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UNTHINKING EUROCENTRISM

Multiculturalism and the media

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FROM EUROCENTRISM TO POLYCENTRISM

THE MYTH OF THE WEST

When Captain Mac, in King Vidor's *Bird of Paradise* (1932), repeats Kipling's nostrum that "East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet," he receives the joking response: "Hey, Mac, what's the dope on the North and South?" This apparently frivolous exchange calls attention to the geographical imaginary that imposes neat divisions, along a double axis (East/West, North/South), on a globe inhospitable to such rigidities. Like its orientalizing counterpart the "East," the "West" is a fictional construct embroidered with myths and fantasies. In a geographical sense, the concept is relative. What the West calls the "Middle East" is from a Chinese perspective "Western Asia." In Arabic, the word for West (*Maghreb*) refers to North Africa, the westernmost part of the Arab world, in contrast to the *Mashreq*, the eastern part. (In Arabic, "West" and "foreign" share the same root – *gh.r.b.*) The South Seas, to the west of the US, are often posited as cultural "East."

Furthermore, the term "West" comes overlaid, as Raymond Williams has pointed out in *Keywords*, with a long sedimented history of ambiguous usage.¹ For Williams, this history goes back to the West/East division of the Roman Empire, the East/West division of the Christian Church, the definition of the West as Judeo-Christian and of the East as Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist, and finally to the postwar division of Europe into the capitalist West and the communist East. Thus politics overdetermines cultural geography. In contemporary parlance, Israel is seen as a "Western" country while Turkey (much of which lies to the west of Israel), Egypt, Libya, and Morocco are all "Eastern." At times the "West" excludes Latin America, which is surprising since most Latin Americans, whatever their ethnic heritage, are geographically located in the western hemisphere, often speak a European tongue as their first language, and live in societies where European modes remain hegemonic. Our point is not to recover Latin America – the name itself is a nineteenth-century French coinage – for the "West," but only to call attention to the arbitrariness of the standard cartographies of identity for irrevocably hybrid places like Latin America, sites at once Western and non-Western, simultaneously African, indigenous and European.

West of
+ term
"West"

* Although the triumphalist discourse of Plato-to-NATO Eurocentrism makes history synonymous with the onward march of Western Reason, Europe itself is in fact a synthesis of many cultures, Western and non-Western. The notion of a "pure" Europe originating in classical Greece is premised on crucial exclusions, from the African and Semitic influences that shaped classical Greece itself to the osmotic Sephardic-Judeo-Islamic culture that played such a crucial role in the Europe of the so-called Dark Ages (a Eurocentric designation for a period of oriental ascendancy) and even in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. As Jon Pieterse points out, all the celebrated "stations" of European progress – Greece, Rome, Christianity, Renaissance, Enlightenment – are "moments of cultural mixing."² Western art has always been indebted to and transformed by non-Western art, whence the Moorish influence on the poetry of courtly love, the African influence on modernist painting, the impact of Asian forms (Kabuki, Noh drama, Balinese theater, ideographic writing) on European theater and film, and the influence of Africanized dance forms on such choreographers as Martha Graham and George Balanchine.³ The "West," then, is itself a collective heritage, an omnivorous mélange of cultures; it did not simply "take in" non-European influences, "it was constituted by them."⁴

* An idealized notion of the West organizes knowledge in ways flattering to the Eurocentric imaginary. Science and technology, for example, are often seen as "Western." The correlative of this attitude in the realm of theory is to assume that all theory is "Western," or that movements such as feminism and deconstruction, wherever they appear, are "Western"; a view that projects the West as "mind" and theoretical refinement and the non-West as "body" and unrefined raw material. But until recent centuries Europe was largely a borrower of science and technology: the alphabet, algebra, and astronomy all came from outside Europe. Indeed, for some historians the first item of technology exported from Europe was a clock, in 1338.⁵ Even the caravels used by Henry the Navigator were modeled after lateen-sailed Arab dhows.⁶ From China and East Asia Europe borrowed printing, gunpowder, the magnetic compass, mechanical clockwork, segmental-arch bridges, and quantitative cartography.⁷ But quite apart from the historical existence of non-European sciences and technologies (ancient Egyptian science; African agriculture; Dogon astronomy; Mayan mathematics; Aztec architecture, irrigation, and vulcanization), we should not ignore the interdependence of the diverse worlds. While the cutting edge of technological development over recent centuries has undoubtedly centered on Western Europe and North America, this development has been very much a "joint venture" (in which the First World owned most of the shares) facilitated by colonial exploitation then and neocolonial "brain draining" of the "Third World" now. If the industrial revolutions of Europe were made possible by the control of the resources of colonized lands and the exploitation of slave labor – Britain's industrial revolution, for example, was partly financed by infusions of wealth generated by Latin American mines and plantations – then in what sense is it meaningful to speak only of "Western" technology, industry, and science? The "West" and the

"non-West" cannot, in sum, be posited as antonyms, for in fact the two worlds interpenetrate in an unstable space of creolization and syncretism. In this sense, the "myth of the West" and the "myth of the East" form the verso and recto of the same colonial sign. If Edward Said in *Orientalism* points to the Eurocentric construction of the East within Western writing, others, such as Martin Bernal in *Black Athena*, point to the complementary Eurocentric construction of the West via the "writing out" of the East (and Africa).

The fact is that virtually the entire world is now a mixed formation. Colonialism emerged from a situation that was "always already" syncretic (for example among Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Moorish Spain, among African nations before colonialism, among indigenous "Americans" before 1492), and the post-independence era has projected its own diasporas and crisscrossing migrations into a fluid cultural mix. Within this flux, "majorities" and "minorities" can easily exchange places, especially since internal "minorities" are almost always the dispersed fragments of what were once "majorities" elsewhere, whence the various "pan"-movements. The expanding field of "comparative intercultural studies" (North/South border studies, pan-American studies, Afro-diasporic studies, postcolonial studies) recognizes these dispersals, moving beyond the nation-state to explore the palimpsestic transnationalisms left in colonialism's wake.

THE LEGACY OF COLONIALISM

As we suggested earlier, contemporary Eurocentrism is the discursive residue or precipitate of *colonialism*, the process by which the European powers reached positions of economic, military, political, and cultural hegemony in much of Asia, Africa, and the Americas. Colonialism took the form both of distant control of resources (French Indochina, the Belgian Congo, the Philippines), and of direct European settlement (Algeria, South Africa, Australia, the Americas). We will use the term *imperialism* to refer to a specific phase or form of colonialism, running roughly from 1870 to 1914, when conquest of territory became linked to a systematic search for markets and an expansionist exporting of capital, and also, in an extended sense, to First World interventionist politics in the post-independence era.

Colonization *per se* preexisted latter-day European colonialism, having been practiced by Greece, Rome, the Aztecs, the Incas, and many other groups. The words "colonization," "culture," and "cult" (that is, religion) all derive from the same Latin verb *colo*, whose past participle is *cultus* and whose future participle is *culturus*, thus placing in play a constellation of values and practices which include occupying the land, cultivating the earth, the affirmation of origins and ancestors, and the transmission of inherited values to new generations.⁸ While nations had previously often annexed adjacent territories, what was new in European colonialism was its planetary reach, its affiliation with global institutional power, and its imperative mode, its attempted submission of the world to

a single "universal" regime of truth and power. Colonialism is ethnocentrism armed, institutionalized, and gone global. The colonial process had its origins in internal European expansions (the Crusades, England's move into Ireland, the Spanish *reconquista*), made a quantum leap with the "voyages of discovery" and the institution of New World slavery, and reached its apogee with turn-of-the-century imperialism, when the proportion of the earth's surface controlled by European powers rose from 67 per cent (in 1884) to 84.4 per cent (in 1914), a situation that began to be reversed only with the disintegration of the European colonial empires after World War II.⁹ Some of the major corollaries of colonialism were: the expropriation of territory on a massive scale; the destruction of indigenous peoples and cultures; the enslavement of Africans and Native Americans; the colonization of Africa and Asia; and racism not only within the colonized world but also within Europe itself.

Colonialist thinking, unfortunately, is not a phenomenon of the past. A 1993 *New York Times Magazine* article by Paul Johnson ("Colonialism's Back – and Not a Moment Too Soon") explicitly calls for a return to colonialism. Excoriating social ills in contemporary Africa, the essay systematically elides the West's role in engendering the situations that provoked these ills. Thus it denounces Somalia as unfit to govern itself, but says nothing about the role of superpower rivalries in nourishing armed conflict there, denounces Angola but ignores US and South African complicity in Angola's civil war, denounces Haiti but remains silent about past US invasions and support for dictatorial regimes. Meanwhile, the essay praises the West's "high-mindedness," for providing a "superb infrastructure of roads and ports," and for "meticulously preparing" the colonies for their freedom, all as part of what for the colonizers was a "reluctant and involuntary process." Some peoples, the essay concludes, "are not yet fit to govern themselves."¹⁰ Johnson's absolutionist discourse asserts the West's disinterested generosity, as if control of land, resources, and forced labor could ever be "unprofitable" or "disinterested."

Colonialism has never been disinterested even on a cultural level. A sequence in Safi Faye's film *Fadjal* (1979) powerfully evokes the experience of *cultural colonialism* from the standpoint of its victims. The scene shows a village classroom in Senegal, where barefoot pupils recite the phrases of their history lesson: "Louis XIV was the greatest king of France. He is called the Sun King." Faye's film stages the theft and substitution of cultural identity. "Real" history, these pupils are told, resides in Europe; only Europeans constitute historical subjects living in progressive time. "Our ancestors, the Gauls," according to French high-school history books for colonial pupils in Vietnam and Senegal, "had blond hair and blue eyes." The Guinean film *Blanc/Ebène* (White Ebony, 1991) has a character correct the French teacher, telling the students: "Your ancestors were Mandinke, and they were heroes." Colonialism, in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's words, annihilated the "people's belief in their names, in their language, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves" and made them see their past as a "wasteland of non-achievement."¹¹ Colonialism exalted European

culture and defamed indigenous culture. The religions of the colonized were institutionally denounced as superstition and "devil-worship." Thus the "spirit dances" of the Native Americans were forbidden, and African diasporic religions such as Santeria and Candomblé were suppressed, partly because medicine men and women, prophets, and visionary-priests – the *papaloi* of the Haitian revolution, the *obeahs* of the Caribbean rebellions – often played key roles in resistance. Colonialist institutions attempted to denude peoples of the richly textured cultural attributes that shaped communal identity and belonging, leaving a legacy of both trauma and resistance.

Although direct colonial rule has largely come to an end, much of the world remains entangled in *neocolonialism*; that is, a conjuncture in which direct political and military control has given way to abstract, semi-indirect, largely economic forms of control whose linchpin is a close alliance between foreign capital and the indigenous elite. Partly as a result of colonialism, the contemporary global scene is now dominated by a coterie of powerful nation-states, consisting basically of Western Europe, the US, and Japan. This domination is economic ("the Group of Seven," the IMF, the World Bank, GATT); political (the five veto-holding members of the UN Security Council); military (the new "unipolar" NATO); and techno-informational-cultural (Hollywood, UPI, Reuters, France Presse, CNN).¹² Neocolonial domination is enforced through deteriorating terms of trade and the "austerity programs" by which the World Bank and the IMF, often with the self-serving complicity of Third World elites, impose rules that First World countries would never tolerate themselves.¹³ The corollaries of neocolonialism have been: widespread poverty (even in countries rich in natural resources); burgeoning famine (even in countries that once fed themselves); the paralyzing "debt trap"; the opening up of resources for foreign interests; and, not infrequently, internal political oppression.

"Dependency theory" (Latin America), "underdevelopment theory" (Africa), and "world systems theory" argue that a hierarchical global system controlled by metropolitan capitalist countries and their multinational corporations simultaneously generates both the wealth of the First World and the poverty of the Third World as the opposite faces of the same coin.¹⁴ "Our [Latin American] defeat," as Eduardo Galeano puts it, "was always implicit in the victory of others; our wealth has always generated our poverty by nourishing the prosperity of others, the empires and their native overseers."¹⁵ Dependency theory rejected the Eurocentric premises of "modernization" theories which blamed Third World underdevelopment on cultural traditions and assumed that the Third World need only follow in the footsteps of the West to achieve economic "takeoff." Dependency theory has been critiqued for its "metrocentrism," for its adherence to an unreformed version of Marxist base-superstructure theory, for its incapacity to conceptualize the interplay of global and local dynamics, for its failure to acknowledge the "residue" of precapitalist formations, for its blindness to the modernizing powers even of reactionary regimes, and for its insensitivity not only to class and gender issues but also to the "relative autonomy" of the cultural

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sphere.¹⁶ Dependency theory was at times guilty of a kind of left Prometheanism, seeing the First World as an all-powerful mover and shaker, and the Third World as a homogenous block passively accepting the economic and ideological imprint of the First World.¹⁷ Given these inadequacies, we are not suggesting here that neocolonial dependency constitutes a total explanation for the disadvantaged position of the Third World, only that any adequate account of that condition requires at least partial recourse to it.

Our concern here goes beyond political economy per se to the role of discourses in shaping colonialist practices. We mean *discourse*, in the Foucauldian sense of a transindividual and multi-institutional archive of images and statements providing a common language for representing knowledge about a given theme. As "regimes of truth," discourses are encased in institutional structures that exclude specific voices, esthetics, and representations. Peter Hulme defines *colonial discourse* as "an ensemble of linguistically-based practices unified by their common deployment of colonial relationships."¹⁸ This discursive ensemble, which for Hulme includes everything from bureaucratic documents to romantic novels, produces the non-European world for Europe. We would distinguish, however, between colonial discourse as the historical product of colonial institutions, and *colonialist/imperialist discourse* as the linguistic and ideological apparatus that justifies, contemporaneously or even retroactively, colonial/imperial practices.

RACE AND RACISM

Racism, although hardly unique to the West, and while not limited to the colonial situation (anti-Semitism being a case in point), has historically been both an ally and the partial product of colonialism. The most obvious victims of racism are those whose identity was forged within the colonial cauldron: Africans, Asians, and the indigenous peoples of the Americas as well as those displaced by colonialism, such as Asians and West Indians in Great Britain, Arabs in France. Colonialist culture constructed a sense of ontological European superiority to "lesser breeds without the law." The "basic legitimation of conquest over native peoples," writes Jules Harmand, "is the conviction of our superiority, not merely our mechanical, economic, and military superiority, but our moral superiority."¹⁹ Such imperial *pronunciamentos* exemplify Albert Memmi's definition of racism as "the generalized and final assigning of values to real or imaginary differences, to the accuser's benefit and at his victim's expense, in order to justify the former's own privilege or aggression."²⁰ Although racism can be irrational and even self-destructive, racism usually comes "in the wake" of concrete oppressions. Thus Native Americans were called "beasts" and "savages" because White Europeans were expropriating their land; Mexicans were derided as "bandidos" and "greasers" because Anglos were seizing Mexican territory; and the colonized generally were ridiculed as lacking in culture and history because colonialism, in the name of profit, was destroying the material basis of their culture and the

archival memory of their history. Racism invokes a double movement of aggression and narcissism; the insult to the accused is doubled by a compliment to the accuser. Racist thinking is tautological and circular; we are powerful because we are right, and we are right because we are powerful. It is also essentializing, ahistorical, and metaphysical, projecting difference across historical time: "They are all that way, and they will always be that way."

Racial categories are not natural but constructs, not absolutes but relative, situational, even narrative categories, engendered by historical processes of differentiation. The categorization of the same person can vary with time, location, and context. Subjective self-definition and political mobilization also sabotage rigid definitions. Africans, prior to colonialism, did not think of themselves as Black but only as members of specific groups – Bantu, Fon, Hausa, Igbo – just as Europeans, prior to the invention of "Whiteness," thought of themselves as Welsh, Sicilians, and so forth. At times, the categories become mobilized as a form of solidarity. In contemporary Great Britain, politically active Asians, Caribbeans, and Africans have at times referred to themselves as "Black." In Israel, Sephardic Jews (who largely originate from Asia and Africa) are called and often call themselves "Black," and their militant 1970s movement was called "the Black Panthers" in honor of the American Black liberationist group of that name.²¹

Racism, similarly, does not "move tidily and unchanged through time and history."²² That racism is positional, relational, means that diverse groups have occupied the functional slot of the oppressed.²³ Racism is above all a social relation – "systematized hierarchization implacably pursued," in Fanon's words²⁴ – anchored in material structures and embedded in historical configurations of power. In fact Memmi's definition, premised on a kind of one-on-one encounter between racist and victim, does not fully account for more abstract, indirect, submerged, even "democratic" forms of racism. Since racism is a complex hierarchical system, a structured ensemble of social and institutional practices and discourses, individuals do not have actively to express or practice racism to be its beneficiaries. Racism cannot be reduced, as it is in Samuel Fuller's *White Dog* (1982), to the canine ravings of pathological maniacs. It is not, as Whitney Young puts it, simply "a desire to wake up every morning and lynch a black man from a tall tree," but rather the "subtle humiliations" and "gross arrogance" that accompany taken-for-granted privilege.²⁵

In a systemically racist society, no one is exempt from a hegemonic racist discourse, including the victims of racism. Racism thus "trickles down" and circulates laterally; oppressed people can perpetuate the hegemonic system by scapegoating one another "sideways," in a manner ultimately benefiting those at the top of the hierarchy. Since racism is a discourse as well as a praxis, a member of an oppressed community can also adopt an oppressive discourse: the anti-Black Black, the self-hating Jew. Samuel Fuller's *Shock Corridor* (1963) stages ethnic self-hatred in the form of a Black character who fancies himself the leader of the Ku Klux Klan. The German film *Weininger's Night* (1989), based on a play (*Soul*

of a Jew) by Yehoshua Sobol, similarly anatomizes European-Jewish self-hatred in its study of a historical German Jew who regarded Jews as the incarnation of evil. Thus discourse and ethnic affiliation can split apart under the extreme pressures of a racist or anti-Semitic society. Manning Marable distinguishes between race as a *passive affiliation*, a category into which one happens to be born, and ethnicity as an *active affiliation*, citing Judge Clarence Thomas as someone who is racially but not ethnically Black, in that he may be regarded as having ceased to function as a member of the Black community.²⁶ Dinesh de Souza, similarly, technically qualifies as a "Third World person of color," but his discourse is of a piece with that of many WASPish incarnations of privilege.

If racism generates contradictions in the victims of racism, it is no less contradictory on its own terms, often masking an attraction to its own hated object. Obsessive denigration can thus mask a perverse identification; repulsion can overlay desire. Ernest Renan, a passionate anti-Semite, devoted his life to studying the same Jewish religious culture that he supposedly despised.²⁷ The colonialist racist, likewise, feels endangered by an almost overwhelming attraction. Here is an anonymous British writer speaking of the seductions of India:

It is in the religious atmosphere above all of India that the Englishman feels himself to be moving in a mysterious, unrealised world, and this feeling is the essence of romance. He does well to resist the seduction which this atmosphere exercises upon those too curious about it . . . The English in India are wise to surround themselves, as far as they can, with English atmosphere, and to defend themselves from the magic of the land by sport, games, clubs and the chatter of fresh-imported girls, and by fairly regular attendance at church.²⁸

These almost comic proposals for maintaining one's Englishness in the face of alien temptation, reminiscent of a headmaster's advice to masturbation-prone youngsters, betrays terror in the face of what is imagined as an exotic lure, even though here the explicit object of fear is religion.

The notion of ambivalence within racism, first broached by Fanon and today often discussed in psychoanalytic terms, needs to be historicized. At times, racism can constitute a disguised form of genealogical self-rejection. By identifying with imperial Rome, Native American scholars point out, the US founding fathers rejected the tribal and communal pasts of their own Northern European ancestors who were conquered by Rome.²⁹ In a later period, White European-American workers came to construct the African-American population as "otherized" incarnations of a permissive, erotic, pre-industrial past that Whites themselves both scorned and desired: "Englishmen and profit-minded settlers in America," as George Rawick puts it, "met the West African as a reformed sinner meets a comrade of his previous debaucheries."³⁰ The practice of "blacking up" before taking part in rebellious or riotous actions (directed both against authority and, sometimes, against Blacks) encodes this ambivalence; blacked-up maskers "both

admired what they imagined blackness to symbolize and hated themselves for doing so."³¹ The smearing of soot over the body was the height of "polymorphous perversity, an infantile playing with excrement or dirt . . . the polar opposite of the anal retentiveness usually associated with accumulating capitalist and protestant cultures."³²

It is sometimes more revealing, then, to analyze the stereotyper than to deconstruct the stereotype. When anti-Black stereotypes (repulsive bestiality, say) are recoded as positive (libidinal freedom, presumably), it tells us more about the White erotic imaginary than about the objects of its fascination. The adulation of Black physical agility has as its tacit corollary a presumed mental incapacity. The lauding of "natural" talent in performance implies that Black achievements have nothing to do with work or discipline. The adoption by Euro-Americans of Native American words and symbols as names for cars, sports teams (the Braves), and so on surely marks a bizarrely mediated form of admiration, a form of "ambivalence" quite unwelcome to those invoked (whence the Native American protests over the football audience's "tomahawk chop", seen as a white projection of the symbolically endorsed but historically problematic violence of "scalping").

Racism is thus adept at the art of the false or boomerang compliment, two forms of which are primitivism and exoticism. A primitivist film like *The Emerald Forest* (1985) lauds the "natural ways" of the "Invisible People," but in a romanticizing manner that has little relevance to the concrete struggles of indigenous people. Exoticism solipsizes its object for the exoticist's pleasure, using the colonized "other" as an erotic fiction in order to reenchant the world. Phyllis Rose contrasts racism with exoticism:

While racists are threatened by difference, the exoticist finds it amusing . . . Racism is like a poor kid who grew up needing someone to hurt. Exoticism grew up rich, and a little bored. The racist is hedged around by dangers, the exoticist by used-up toys."³³

Racial attitudes are multiform, fissured, even schizophrenic. Multicultural bellies, full of tacos, felafel, and chow mein, are sometimes accompanied by monocultural minds. Ellison describes a White youngster, his transistor radio playing a Stevie Wonder song, shouting racial epithets at Blacks trying to swim at a public beach. Third World immigrants of color to the US, pressured by the reigning Black/White binarism, may adopt ambivalent attitudes, identifying with fellow minorities but also tempted to affirm their precarious sense of national belonging by themselves rejecting Blacks. When immigrants got off the boat, Toni Morrison suggests, the "second word they learned was 'nigger.'"³⁴ Racism also provokes another kind of schizophrenia: the same dominant society that adores African-American celebrities expresses rampant paranoia toward the so-called underclass of inner-city youth. In Latin America, the same Europeanized elites that proudly invoke their *mestizo* culture steadfastly refuse to empower the *mestizo* majority. Thus very real cultural "victories" – and it does indeed make a difference that

millions of people adore "minority" celebrities – mask political defeats. Racial categories, in sum, are contradictory, and while these contradictions offer no solace for the victims of racism, any complex analysis must take them into account.

Racism often travels in gangs, accompanied by its buddies sexism, classism, and homophobia. Systems of social stratification thus get superimposed on one another, in ways that are both contradictory and mutually reinforcing. As a historical product, the causes of racism are at once economic (as a scapegoating mechanism linked to economic resentment or opportunism), psychological (having to do with the projections of insecure, ambivalent, or panicked identities), and discursive. (But although racism has a discursive dimension, it is not just a discourse; a police prod is not a discourse, even though discourses impinge on public perceptions of why and how police prods are used.) Racism offers its own perverse "pleasures": an easy, unearned feeling of superiority, the facile cementing of group identity on the fragile basis of arbitrary antipathy. These "pleasures" explain the racism of the weak, the racism that goes against the racist's own self-interest, as when working-class Euro-Americans reject programs beneficial to them because they might also help African-Americans.

Racism traces its deep psychic roots to fear of the "other" (associated with a suppressed animalic "shadowy" self) and to phobic attitudes toward nature and the body. It was the "negro misfortune," writes Ralph Ellison, "to be caught up associatively on the negative side of [the] basic dualism of the white folk mind and to be shackled to almost everything it would repress from conscience and consciousness."³⁵ Lillian Smith describes the sexual education of southern Whites as homologically "segregating" the body into those parts that are dark and untouchable and those that are not.³⁶ The paired terms "Black" and "White" easily lend themselves to the Manicheisms of good/evil; matter/spirit; devil/angel.³⁷ And since everyday speech posits blackness as negative ("black sheep," "black day"), and black and white as opposites ("it's not a black and white issue") rather than as nuances on a spectrum, Blacks have almost always been cast on the side of evil.³⁸ It is resistance to this Manichean temptation that has led many – from Franz Boaz in the 1920s to Jesse Jackson in the 1980s – to call for a move from a terminology based on color and race to one based on culture; to speak not of Blacks and Whites, for example, but rather of African-Americans and European-Americans.

Any analysis of racism calls for certain distinctions. First, *racism* differs from *ethnocentrism*. Any group can be ethnocentric, in that it sees the world through the lenses provided by its own culture. But to see the world through the lenses provided by one's own culture is not necessarily racist, nor is it racist simply to notice physical or cultural differences, or to detest specific members of a group, or even to dislike the cultural traits of specific groups. What is racist is the stigmatizing of difference in order to justify unfair advantage or the abuse of power, whether that advantage or abuse be economic, political, cultural, or psychological. Although people of all groups can entertain racist opinions – there

is no genetic immunity to racism – not every group enjoys the power to practice racism; that is, to translate a racial attitude into social oppression. Analysts also distinguish between *exclusive racisms* of extermination, or *inclusive racisms* of exploitation;³⁹ between *overt* racism, expressed in hostile actions, and *covert* racism, where hostility is not obvious or explicit. Racism can also be *inferential* (in Stuart Hall's words), in other words consisting in "those apparently naturalized representations of events and situations . . . which have racist premises and propositions inscribed in them as a set of unquestioned assumptions."⁴⁰ The conventional distinction between *individual* and *institutional* racism, finally, is problematic, since racism is by definition "the expression or activation of group power."⁴¹ Racism, then, is both individual and systemic, interwoven into the fabric both of the psyche and of the social system, at once grindingly quotidian and maddeningly abstract. It is not a merely attitudinal issue, but a historically contingent institutional and discursive apparatus linked to the drastically unequal distribution of resources and opportunities, the unfair apportioning of justice, wealth, pleasure, and pain. It is less an error in logic than an abuse of power, less about "attitudes" than about the deferring of hopes and the destruction of lives.

Within the transformational grammar of colonial-style racism, several key mechanisms stand out: (1) *the positing of lack*; that is, the projection of the racially stigmatized as deficient in terms of European norms, as lacking in order, intelligence, sexual modesty, material civilization, even history. Thus the colonialist ideolog Georges Hardy posits the "African mind" as a series of absences: of memory, a sense of truth, a capacity for abstraction, and so forth.⁴² Through this same kind of negative alchemy French colonizers transformed the hospitality for which Arab culture has always been celebrated into a sign of backwardness. Arabs, like the New World indigenes, were seen as giving away things not out of cultural codes of generosity but because they were too stupid to recognize their value. The assumption of lack leads to what might be called the racism of surprise: "You mean that *you*'re the doctor!" "So there are universities in Africa!" Racism also involves (2) *the mania for hierarchy*, for ranking not only peoples (placing Europeans above non-Europeans, Zulus over Bushmen) but also artifacts and cultural practices (farming over nomadism, brick over thatch, melody over percussion). Racism also entails the interrelated processes of (3) *blaming the victim* and (4) *the refusal of empathy*, the withholding of sympathy for people caught up in the struggle for survival within the existing social order, the maintenance of a cool, skeptical distance in the face of claims of oppression. Racism involves (5) *the systematic devalorization of life*, which sometimes takes the extreme form of open calls for murder. Thus L. Frank Baum (the author of *The Wizard of Oz*), in 1891, casually recommends genocide: "the best safety of the frontier settlements will be secured by the total annihilation of the few remaining Indians. Why not annihilation? . . . better that they should die than live the miserable wretches that they are."⁴³ The devalorization of life was classically and satirically expressed by Mark Twain, in Huck Finn's response to the question whether anyone was hurt in a steamboat accident: "No Maam, killed a nigger."

Racism in this sense operates less on the cerebral level of opinion than on the visceral level of ethnic solidarity and us/them antipathy, the pronomial level of an assumed "we."

The dominant media constantly devalorize the lives of people of color while regarding Euro-American life as sacrosanct, as when massive fratricidal killing in Miami's inner city is seen as less serious than the murders of a few European tourists, or when the talismanic phrase "saving American lives" is invoked as a pretext for murderous incursions in Third World countries. The same regime that devalorizes life then projects this devalorization on to those whose lives it has devalorized. In the film *Hearts and Minds* (1975), General Westmoreland, the chief administrator of the killing fields of the Vietnam war, sums up oriental philosophy in the phrase "life has no value." (His words are juxtaposed with Vietnamese parents weeping inconsolably over their lost children.)⁴⁴ The devalorization of life has as its corollary the media penchant for associating the Third World with violent, unnecessary, random death, or with disease and natural disaster, whereby "the dead or dying body has become in itself the visual sign of human reality in the Third World."⁴⁵

By focussing on the moral dilemmas of the dominant group rather than on structures of oppression, even liberal discourse devalorizes the lives of people of color. Thus the PBS documentary *Dear America: Letters from Home* (1990) laments the "tragedy" of the Vietnam war, but only in relation to Americans.⁴⁶ The final intertitle registers the more than 50,000 American dead, but passes over the 2 million Vietnamese dead. Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979), similarly, addresses the "madness" of the war without ever lending human depth to the Vietnamese themselves. Many Vietnam films, such as *Coming Home* (1978), *The Deer Hunter* (1978), *Platoon* (1986), and *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989), treat the war as a domestic tragedy; the real battle takes place within the (White) American soul, a logomachy within imperial culture. During the Gulf war, the mass media constantly framed debates and channeled empathy through a geopolitical grid. When Ted Koppel, at the height of the aerial bombardment of Iraq, spoke of a "quiet day in the Middle East," he did not mean that no Iraqis were being killed, only that no "important" people were getting hurt. And while the Gulf war was not a directly colonial war, the euphoria over "victory" was very much premised on a colonialist devalorization of non-Western life.

Finally, racism has its double binds and Catch 22s: if you are too unlike us, you are inferior; if you are too like us, you are no longer a "real" Black or Indian or Asian. Racism thus juggles two complementary procedures: *the denial of difference* and *the denial of sameness*. While obfuscating differences in historical experience, it denies the sameness of human aspiration. Confronted with demands for the "affirmative" correction of historical injustices, the dominant group becomes the partisan of equality (let everyone be treated just the same), forgetting its own inherited advantages and denying differences in location and experience. *A Dry White Season* (1989) crystallizes this issue by having the Black activist reject the liberal White South African lawyer's claim of a common life

experience: "So you too knew passbooks, imprisonment, humiliation?" The liberal ideal of "color-blindness" which sees progress as "transcending" race, similarly, equates White racism and Black cultural nationalism as equally "race-conscious." But Black nationalism sees integrationist rationality simply as a "particular discourse of power" used by White Europeans to justify their own privileged status.⁴⁷ Indeed, some social theorists see liberalism as a constitutively exclusionary, sublimated form of Social Darwinism, in that liberal claims about equality and rights actually hide another unacknowledged set of social credentials (Whiteness, maleness, Americanness, propertiedness) that constitute the real bases of inclusion.⁴⁸ It is the failure to acknowledge this jungle law "off the books" that authorizes (6) a *discourse of reverse discrimination*; that is, a situation in which those who have long benefited from institutional favoritism resort to a meritocratic language of individual achievement and counter-victimization. This discourse goes at least as far back as the days of slavery, when a Frenchman warned that abolition "would ruin France, and by seeking to liberate 500,000 blacks ... will have enslaved 25 million whites."⁴⁹

THE THIRD WORLD

The definition of the "Third World" flows logically out of our discussion of colonialism and racism, for the "Third World" refers to the colonized, neocolonized, or decolonized nations and "minorities" whose structural disadvantages have been shaped by the colonial process and by the unequal division of international labor. The term itself was formed against the backdrop of the patronizing vocabulary which posited these nations as "backward," "underdeveloped," and "primitive." As a political coalition, the "Third World" coalesced around the enthusiasm generated by anticolonial struggles in Vietnam and Algeria, and specifically emerged from the 1955 Bandung Conference of "non-aligned" African and Asian nations. Coined by French demographer Alfred Sauvy in the 1950s by analogy to the revolutionary "third estate" of France — that is, the commoners, in contrast with the first estate (the nobility) and the second (the clergy) — the term posited three worlds: the capitalist First World of Europe, the US, Australia, and Japan; the "Second World" of the socialist block (China's place in the schema was the object of much debate); and the Third World proper. The fundamental definition of the "Third World" has more to do with protracted structural domination than with crude economic categories ("the poor"), developmental categories (the "non-industrialized"), racial categories ("the non-White"), cultural categories ("the backward"), or geographical categories ("the East," "the South"). These other categorizations are imprecise because the Third World is not necessarily poor in resources (Venezuela and Iraq are rich in oil), nor simply non-White (Argentina and Ireland are predominantly White), nor non-industrialized (Brazil, Argentina, and India are all highly industrialized), nor culturally "backward" even in "high art" terms (a fact recently recognized by the international prestige granted writers like

Rushdie, Fuentes, Brathwait, Ngũgĩ, Walcott, Soyinka, Mahfouz, and Morrison).

Our work intervenes at a precise juncture in the history of the Third World. On the one hand, recent years have seen ongoing revolutionary and anticolonial struggles. On the other, the period of "Third World euphoria," when it seemed that First World leftists and Third World guerillas would walk arm-in-arm toward global revolution, has given way to the collapse of communism, the indefinite postponement of the devoutly wished-for "tricontinental revolution," the realization that the "wretched of the earth" are not unanimously revolutionary (nor necessarily allies to one another), the appearance of an array of Third World despots, and the recognition that international geopolitics and the global economic system have obliged even socialist regimes to make a sort of peace with transnational capitalism.

Recent years have also witnessed a terminological crisis swirling around the term "Third World" itself, now seen as an inconvenient relic of a more militant period. For Shiva Naipaul, the term is symptomatic of a "bloodless universality that robs individuals and their societies of their particularity."⁵⁰ Echoing Naipaul, but from a Marxist perspective, Aijaz Ahmad argues that Third World theory is an "open-ended ideological interpellation" that papers over class oppression in all three worlds, while limiting socialism to the (now non-existent) "Second World."⁵¹ Third World feminist writers such as Nawal El Saadawi, Assia Djebar, Gayatri Spivak, and Lelia Gonzales have shown the gendered limitations of Third World nationalism. Apart from the problem of local Third World imperialisms (Indonesia's over Timor, for example), moreover, countries such as Iran and Turkey fit uneasily into the tripartite scheme, in that they were never directly colonized, even though they form part of the economically "peripheral" countries subject to indirect European domination.⁵² Three-worlds theory not only flattens heterogeneities, masks contradictions, and elides differences, it also obscures similarities (for example, the common presence of "Fourth World" indigenous peoples in both "Third World" and "First World" countries).

Third World nationalist discourse often assumes an unquestioned national identity, but most contemporary nation-states are "mixed" formations. A country like Brazil, arguably Third World in both racial terms (a *mestizo* majority) and economic ones (given its economically dependent status), is still dominated by a Europeanized elite. The US, a "First World" country which always had its Native American and African-American minorities, is now becoming even more "Third Worldized" by waves of post-independence migrations. Contemporary US life intertwines First and Third World destinies. The song "Are My Hands Clean?," by Sweet Honey in the Rock, traces the origins of a blouse on sale at Sears to cotton in El Salvador, oil in Venezuela, refineries in Trinidad, factories in Haiti and South Carolina. Thus there is no Third World, in Trinh T. Minh-ha's pithy formulation, without its First World, and no First World without its Third. The First World/Third World struggle takes place not only *between* nations but also *within* them.

But even within the current situation of "dispersed hegemonies" (in the words

of Arjun Appadurai)⁵³ the historical thread or inertia of Western domination remains a powerful presence. Despite its problems, the term "Third World" does retain heuristic value as a label for the "imperialized formations" (including some within the First World), thus conferring majority status on a group which constitutes three-fourths of the world's population. The countries of Latin America, Asia, and Africa do have in common an "exclusion from decision-making power and an oppressive experience of global development and industrialization, leading to economies obliged to be complementary to those of the advanced capitalist countries."⁵⁴ According to UN statistics, the First World, although it comprises only one-fifth of the world's population, enjoys 60 per cent of a global wealth drawn in substantial measure from the Third World.⁵⁵

In geopolitical and economic terms, furthermore, the term "Third World" has certain advantages over alternative expressions. While the polarity "North-South" usefully describes the world as divided into rich and poor, whereby the industrial market economies (First World) and the formerly non-market economies (Second World) form the major consumers of the raw materials produced by a Third World largely located in the southern hemisphere, it is also misleading, not only because some wealthy countries (such as Australia) are located in the South, but also because of the current "Third Worldization" of a Second World increasingly dependent on the West. The North-South polarity also ignores the fact that it was the First World and not the Second World that exploited the Third World most egregiously. Finally, the idea of the "proletarian" versus the "bourgeois" nations obscures the patriarchal and classed nature of all three worlds. All these terms, like that of the "Third World," then, are only schematically useful; they must be placed "under erasure," seen as provisional and only partly illuminating. We will retain the expression "Third World," therefore, to signal both the dumb inertia of neocolonialism and the energizing collectivity of radical critique, but with the caveat that the term obscures fundamental issues of race, class, gender, and culture. At the same time, we would call for a more flexible conceptual framework to accommodate different and even contradictory dynamics in diverse world zones.

THE IMPERIAL IMAGINARY

The colonial domination of indigenous peoples, the scientific and esthetic disciplining of nature through classificatory schemas, the capitalist appropriation of resources, and the imperialist ordering of the globe under a panoptical regime, all formed part of a massive world historical movement that reached its apogee at the beginning of the twentieth century. Indeed, it is most significant for our discussion that the beginnings of cinema coincided with the giddy heights of the imperial project, with an epoch where Europe held sway over vast tracts of alien territory and hosts of subjugated peoples. (Of all the celebrated "coincidences" – of the twin beginnings of cinema and psychoanalysis, cinema and nationalism, cinema and consumerism – it is this coincidence with the heights of imperialism that has been least explored.) Film was born at a moment when a poem such as Rudyard Kipling's "White Man's Burden" could be published, as it was in 1899, to celebrate the US acquisition of Cuba and the Philippines. The first Lumière and Edison screenings in the 1890s closely followed the "scramble for Africa" which erupted in the late 1870s; the Battle of "Rorke's Drift" (1879) which opposed the British to the Zulus (memorialized in the film *Zulu*, 1964); the British occupation of Egypt in 1882; the Berlin Conference of 1884 which carved up Africa into European "spheres of influence"; the massacre of the Sioux at Wounded Knee in 1890; and countless other imperial misadventures.

The most prolific film-producing countries of the silent period – Britain, France, the US, Germany – also "happened" to be among the leading imperialist countries, in whose clear interest it was to laud the colonial enterprise. The cinema emerged exactly at the point when enthusiasm for the imperial project was spreading beyond the elites into the popular strata, partly thanks to popular fictions and exhibitions. For the working classes of Europe and Euro-America, photogenic wars in remote parts of the empire became diverting entertainments, serving to "neutralize the class struggle and transform class solidarity into national and racial solidarity."¹ The cinema adopted the popular fictions of colonialist writers like Kipling for India and Rider Haggard, Edgar Wallace and Edgar Rice Burroughs for Africa, and absorbed popular genres like the "conquest fiction" of the American southwest. The cinema entered a situation where European and American readers had already devoured Livingstone's *Missionary*

Travels (1857); Edgar Wallace's "Sanders of the River" stories in the early 1900s; Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885); and Henry Morton Stanley's *How I Found Livingstone* (1872), *Through the Dark Continent* (1878), and *In Darkest Africa* (1890).

English boys especially were initiated into imperial ideals through such books as Robert Baden-Powell's *Scouting for Boys* (1908), which praised:

the frontiersmen of all parts of our Empire. The "trappers" of North America, hunters of Central Africa, the British pioneers, explorers, and missionaries over Asia and all the wild parts of the world ... the constabulary of North-West Canada and of South Africa.²

The practical survivalist education of scouting, combined with the initiatory mechanisms of the colonial adventure story, were designed to turn boys, as Joseph Bristow puts it, into "aggrandized subjects," an imperial race who imagined the future of the world as resting on their shoulders.³ While girls were domesticated as homemakers, without what Virginia Woolf called a "room of their own," boys could play, if only in their imaginations, in the space of empire. The fantasy of far-away regions offered "charismatic realms of adventure"⁴ free from charged heterosexual engagements. Adventure films, and the "adventure" of going to the cinema, provided a vicarious experience of passionate fraternity, a playing field for the self-realization of European masculinity. Just as colonized space was available to empire, and colonial landscapes were available to imperial cinema, so was this psychic space available for the play of the virile spectatorial imagination as a kind of mental *Lebensraum*. Empire, as John McClure puts it in another context, provided romance with its raw materials, while romance provided empire with its "aura of nobility."⁵

THE SHAPING OF NATIONAL IDENTITY

Beliefs about the origins and evolution of nations often crystallize in the form of stories. For Hayden White, certain narrative "master tropes" shape our conception of history; historical discourse consists "of the provisions of a plot structure for a sequence of events so that their nature as a comprehensible process is revealed by their figuration as a story of a particular kind."⁶ The nation of course is not a desiring person but a fictive unity imposed on an aggregate of individuals, yet national histories are presented as if they displayed the continuity of the subject-writ-large.⁷ The cinema, as the world's storyteller *par excellence*, was ideally suited to relay the projected narratives of nations and empires. National self-consciousness, generally seen as a precondition for nationhood – that is, the shared belief of disparate individuals that they share common origins, status, location, and aspirations – became broadly linked to cinematic fictions. In the modern period, for Benedict Anderson, this collective consciousness was made possible by a common language and its expression in "print capitalism."⁸ Prior to the cinema, the novel and the newspaper fostered imagined communities

through their integrative relations to time and space. Newspapers – like TV news today – made people aware of the simultaneity and interconnectedness of events in different places, while novels provided a sense of the purposeful movement through time of fictional entities bound together in a narrative whole. As “bourgeois epic” (in the words of Georg Lukács), the novel inherited and transformed the vocation of the classical epic (for example *The Aeneid*) to produce and heighten national identity, both accompanying and crystallizing the rise of nations by imposing a unitary topos on heterogenous languages and diverse desires.

* The fiction film also inherited the social role of the nineteenth-century realist novel in relation to national imaginaries. Like novels, films proceed temporally, their durational scope reaching from a story time ranging from the few minutes depicted by the first Lumière shorts to the many hours (and symbolic millennia) of films like *Intolerance* (1916) and *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). Films communicate Anderson’s “calendrical time,” a sense of time and its passage. Just as nationalist literary fictions inscribe on to a multitude of events the notion of a linear, comprehensible destiny, so films arrange events and actions in a temporal narrative that moves toward fulfillment, and thus shape thinking about historical time and national history. Narrative models in film are not simply reflective microcosms of historical processes, then, they are also experiential grids or templates through which history can be written and national identity figured. Like novels, films can convey what Mikhail Bakhtin calls “chronotopes,” materializing time in space, mediating between the historical and the discursive, providing fictional environments where historically specific constellations of power are made visible. In both film and novel, “time thickens, takes on flesh,” while “space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history.”⁹ There is nothing inherently sinister in this process, except to the extent that it is deployed asymmetrically, to the advantage of some national and racial imaginaries and to the detriment of others.

The national situation described by Anderson becomes complicated, we would argue, in the context of an imperial ideology that was doubly transnational. First, Europeans were encouraged to identify not only with single European nations but also with the racial solidarity implied by the imperial project as a whole. Thus English audiences could identify with the heroes of French Foreign Legion films, Euro-American audiences with the heroes of the British Raj, and so forth. Second, the European empires (what Queen Victoria called the “imperial family”) were themselves conceived paternalistically as providing a “shelter” for diverse races and groups, thus downplaying the national singularities of the colonized themselves. Given the geographically discontinuous nature of empire, cinema helped cement both a national and an imperial sense of belonging among many disparate peoples. For the urban elite of the colonized lands, the pleasures of cinema-going became associated with the sense of a community on the margins of its particular European empire (especially since the first movie theaters in these countries were associated with Europeans and the Europeanized local

bourgeoisies).¹⁰ The cinema encouraged an assimilated elite to identify with "its" empire and thus against other colonized peoples. *

If cinema partly inherited the function of the novel, it also transformed it. Whereas literature plays itself out within a virtual lexical space, the cinematic chronotope is literal, splayed out concretely across the screen and unfolding in the literal time of twenty-four frames per second. In this sense, the cinema can all the more efficiently mobilize desire in ways responsive to nationalized and imperialized notions of time, plot, and history. The cinema's institutional ritual of gathering a community – spectators who share a region, language, and culture – homologizes, in a sense, the symbolic gathering of the nation. Anderson's sense of the nation as "horizontal comradeship" evokes the movie audience as a provisional "nation" forged by spectatorship. While the novel is consumed in solitude, the film is enjoyed in a gregarious space, where the ephemeral communitas of spectatorship can take on a national or imperial thrust. Thus the cinema can play a more assertive role in fostering group identities. Finally, unlike the novel, the cinema is not premised on literacy. As a popular entertainment it is more accessible than literature. While there was no mass reading public for imperial literary fictions within the colonies, for example, there *was* a mass viewing public for imperial filmic fictions. *

The dominant European/American form of cinema not only inherited and disseminated a hegemonic colonial discourse, it also created a powerful hegemony of its own through monopolistic control of film distribution and exhibition in much of Asia, Africa, and the Americas. Eurocolonial cinema thus mapped history not only for domestic audiences but also for the world. African spectators were prodded to identify with Cecil Rhodes and Stanley and Livingstone against Africans themselves, thus engendering a battle of national imaginaries within the fissured colonial spectator. For the European spectator, the cinematic experience mobilized a rewarding sense of national and imperial belonging, on the backs, as it were, of otherized peoples. For the colonized, the cinema (in tandem with other colonial institutions such as schools) produced a sense of deep ambivalence, mingling the identification provoked by cinematic narrative with intense resentment, for it was the colonized who were being otherized.

While the novel could play with words and narrative to engender an "aggrandized subject," the cinema entailed a new and powerful apparatus of the gaze. The cinematic "apparatus," that is to say the cinematic machine as including both the instrumental base of camera, projector, and screen and the spectator as the desiring subject on whom the cinematic institution depends for its imaginary realization, not only represents the "real" but also stimulates intense "subject effects." For Christian Metz, the cinematic apparatus fosters narcissism, in that the spectator identifies with him/herself as a "kind of transcendental subject."¹¹ By prosthetically extending human perception, the apparatus grants the spectator the illusory ubiquity of the "all-perceiving subject" enjoying an exhilarating sense of visual power. From the Diorama, the Panorama, and the Cosmorama up

through NatureMax, the cinema has amplified and mobilized the virtual gaze of photography, bringing past into present, distant to near. It has offered the spectator a mediated relationship with imaged others from diverse cultures. We are not suggesting that imperialism was inscribed either in the apparatus or in the celluloid, only that the context of imperial power shaped the uses to which both apparatus and celluloid were put. In an imperial context the apparatus tended to be deployed in ways flattering to the imperial subject as superior and invulnerable observer, as what Mary Louise Pratt calls the "monarch-of-all-I-survey." The cinema's ability to "fly" spectators around the globe gave them a subject position as film's audio-visual masters. The "spatially-mobilized visibility"¹² of the I/eye of empire spiraled outward around the globe, creating a visceral, kinetic sense of imperial travel and conquest, transforming European spectators into armchair conquistadors, affirming their sense of power while turning the colonies into spectacle for the metropole's voyeuristic gaze.

CINEMA AS SCIENCE AND SPECTACLE

If the culture of empire authorized the pleasure of seizing ephemeral glimpses of its "margins" through travel and tourism, the nineteenth-century invention of the photographic and later the cinematographic camera made it possible to record such glimpses. Rather than remaining confined to its European home, the camera set out to "explore" new geographical, ethnographic, and archeological territories. It visited natural and human "wonders" (the Nile, the Taj Mahal) and unearthed buried civilizations (the excavations in Nubia), imbuing every sight with the wide-eyed freshness of the new machine. Yet the pioneers of the recorded image rarely questioned the constellation of power relations that allowed them to represent other lands and cultures. No one questioned how Egyptian land, history, and culture should be represented, for example, or asked what Egyptian people might have to say about the matter. Thus photographers making the grand oriental tour might record their own subjective visions, but in doing so they also drew clear boundaries between the subject looking and the object being looked at, between traveler and "traveled upon." Photographers such as George Bridges, Louis de Clercq, Maxime du Camp and filmmakers like Thomas Edison and the Lumière brothers did not simply document other territories; they also documented the cultural baggage they carried with them. Their subjective interpretations were deeply embedded in the discourses of their respective European empires.

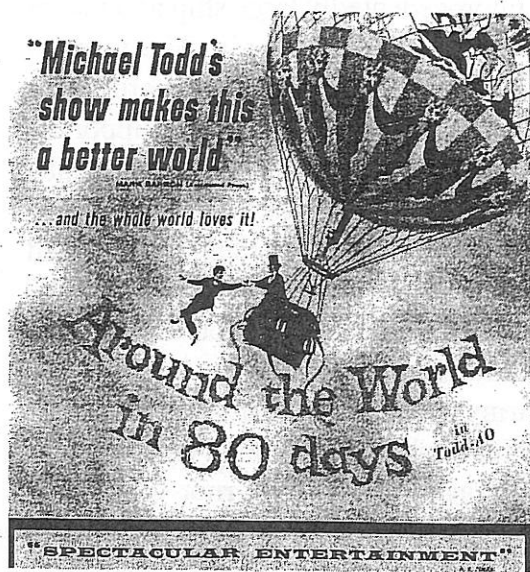
The excitement generated by the camera's capacity to register the formal qualities of movement reverberated with the full-steam-ahead expansionism of imperialism itself. The camera was hired out to document the tentacular extensions of empire. Photographers and filmmakers were especially attracted to trains and ships, engines of empire that delivered raw materials from the interiors of Asia, Africa, and the Americas into the heart of Europe. Robert Howlett's photographs for the London *Times* of "The Bow of the Great Eastern" (1857) not only foreshadowed subsequent homages to the futurist esthetics of the machine,

photograph
images used for
purpose - enhance
colonization

but also documented the construction of an unprecedentedly large ship as a matter of national pride and a confirmation of British supremacy at sea. The work of early photographers such as Felix Teynard, Maxime du Camp, Edouard-Denis Baldus, John Beasley Green, Louis de Clercq, and John Murray was supported, published, and exhibited by diverse imperial institutions. De Clercq, for example, was invited to accompany the historian Emmanuel-Guillaume Rey on a French government-sponsored expedition of 1859 to the Crusader castles of Syria and Asia Minor, a trip that generated the six volumes of *Voyage en Orient, Villes, Monuments, et Vues Pittoresques de Syrie*, along with the collection of historical artifacts now housed in the Oriental Antiquities Department of the Louvre. And Murray served in the East India Company army, where, like many Englishmen in India, he took up photography as a hobby. His work, first exhibited in London in 1857 during the "Indian Mutiny," was encouraged by the Governor-General of India, Lord Earl Canning, the same governor who suppressed the uprising and who, together with his wife Lady Charlotte Canning, was a major patron of photography in India.¹³

Travel photographers did not just document territories for military and governmental purposes, their photos also registered the advances of scientific activities, for example the archeological excavations of Greece and Egypt. Fascination with ancient monuments was mingled with admiration for the camera's capacity to provide a vivid sense of distant regions and remote times: a photo in Du Camp's album *Egypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie* (1852) – "Westernmost Colossus of the temple of Re, Abu Simbel, 1850" – shows the photographer's assistant atop the crown of Rameses II, illustrating both relative scale and a moment of mastery and possession. If bourgeois travelers cherished photographic moments of their own exploring – as in Du Camp's photo of Flaubert in Cairo in 1850 – the colonized had to bear the weight of a generic ethnographic gaze, as in the anonymous photograph "Women Grinding Paint, Calcutta, 1854." The camera also played a botanical and zoological role by documenting exotic fauna and flora. Louis Pierre Théophile Dubois de Nehant's "Another Impossible Task" (1854) shows the elephant "Miss Betsy," imported from India, in the Brussels Zoo, while Count de Motizon's photo (1852) captures Londoners admiring a hippopotamus captured on the banks of the White Nile. More than a servile scribe, the camera actively popularized imperial imagery, turning it into an exciting participatory activity for those in the motherland.

The social origins of the cinema were schizophrenic, traceable both to the "high" culture of science and literature and to the "low" culture of sideshows and nickelodeons. (At times the two cultures coalesced: the flying balloon in *Around the World in 80 Days*, designed to circle the world, is also the object of spectacle for enthusiastic Parisians.) The desire to expand the frontiers of science became inextricably linked to the desire to expand the frontiers of empire. The immediate origins of the cinema in Western science meant that filmic exhibition also entailed the exhibition of Western triumphs. The visible achievements of both cinema and science also graced the proliferating world fairs, which since the mid-nineteenth

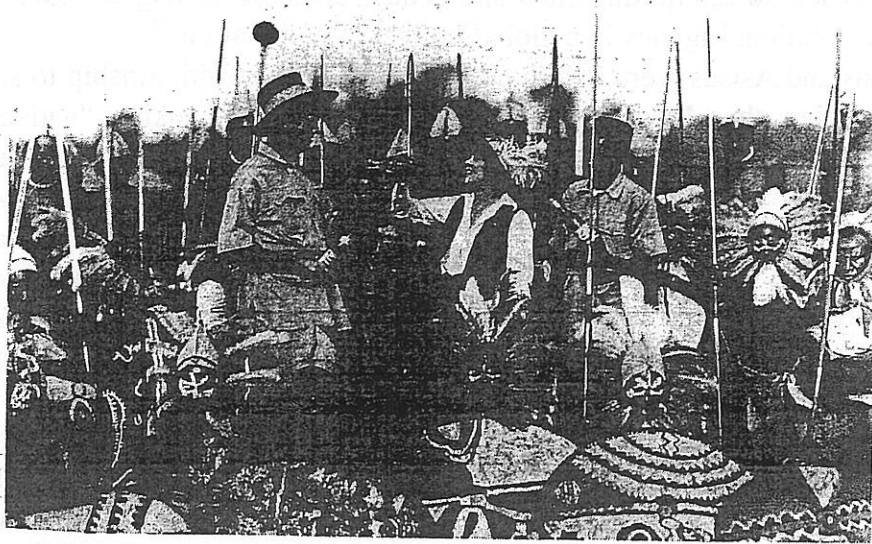


Plates 15 and 16 Global ubiquity:
Around the World in 80 Days and
Simba: King of the Beasts

century had become the new “international” showplaces for the spectacular fruits of industrial and scientific progress.

The visualist inclinations of Western anthropological discourse¹⁴ prepared the way for the cinematographic representation of other territories and cultures. The “ontologically” kinetic status of the moving image privileged the cinema not only over the written word but over still photography as well. It lent indexical credibility to anthropology, arming it with visual evidence not only of the existence of “others” but also of their actually existing otherness. Cinema in this sense prolonged the museological project of gathering three-dimensional archeological, ethnographic, botanical, and zoological objects in the metropolis. Unlike the more auratic and “inaccessible” elite arts and sciences, a popularizing cinema could plunge spectators into the midst of non-European worlds, letting them see and feel “strange” civilizations. It could transform the obscure *mappa mundi* into a familiar, knowable world.

Photography and the cinema often represented alien topographies and cultures as aberrant in relation to Europe. Operating on a continuum with zoology, anthropology, botany, entomology,¹⁵ biology, and medicine, the camera, like the microscope, anatomized the “other.” The new visual apparatuses demonstrated the power of science to display and even decipher otherized cultures: dissection and montage together constructed a presumably holistic portrait of the colonized. Technological inventions, in other words, mapped the globe as a disciplinary space of knowledge.¹⁶ Topographies were documented for purposes of military and economic control, often on the literal backs of the “natives” who carried the cinematographers and their equipment. In the colonial context, the common trope of the “camera gun” (Marey’s “fusil cinématographique”) resonated with the aggressive use of the camera by the agents of the colonial powers.¹⁷ “Primitive” peoples were turned into the objects of quasi-sadistic experimentation. This kind of aggression reached a paroxysm in the 1920s films of Martin and Osa Johnson,



where the filmmakers gleefully prodded Pygmies, whom they called “monkeys” and “niggers,” to get sick on European cigars. In films such as *Trailing African Wild Animals* (1922) and *Simba* (1927), the Johnsons treated African peoples as a form of wildlife. The camera penetrated a foreign and familiar zone like a predator, seizing its “loot” of images as raw material to be reworked in the “motherland” and sold to sensation-hungry spectators and consumers, a process later fictionalized in *King Kong* (1933). There was no clue, in such films, as to how Europeans depended for their everyday survival in the field on the knowledge, intelligence, labor, and the “enforced subordination of people the white folk insisted on seeing as perpetual children.”¹⁸

If cinema itself traced its parentage to popular sideshows and fairs, ethnographic cinema and Hollywoodian ethnography were the heirs of a tradition of exhibitions of “real” human objects, a tradition going back to Columbus’ importation of “New World” natives to Europe for purposes of courtly entertainment. Exhibitions organized the world as a spectacle within an obsessively mimetic esthetic.¹⁹ In the US, at a time roughly coincident with the beginnings of cinema, a series of fairs — the Chicago Columbian Exposition of 1893, the Omaha Trans-Mississippi Exposition in 1898, the Buffalo Pan-American Exposition in 1901, the St Louis “Louisiana Purchase” Exposition in 1904 — introduced millions of fairgoers to evolutionary ideas about race in an atmosphere of communal good cheer. The Chicago Columbian Exposition spatialized racial hierarchies in a quasi-didactic fashion by having the Teutonic exhibits placed closest to the “White City,” with the “Mohammedan world” and the “savage races” at the opposite end. Racism and “entertainment,” as Robert W. Rydell points out, became closely intertwined.²⁰ The Omaha fair featured an exhibit on “the Vanquished Races,” and in the Atlanta Exposition the Sioux were obliged to reenact their own defeat and humiliation at Wounded Knee. The Louisiana Purchase Exposition included a Filipino exhibit that made the Pacific Islands

seem as much a part of "manifest destiny" as the conquest of the west. Such expositions gave utopian form to White supremacist ideology, legitimizing racial hierarchies abroad and muting class and gender divisions among Whites at home by stressing national agency in a global project of domination.²¹

Africans and Asians were exhibited as human figures with kinship to specific animal species, thus literalizing the colonialist zeugma yoking "native" and "animal," the very fact of exhibition in cages implying that the cages' occupants were less than human. Lapps, Nubians, and Ethiopians were displayed in Germany in anthropological-zoological exhibits.²² The conjunction of "Darwinism, Barnumism [and] pure and simple racism" resulted in the exhibition of Ota Benga, a Pygmy from the Kasai region, alongside the animals in the Bronx Zoo.²³ A precursor to Epcott's global village, the 1894 Antwerp World's Fair featured a reconstructed Congolese village with sixteen "authentic" villagers. In many cases the people exhibited died or fell seriously ill. "Freak shows" too paraded before the West's bemused eye a variety of "exotic" pathologies. Saartjie Baartman, the "Hottentot Venus,"²⁴ was displayed on the entertainment circuit in England and France. Although her protrusive buttocks constituted the main attraction, the rumored peculiarities of her genitalia also drew crowds, with her racial/sexual "anomaly" constantly being associated with animality.²⁵ The zoologist and anatomist George Cuvier studied her intimately and presumably dispassionately, and compared her buttocks to those of "female mandrills, baboons ... which assume at certain epochs of their life a truly monstrous development."²⁶ After Baartman's death at the age of twenty-five, Cuvier received official permission for an even closer look at her private parts, and dissected her to produce a detailed description of her body inside out.²⁷ Her genitalia still rest on a shelf in the Musée de l'Homme in Paris alongside the genitalia of "*une négresse*" and "*une péruvienne*"²⁸ as monuments to a kind of imperial necrophilia. The final placement of the female parts in the patriarchally designated "Museum of Man" provides a crowning irony.

As the product of both science and mass culture, cinema combined traveling knowledge with traveling spectacles, conveying a view of the "world itself as an exhibition."²⁹ The study of a hypersexualized "other" in scientific discourse was paralleled by the cinema's scopophilic display of aliens as spectacle. Hollywood productions abounded in "exotic" images of moving native bodies, at times incorporating actual travelogs dug up from the archives, deployed in such films as the *Tarzan* series. Thus in a "double standard" erotics, the Production Code of the Motion Picture Producers and Directors of America, Inc, 1930-4, which censored Jane's two-piece outfit into one in later *Tarzan* films, left intact the naked African women in the background, evoking a *National Geographic*-style prurient delight in unilateral native nudity. The portrayal of dance rituals in such films as *The Dance of Fatima* (1903), *The Sheik* (1921), *Bird of Paradise* (1932), and *Sanders of the River* (1935) displayed alien flesh to hint at the masculinist pleasures of exploration. Hiding behind a respectable figleaf of "science" and "authenticity," ethnographic films focussed directly on the bouncing breasts of

dancing women,³⁰ Hollywood films, under the surveillance of domestic moral majorities, relegated native nudity to the background, or restricted the imagery to minimal "native" garb. Formulaic scenes of dark frenzied bodies entranced by accelerating drum rhythms relayed a fetishized image of indigenous religions. Ceremonial possession (portrayed as a kind of mass hysteria) evoked the uncontrollable id of libidinous beings. Ethnographic science, then, provided a cover for the unleashing of pornographic impulses. The cinematic exposure of the dark body nourished spectatorial desire, while marking off imaginary boundaries between "self" and "other," thus mapping homologous spheres, both macrocosmic (the globe) and microcosmic (the sphere of carnal knowledge).

PROJECTING THE EMPIRE

The cinema combined narrative and spectacle to tell the story of colonialism from the colonizer's perspective. From the Lumière brothers' mocking portrayals of Muslim Arab religious and culinary habits in *Le Musulman Rigolo* (The Funny Muslim, 1902) and *Ali Bouffe à l'Huile* (Ali Eats with Oil, 1902), through the adventure tales of *Tarzan*, to the Westerner-in-the-pot cannibal imagery of the 1980s version of *King Solomon's Mines* and the scientific missions of *Indiana Jones* (1981, 1984, 1989), dominant cinema has spoken for the "winners" of history, in films which idealized the colonial enterprise as a philanthropic "civilizing mission" motivated by a desire to push back the frontiers of ignorance, disease, and tyranny. Programmatically negative portrayals helped rationalize the human costs of the imperial enterprise. Thus Africa was imaged as a land inhabited by cannibals in the Ernst Lubin comedy *Rastus in Zululand* (1910), Mexicans were reduced to "greasers" and "bandidos" in films like *Tony the Greaser* (1911) and *The Greaser's Revenge* (1914), and Native Americans were portrayed as savage marauders in *Fighting Blood* (1911) and *The Last of the Mohicans* (1920).

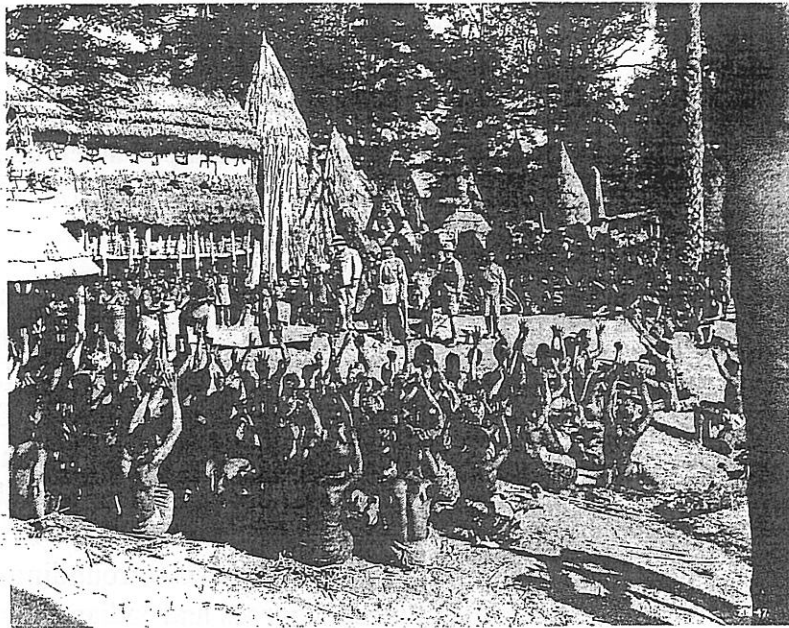
Each imperial filmmaking country had its own imperial genres set in "darkest Africa," the "mysterious East," and the "stormy Caribbean." It was in this imperializing spirit that Thomas Alva Edison staged battles against Filipino guerillas in the fields of New Jersey (with Blacks standing in for the Filipinos) and that J. Stuart Blackton staged the Spanish-American war using scale-model battleships in local bathtubs. Indeed, many of the early American one-reelers, such as *Cuban Ambush* (1898), *Roosevelt's Rough Riders* (1898), *Troop Ships for the Philippines* (1898), and *Landing of U.S. Troops near Santiago* (1902), glorified the imperialist binge in the Caribbean and the Philippines. Even filmmakers not conventionally associated with lauding imperialism betray a shared discourse of empire. Georges Méliès' filmography, for example, features a number of films related to expansionist voyages and orientalist fantasies: *Le Fakir - Mystère Indien* (1896), *Vente d'Esclaves au Harem* (1897), *Cléopâtre* (1899), *La Vengeance de Bouddah* (1901), *Les Aventures de Robinson Crusoe* (1902), *Le Palais des Mille et une Nuits* (1905).³¹ Similarly, in Méliès' *Le Voyage*

dans la Lune (A Trip to the Moon, 1902; based on Verne's *From the Earth to the Moon*, 1865), the rocket's phallic penetration of the moon (the space frontier) recapitulates, on another level, the historical discourse of the other (imperial) "frontier." ("I would annex the planets if I could," Cecil Rhodes often said.) The film is structured like a colonial captivity narrative: spear-carrying skeleton creatures burst from the moon's simulacral jungle and capture the explorers, only to be defeated by the male explorers' gunlike umbrellas, which magically eliminate the savage creatures. Such a film, not in any obvious sense "about" colonialism, can thus be read as analogizing imperial expansion.

Many American films, for example *Beau Geste* (1939), filmed in Arizona but set in Morocco, praised the work of imperial confrères in the French Foreign Legion. Between 1911 and 1962, France itself made over 200 feature films set in North Africa, many of them memorializing the exploits of the Legion against native rebels.³² But the British especially became masters of the imperial epic, as in the Korda trilogy *Sanders of the River* (1935), *Drums* (1938), and *The Four Feathers* (1939) and in the films produced by Michael Balcon: *Rhodes of Africa* (1936), *The Great Barrier* (1936), and *King Solomon's Mines* (1937). At a time when roughly one-fourth of the human race lived under British rule, many films preferred a nostalgic look back at the "pioneering" days of "exploration" to a frontal examination of the quotidian brutality of latter-day imperialism.³³

Cedric Hardwicke as Livingstone conducting an African choir in "Onward Christian Soldiers" in *David Livingstone* (1936), Cecil Rhodes planning the Cape-to-Cairo railway before a map of Africa in *Rhodes of Africa*, Reginald Denny laying down imperial law to a native ruler in *Escape to Burma* (1955), Tarzan performing deeds of valor in the imperial service; such are the filmic epiphanies of empire. What Jeffrey Richards describes as the "square-jawed, pipe-smoking, solar-topeed English sahib," standing at the ramparts, scanning the horizon for signs of native restlessness, crystallized an ideal imperial figure for cinematic consumption. Actors such as Ronald Colman, C. Aubrey Smith, Clive Brook, David Niven, Basil Rathbone, George Sanders, and Ray Milland incarnated heroic virtue in what amounted to a form of celuloid ancestor worship. *Rhodes of Africa*, for example, paints a hagiographic portrait of the imperial patriarch, constructed as an exemplum of foresight and benevolence. Both Korda and Balcon stress the austere stoic virtues and natural authority of the British on foreign strands. In *Sanders*, a film based on the popular Edgar Wallace series, a colonial District Commissioner (Sanders) puts down an uprising in Nigeria and brings British law and order to the River Territories. The usual colonial splitting pits the good Black Chief Bosambo (Paul Robeson) against the evil King Mofalaba. Colonialism, as incarnated by the authoritative and likeable Sanders, is portrayed as natural, eternal, beneficent. Africans themselves, meanwhile, were enlisted to enact their own caricatures. The exploits of figures like Sanders, Tarzan, and Quartermain brought home to the domestic public an idealized version of what abstract imperial theories meant "on the ground."

The imperial thrust of many of these films requires no subtle deciphering; it is



Plates 17 and 18 The White man's burden: *Sanders of the River* and *Beau Geste*

right on the surface, often in the form of didactic forewords. *Sanders*, for example, is dedicated to the "sailors, soldiers and merchant adventurers . . . who laid the foundations of the British Empire [and whose] work is carried on by the civil servants – the Keepers of the King's Peace." The preface to *Rhodes of Africa* suggests that Africans themselves endorsed Rhodes' enterprise; the Matabele, we are told, regarded Sanders as "a royal warrior, who tempered conquest with the gift of ruling." Elsewhere imperial ideology is explicitly expressed through dialog. Colonel Williams in *Wee Willie Winkie* (1937) tells Shirley Temple:

"Beyond that pass, thousands of savages are waiting to sweep down and ravage India. It's England's duty, it's my duty, to see that this doesn't happen." *Farewell Again* (1937) begins:

All over the world, wherever the Union Jack is flown, men, from castle and cottage, city and village, are on duty . . . facing hardship, danger, death with only a brief glimpse of home. Each has his own joys and sorrows but a common purpose unites them – their country's service.

In such films, Britain's material interests in the imperialized world are masked by what Conrad's Marlowe would have called "redeeming ideas": the battle against savagery (*Wee Willie Winkie*), the struggle to abolish slavery (*Killers of Kilimanjaro*, 1959), the fight against fascism (*The Sun Never Sets*, 1940).

A positive image of empire was also encoded into law. The British in particular imposed censorship provisions throughout their empire. In Trinidad, the censorship code forbade "scenes intended to ridicule or criticise unfairly" British social life: "White men in a state of degradation amidst native surroundings, or using violence towards natives, especially Chinese, negroes and Indians," and "equivocal situations between men of one race and girls of another race."³⁴ In 1928 the Hong Kong censor told the American Consul-General that his duty was to uphold British prestige in "a small settlement of white men on the fringe of a huge empire of Asiatics." A United Artists agent in Hong Kong reported that banned subjects included "armed conflict between Chinese and whites" and portrayals of "white women in indecorous garb or positions or situations which would tend to discredit our womenfolk with the Chinese."³⁵ The British censorship codes applied to global audiences, pressuring American producers to respect them. In 1928, Jason Joy warned production personnel that the British would not permit "the portrayal of the white man and woman . . . in a way that might degrade him or her in the eyes of the native, nor will they permit anything in films tending to incite the natives against the governing race."³⁶ At the same time, colonial powers tried to prevent the development of rival "native" cinemas. The growing power of Egyptian national cinema in the Arab world was perceived as troublesome by the French, leading them to form a special department "responsible for setting up a production centre in Morocco whose official mission was to oppose the influence of Egyptian cinema."³⁷

Hollywood films also rendered service to empire by reconstructing colonial outposts in southern California. In Samuel Goldwyn's *The Real Glory* (1939), for example, soldiers of fortune and the American army quell a "terrorist" uprising in the Philippines. Despite the US' own historical origins in anti-British revolt, Hollywood films often demonstrated as much enthusiasm for European colonialism as did the European films. Hollywood made more films than the French did about the French Foreign Legion,³⁸ and American films like W.S. Van Dyke's *Trader Horn* (1931) and *Stanley and Livingstone* (1939) glorified British colonialism in Africa. George Stevens' *Gunga Din* (1939), similarly, showed three heroic British soldiers battling savage Punjabis in nineteenth-century India.

Furthermore, the fact that American stars such as Spencer Tracy in *Stanley and Livingstone* and Charlton Heston in *Khartoum* (1966) played British colonial heroes virtually ensured the sympathetic identification of the Euro-American public, thus playing out on a thespian level the historical lap-dissolve by which the British-dominated imperialism of the nineteenth century faded into the US-dominated imperialism of the twentieth. In Henry Hathaway's *Lives of a Bengal Lancer* (1934), starring Gary Cooper, a handful of British officers hold back a native rebellion. The older officers are played by British actors, the younger by Americans, suggesting a kind of imperial succession. As Richards points out, Shirley Temple, the top box-office attraction in Britain and the US from 1935 to 1938, played a central role in the imperial films.³⁹ *Wee Willie Winkie*, based on a Kipling story, featured her as an American girl in India who learns about England's mission from her British grandfather, the commanding officer of a frontier fort. While the grandfather – a figure of British colonialism – is overly rigid, the American granddaughter is flexible and adept at mediation and at one point actually intervenes in a war to reconcile a rebel Khan to the British Raj. Thus the English-American family becomes enlisted in a kind of imperial allegory. Temple's diplomatic "in-betweenness" reflects the historical in-betweenness of the US itself, as at once an anticolonial revolutionary power in relation to Europe, and a colonizing, hegemonic power in relation to Native American and African peoples. Upon arriving in India, Temple confuses the Indians (natives of India) with American "Indians" – committing Columbus' error, but in reverse. In a film released just two years later, *Susannah of the Mounties* (1939), she intervenes between the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and an "Indian" tribe, suggesting the substitutability of the two kinds of "Indian." (Shirley Temple Black's later nomination as Ambassador to Ghana provides a further twist on this trope of substitutability.) Moreover, three of the epics of British India, *Lives of a Bengal Lancer*, *Four Men and a Prayer* (1938), and *Gunga Din*, were remade as westerns, entitled respectively *Geronimo* (1940), *Fury at Furnace Creek* (1940), and *Soldiers Three* (1951). The imperial epic also provided the model for westerns like *Santa Fe Trail* (1940) and *They Died with Their Boots on* (1941), while *Charge of the Light Brigade* (1938) was the model for *Khartoum*. Thus a kind of imperial circularity recycled the formulae of European supremacy vis-à-vis globally dispersed others, with the White European always retaining his or her "positional superiority" (Edward Said's term).

The studios' predilection for spinning-globe logos also translated imperial ambition. The Lumières' location shootings of diverse "Third World" sites, such as India, Mexico, Egypt, and Palestine, inaugurated this imperial mobility. The globe logo became associated with several studios (Universal, RKO), and with the British Korda brothers' productions, many of whose films, such as *Drums*, *The Four Feathers*, and *The Jungle Book* (1942), concerned imperial themes. The globe image symbolically evokes divine powers, since the created world implies a Creator. Later, TV news updated this trope of "covering the world." In the 1950s, John Cameron Swayze used the globe-trotting motif in his *Camel News*

Caravan and contemporary news programs call attention to it through their spherical-line globes and illuminated maps. Recent TV coverage of international crises generated further elaborations of the trope. A Gulf war special, ABC's *A Line in the Sand*, had Peter Jennings walk on top of a colorful political map of the Middle East as a setting for a pedagogical tour of the region's history, in a "covering" at once temporal and spatial. The North American TV commentator literally steps on, sits on, and looks down on the map, bestriding the narrow world "like a colossus."⁴⁰

In both cinema and TV, such overarching global points-of-view suture the spectator into the omniscient cosmic perspective of the European master-subject. Incorporating images of maps and globes, *Around the World in 80 Days*, (1956), for example, begins with its omniscient narrator hailing the "shrinking of the world" which occurred during the period that Verne was writing his book. (The prelude to the film includes the mandatory globus prop made to spin for the camera.) The idea of "shrinking" materializes the confident, scientific perspective of upper-class British men. "Nothing is impossible," says the David Niven character: "when science finally conquers the air it may be feasible to circle the globe in eighty hours." Thus he implicitly links the development of science to imperial control, an idea reinforced by the character's recurrent association with the strains of "Rule Britannia." In recent science-fiction films such as *Return of the Jedi* (1983), globality embraces spheres yet to be charted by NASA. The conquest of outer space cohabits with an underlying imperial narrative in which the visualization of another planet conforms to the representational paradigm of Third World "underdevelopment." A Manichean struggle pits the hero against the new land and its natives. The exotic, teddy-bear-like "Ewoks" – whose language, as in most colonial films, remains unintelligible – worship the high-tech Euro-American hero and defend him against repulsive, evil, irrational creatures. The hero's physical and moral triumph legitimates the enemy's destruction and the paternal transformation of the friendly "elements" into servile allies, authorizing his right to establish new outposts (and implicitly to hold on to old ones). Like early adventure films, spectacular sci-fi and star-war video-games visualize progress as a purposeful movement toward global ubiquity; if in the early films traveling the ocean entailed no boundaries, in the recent ones the sky is no longer the limit.

THE WESTERN AS PARADIGM

If the imperial adventure film conveyed the pleasures and benefits of empire, the western told the story of imperial-style adventures on the American frontier. Indeed, the link between the two imperial adventures, in the continental US and outside of it, has usually been obscured, the word "imperialism" usually being restricted in reference to the late nineteenth-century expansions beyond the continent into the Caribbean and the Pacific. As has often been noted, the high proportion of westerns in Hollywood's costume-film output – roughly one-fourth

of all Hollywood features between 1926 through 1967 – is so striking as to betray a kind of national obsession.⁴¹ Although relatively few films treat the American revolution, Washington, Jefferson, and Franklin, countless films treat the conquest of the west, Kit Carson, Billy the Kid, and General Custer. The central place of the “myth of the frontier” in the American imaginary has been eloquently discussed by Francis Jennings, Richard Slotkin, Richard Drinnon, Michael Rogin, John Cawelti, and others. Arguably the longest-lived of American myths, it traces its origins to the colonial period. The myth of the frontier has its ideological roots in some of the discourses addressed in the previous chapter: the competitive laws of Social Darwinism, the hierarchy of the races and sexes, the idea of progress. It gave exceptionalist national form to a more widespread historical process – the general thrust of European expansion into Asia, Africa, and the Americas. What Slotkin calls the “American-History-As-Indian-War” trope has consistently given a fantastical self-aggrandizing shape to “United Statesian” self-narration, with reverberations that echo through popular culture even today.

The western inherited a complex intertext embracing classical epic, chivalric romance, Indianist novel, conquest fiction, the paintings of George Catlin, and the drawings of Frederic Remington. It played a crucial pedagogical role in forming the historical sensibilities of generations of Americans. The western’s macro-narrative was doubly “condensed,” both temporally and spatially: of a “New World” history of almost four centuries, these films focus on the last 200 years, thus repressing situations of first contact when American land and culture were more obviously Indian, and when non-genocidal collaboration with the Indians was still possible. Films like *Drums along the Mohawk* (1939) and *Northwest Passage* (1940), set before 1800, are in this sense the exception; westerns usually place us at a historical moment when the penetration of the frontier is already well under way, when the characters’ point of origin is no longer Europe but Euro-America, and when there is little likelihood that Native Americans will mount a successful resistance to European occupation. That westerns are not “easterns” is no accident, since “easterns,” set on the eastern seaboard of an earlier generation’s contact with Native Americans, might have stressed the “un-American” foreignness of White Europeans, bringing up some of the intriguing “what ifs?” of history.

Hollywood’s Native America, as Ward Churchill puts it, “flourished with the arrival of whites,” then “vanished somewhat mysteriously, along with the bison and the open prairie,” in a story with no “before” and no “after.”⁴² As a result, there is no cinematic recognition of what Churchill calls “a white-free and autonomous past,” no Iroquois, Sioux, or Cherokee (not to mention Aztec or Inca) counterpart to *Cleopatra* (1934, 1963), *The Robe* (1953), or *Ben Hur* (1926, 1959). Furthermore, even within an already condensed spatiotemporality, these westerns privilege a period of roughly fifty years, and return time and again to particular sites and events. Although historical Native Americans generally avoided direct confrontation with the White military – according to the National Parks Service, there were probably only six full-scale attacks on

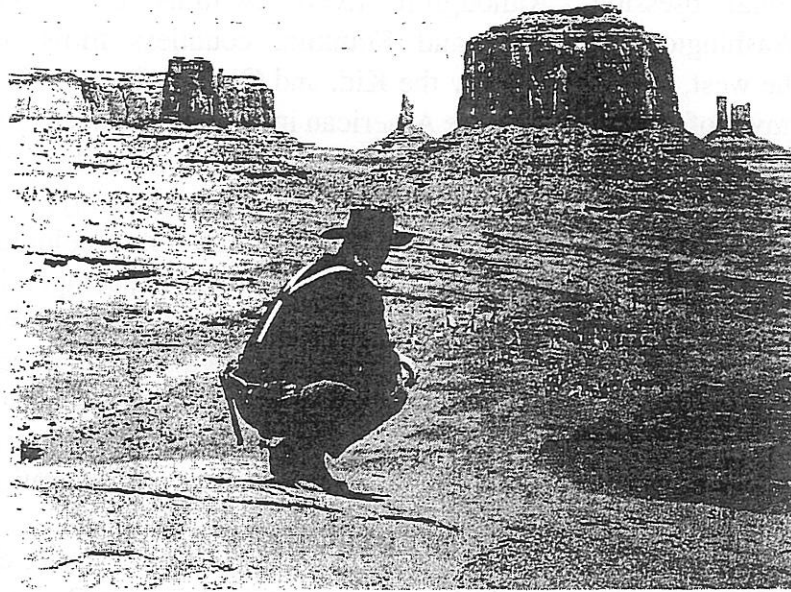


Plate 19 Dominating vistas: John Wayne in *The Searchers*

US cavalry forts between 1850 and 1890 – the Indian raid on the fort, as the constructed bastion of settled civilization against nomadic savagery, nevertheless became a staple topos in American westerns.⁴³ Turned into aggressors, Native Americans became dispensable “pop-up targets for non-Indian guns.”⁴⁴ The status of a hero, and indirectly of an actor, was defined by the number of Indians he could kill.⁴⁵

Central to the western is the land. The reverent attitude toward the landscapes themselves – Monument Valley, Yellowstone, the Colorado River – occludes those to whom the land belonged and thus naturalizes expansionism. The land is regarded as both empty and virgin, and at the same time superinscribed with Biblical symbolism – “Promised Land,” “New Canaan,” “God’s Earth.” A binary division pits sinister wilderness against beautiful garden, with the former “inevitably” giving way before the latter: “The sturdy plant of the wilderness,” Thomas Farnham writes, “droops under the enervating culture of the garden. The Indian is buried with his arrows and bow.”⁴⁶ The dry, desert terrain furnishes an empty stage for the play of expansionist fantasies. Nor is it usually explained that the native populations portrayed as an intrinsic part of the landscape were for the most part driven there by the White expropriation of more fertile lands farther east.

A Manichean allegory also papers over two diametrically opposed views of the land and the soil: for most Native American cultures, land is not real estate for sale but is sacred both as historically consecrated and as the “mother” that gives (and needs) nurture.⁴⁷ In many indigenous languages, the concept of “selling land” is literally unspeakable, because there are no words to convey it; whence



Plate 20 The vision of the dominated: *Wiping the Tears of Seven Generations*

the absurdity of imagining that Europeans “bought” Manhattan for \$24 and a few trinkets. For the European, on the other hand, the land was a soulless conglomeration of exploitable resources, and the Indians a wandering horde without a sense of property, law, or government. “Civilization,” as one Secretary of War put it, “entails a love for exclusive property.” Progress, said Senator Henry Dawes, depends on not holding land in common, since “selfishness is the basis of civilization.”⁴⁸ For Europeans, land existed to be transformed and monogrammed, as it were, by a human, societal presence. While for the Europeans land was a commodity that had to produce quickly or else be abandoned for greener pastures (or more golden mines), for the Native Americans land was a sacred trust irreparably damaged by conquest.

The very titles of westerns stress a mobile, and mobilizing, European claim on the land. A disproportionate number stress European-designed state borders – *Oklahoma Kid* (1939), *Colorado Territory* (1949), *The Texas Rangers* (1936), *California Conquest* (1952) – the irony of course being that a high proportion of American states (such as Alabama, Arizona), rivers (including the Ohio, Potomac), lakes (for example Huron, Ontario) and mountain ranges (the Adirondacks and Poconos, for instance) carry native names.⁴⁹ The titles themselves exhibit the Adamic/Promethean power to name: *El Dorado* (1967), *Northwest Passage* (1940), *The Last Frontier* (1956). A kind of occidentotropism (“Go West Young Man!”) informs the films, conveying a thrusting, trailblazing purposiveness, a divinely sanctioned crepuscular teleology: *Red Sundown* (1956), *Union Pacific* (1939), *The Last Outpost* (1935, 1951), *Heaven’s Gate* (1980). Other titles resonate more blatantly with westward-driving zeal – *Westbound* (1959), *Westward the Women* (1951), *The Way West* (1967). Such titles relay the “becoming” of the American nation, which reached its telos with the complete transmogrification of nature into culture, a point fully reached only in the age of

cinema. The west was thus less a place than a movement, a going west, a moving horizon, a "vaguely realizing westward" in Robert Frost's phrase, a tropism in both senses of the word – a movement toward and a figure of speech.

The western projects a vision of wide-open possibility, a sense of vistas infinitely open in both space and time. Esthetically, this vision is expressed in wide-screen perspectives and soaring crane shots accompanying stampedes and cavalcades. The title of *How the West Was Won* (1936), a spectacular epic that follows an emigrant family from the Erie Canal in the 1830s to a settled home in the west fifty years and four generations later, sums up the theme of conquest and settlement. Western films inherit the vocation of frontier painting, exemplified by the Currier and Ives lithograph *Through to the Pacific*, where an allegorical landscape rich in symbols of material progress includes a train moving through an industrial town in the foreground toward "undeveloped" land stretching to the Pacific in the background. John Ford's *The Iron Horse* (1924), whose title itself is an anthropomorphic "Indianism," narrates a similar progression from a rustic past (before the railroad was built, when Indians attacked the wagon trains) to a dynamic adventure-filled present (during the construction of the railroad, when the Indians attack the workers), and an implied felicitous future (with the linking of the two railroads, symbolically the realization of the nation's manifest destiny, and the disappearance of Indians from the scene). A nation with continental ambitions crystallizes on the screen as diverse groups coalesce around a common project. The wild land is domesticated and envalued, with progress embodied in its metallic avatar, the locomotive, a vehicle often metonymically (Lumière's train station) and metaphorically associated with the cinema itself. A differential mode of emplotment encodes Enlightenment values of progress and development, assigning a comic "happy end," under the sign of providence, for the characters representing the West, and a tragic "doomed to extinction" emplotment for the West's "others." A narrative paradigm is enlisted to serve teleological notions of national progress and manifest destiny.

"Too bad," Duke Wayne says of Indian extinction in *Hondo* (1953); "it was a good way of life." The elimination of the Indian allows for elegiac nostalgia as a way to treat Indians only in the past tense and thus dismiss their claims in the present, while posthumously expressing thanatological tenderness for their memory. Here too the titles are revelatory of the idea that Indians live in historically condemned time: *The Vanishing Race* (1912), *The Last of the Mohicans* (1920, 1932, 1936, 1992), *The Last of the Redmen* (1947). An ambivalently repressive mechanism dispels the anxiety in the face of the Indian, whose very presence is a reminder of the initially precarious grounding of the American nation-state itself. For Native Americans, meanwhile, the memories were vivid and painful. In the filming of *The Indian Wars* (1914), traumatized Sioux were obliged to reenact their own historical defeat and humiliation at Wounded Knee:

The plan called for the battle to take place right over the Indian graves, which seemed to the Sioux a horrible desecration ... the Indians were resentful, remembering how the white soldiers had massacred their tribesmen and the women and children ... The greatest difficulty in getting these men together was to convince them that the purpose of this mobilization was merely to reproduce the wars and not to annihilate them, for when they saw the Hotchkiss guns, the rifles, revolvers and cases of ammunition, there was a feeling of unrest, as though the time had come when they were to be gathered in by the Great Spirit through the agency of the white men.⁵⁰

In a temporal paradox, living Indians were induced to "play dead," as it were, in order to perform a narrative of manifest destiny in which their role, ultimately, was to disappear.

We are not suggesting that all westerns were made in a single mold, or that there were never sympathetic portrayals of Indians, or that westerns were free of ideological tensions and contradictions. Enormous differences, obviously, separate William S. Hart's *The Aryan* (1916) from "pro-Indian" westerns like *Broken Arrow* (1950) or *Devil's Doorway* (1970), and the general run of westerns from a going-native western like *Little Big Man* (1970), a satirical western such as *Buffalo Bill and the Indians, or Sitting Bull's History Lesson* (1976), or an implicitly anti-Vietnam-war western like *Soldier Blue* (1970), which appropriates the 1864 Sand Creek massacre of Cheyenne and Arapahos to allegorize the My Lai massacre in Vietnam. Even within specific subgenres there were notable differences. A captivity narrative, for example, could either portray White assimilation to Indian ways or convey a racist horror of sexual assault, to be avenged by "savage war." The western has also evolved historically, particularly since the 1960s when pro-Indian films began to promote identification, however condescendingly, with Indian cultural values. As Thomas Schatz points out, later westerns become reflective, projecting a less flattering vision of the expansionist project; the law-and-order heroes of the classic western give way to renegade antiheroes.⁵¹ Post-1960s' "realistic" westerns depict the frontier as violent but unheroic, often presenting Native Americans with considerable sympathy.

Our point, then, is not to collapse differences among westerns, but rather to point to the genre's ideological premises and its general procedures for fostering identification. Generally speaking, the Hollywood western turned history on its head by making Native Americans appear intruders on their own land, and thus provided a paradigmatic perspective, as Tom Engelhardt points out, through which to view the whole of the non-White world.⁵² Rarely do westerns show Native Americans as simply inhabiting the domestic space of their unthreatening daily lives, although it was *their* lives and habits that were brutally disrupted by western expansion. Native Americans are usually portrayed as mean-spirited enemies of the moving train of progress. The point-of-view in the western is premised on exteriority, within what Tom Engelhardt calls "an imagery of

encirclement." The besieged wagon train or fort forms the focus of attention and sympathy, and from this center familiar figures sally out against unknown attackers characterized by inexplicable customs and irrational hostility: "In essence, the viewer is forced behind the barrel of a repeating rifle and it is from that position, through its gun sights, that he [sic] receives a picture history of western colonialism and imperialism."⁵³ The point-of-view conventions consistently favor the Euro-American protagonists; they are centered in the frame, their desires drive the narrative; the camera pans, tracks, and cranes to accompany their regard. In films such as *Drums along the Mohawk*, the point-of-view can be said to follow a structure of concentric circles. The inner humanized circle – often including women and children – is threatened by a second circle of attackers, until a final outer circle – the cavalry – rescues the besieged first circle by annihilating the middle circle. The outer circle, as colonial *deus ex machina*, executes an environing providential order – cinematic shorthand for genocide. The possibility of sympathetic identifications with the Indians is simply ruled out by the point-of-view conventions; the spectator is unwittingly sutured into a colonialist perspective.

Dominant narratives about colonial encounters suggest that "we," while imperfect, are at least human, while the non-European "they" are irrational and subhuman. The "colonial proportion" decrees that many of "them" must die for each one of "us," a pattern repeated in films of Zulus fighting the British, Mexicans fighting the US cavalry, American soldiers against Japanese kamikaze bombers, and, most recently, American pilots against Iraqi conscripts. But while "they" die disproportionately, "we" must believe that "they" pose an apocalyptic threat. Richard Drinnon traces the process by which White hostility toward premodern "savages" has been recycled throughout American history. The process began with the "proto-victims," the Pequots massacred in 1637, when the Puritans made some 400 of them "as a fiery oven" in their village near the Mystic River and later finished off 300 more in the mud of Fairfield Swamp, in an early example of the "righteous massacres" that have so marked American history.⁵⁴ The founding arrogance of the Pequot massacre was subsequently expanded to the "Conquest of the West," after which it was extended to the Philippines during the "imperialist binge" at the end of the nineteenth century, where many of the commanding generals had fought in the Plains and Apache wars.⁵⁵ "The pigments of Indian-hating," writes Drinnon, "shaded off into coolie-hating, the Chinese exclusion act (1882) and the 'Yellow Peril' hysteria at the turn of the century."⁵⁶ During the Philippine-American war, soldiers writing home stressed the comparison. An officer who served in the Philippines wrote reporter Henry Loomis Nelson:

We exterminated the American Indians, and I guess most of us are proud of it, or, at least, believe the end justified the means; and we must have no scruples about exterminating this other race standing in the way of progress and enlightenment, if it is necessary.⁵⁷

Another Asian war, the Vietnam war, also reverberated with echoes of the Indian wars. The same Custer story that provided John Ford with the plot for *Fort Apache* (1948) also provided Arthur Penn and Sidney Salkow with allegorical material with which to denounce the imperial folly of the Vietnam war. According to Frances Fitzgerald in *Fire in the Lake* (1973), the American elite saw the war as the:

painless conquest of an inferior race [just as to] the American settlers the defeat of the Indians had seemed not just a nationalist victory, but an achievement made in the name of humanity – the triumph of light over darkness, of good over evil, of civilization over brutish nature.⁵⁸

The very names of some of the military operations in Vietnam – “Rolling Thunder,” “Sam Houston,” “Hickory,” and “Daniel Boone” – resonated with the memory, and the attitudes, of the American frontier history relayed in the western. Troops described Vietnam as “Indian country,” while General Maxwell Taylor justified escalation as a case of moving the “Indians” away from the “fort” so that the “settlers” could “plant corn.”⁵⁹ For Lyndon Johnson, Vietnam recalled the Alamo. Even the “domino theory,” according to Drinnon, “was an updated, internationalized version of the older fear of pan-Indian movements that went back beyond the Pequots and the Narragansetts.”⁶⁰ And more recently General Schwarzkopf compared Iraq to “Indian territory.”

THE LATE IMPERIAL FILM

The colonial/imperial paradigm did not die with the formal end of colonialism, nor is the western paradigm limited to the wild west. Indeed, one could speak of a “submerged” imperial presence in many films – the South African diamond mines in the background of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953), the French presence in Morocco in *The Man Who Knew too Much* (1954), the neocolonial backdrop of Disney films set in Latin America (*The Three Caballeros*, 1945, for example),⁶¹ or the French domination, again in North Africa, in René Clair’s *Les Belles des Nuits* (1952). Such attitudes seep even into innocuous television entertainments such as *Gilligan’s Island*, seen by 2.5 million people per day as late as 1986, where the island, as Paul Sellors points out, is perceived as surrounded by barbarian tribes.⁶² The same Rider Haggard novels that inspired filmmakers in the silent period were adopted again throughout the sound period, sometimes more than once. *King Solomon’s Mines* was filmed again, often recycling the same footage, in 1937, 1950, 1959 (under the title *Watusi*), and 1985. The 1937 film features Paul Robeson as the Zulu Umbopa and has the witchdoctor Gogoul trap innocent Whites inside a volcano; as they are about to be butchered, an opportune solar eclipse confirms their pretense of being gods. The 1959 Kurt Neumann film *Watusi* reuses footage from the 1950 film, and has a missionary’s daughter saved from “savages.” The 1985 *King Solomon’s Mines* borrows shamelessly from *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and recycles the most classic

colonialist imagery, such as hordes of spear-carriers and the venerable "Europeans-in-the-pot" cannibal motif. In a kind of desired Western history, the *Made in Zimbabwe*, the film in an amalgam of Manichean narratives, suggests that the real colonial foreigners in Africa were not the British or the French but the Turks and the Arabs, along with the German Nazis.⁶³

It would be impossible, even pointless, to inventory all the films that relay a colonialist or imperialist perspective, but we can examine a symptomatic example. Andrew McLaglen's *The Wild Geese* (1978) extends the western conventions to post-independence Africa. Based on a novel by Daniel Carney, a White man from Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and a former member of the South African police, the film glorifies the White mercenaries who once propped up White-minority rule in places like South-Africa and corrupt Black rule in places like Zaire. The film, which centers on the mercenaries' armed rescue of a deposed Central African President, features highly popular actors playing the mercenaries. Richard Burton plays a tough Bogart-like commander who hides a sensitive heart beneath his cynical surface. Richard Harris is a brilliant military technician who regretfully tears himself away from his young son to join the "mission." Roger Moore is a playboy-pilot and Hardy Kruger a South African policeman. The mercenaries form the central focus of our sympathy; they win us with their flawed humanity, their quirky eccentricities, and their boisterous Hawksian camaraderie. Killing Africans en masse, the film implies, somehow brings out the mercenaries' latent humanity.

In the racist hierarchies of *The Wild Geese*, White males stand at the apex, White women are essentially dispensable, and Africans are playthings for Western plans. The film adroitly camouflages its racism, however: a token Black is included in the mercenary force – massacres seem more palatable when the perpetrators are "integrated" – and the entire operation is in any case performed on behalf of a Black leader repeatedly characterized as "the best there is." (The "best there is," unfortunately, is portrayed as sick, helpless, dying, literally carried on the backs of the Whites.) Within this White rescue fantasy, the Black leader of the 1970s speaks oddly like the Sidney Poitier of the 1950s. Pleading for love and integration, he calls on Blacks to "forgive the White past" and on Whites "to forgive the Black present," thus canceling out centuries of slavery and colonialism in the misleading symmetry of an aphorism.

Despite its flimsy integrationist façade, itself rather anachronistic in the 1970s, *The Wild Geese* conforms to the generic conventions of the western as colonialist adventure film. Even mercenaries, recruited from the flotsam and jetsam of English society, the film suggests, are suited to exercise power over African life. Whether gamblers, drunkards, or opportunists, they remain human; they are "us." African life, meanwhile, comes cheap. The film consistently obeys the "colonial proportion" in the body count; scores, even hundreds of Blacks die for each White mercenary slain. At the same time, the film exploits our instinctive sympathy for any group performing a "mission." We are induced to glory in the "surgical precision" of a task well done, whatever its political motivation. The European

right to determine Africa's destiny is simply assumed. *The Wild Geese* enlists the gamut of cinematic devices in the service of the mercenary cause. The camera places us behind the barrels of mercenary guns, from which vantage point we see Africans fall by the hundreds. History is neatly inverted, so that Africans, like Native Americans in the western, come to seem invaders in their own land. The cinematography, finally, celebrates the lyricism of warfare. Explosions are made beautiful and violent death graceful. Free-falling paratroopers float earthward in choreographed aerial shots: neocolonial war as *homo ludens*.

In the Reagan-Bush era, dominant cinema rediscovered the charms of the imperial/frontier narrative. *Red Dawn* (1984) returns to the encirclement imagery of the western, but this time it is the Cubans, the Soviets, and the (presumably Sandinista) Nicaraguans who take over the functional slot of the Indians. A literary eulogist of the Somoza regime in Nicaragua, Jack Coz, produced *The Last Plane Out* (1983), a defense of the dictator whom Roosevelt called "our son of a bitch." *Mountains of the Moon* (1989), meanwhile, recapitulates the Victorian explorer Richard Burton's search for the sources of the Nile, with weirdly colorful savages, presumably incapable of "discovering" the sources for themselves, as his witnesses. The Michael Caine vehicle *Ashanti* (1979) resurrects the venerable scenario of the British as the passionate enemies of slavery in Africa, seen also in films such as *Killers of Kilimanjaro* (1959) and *Drums of Africa* (1963). In *Doctor No* (1962), the British exercise benevolent rule over good-natured West Indians.

The 1980s and 1990s have witnessed a wave of elegiac narratives about the closing of the imperial period. The Raj nostalgia genre, exemplified by the TV series *The Jewel in the Crown* and by such films as *Staying On* (1980), *Passage to India* (1984), *Gandhi* (1982), *Heat and Dust* (1982), and *Kim* (1984), was denounced by Salman Rushdie as a transparent Thatcherite attempt to refurbish the image of empire, forming the "artistic counterpart of the rise of conservative ideologies in modern Britain."⁶⁴ Although Forster's novel *Passage to India* helped crystallized the beginnings of a change of attitude toward the British presence in India, David Lean's adaptation tones down the cautious anti-colonialism of the novel in the name of "balance." Richard Attenborough's *Gandhi*, as a spectacular epic about an ascetic, a *Triumph of the Will* for pacifists, pursues the "Great Man" view of history, subtly prettifying the British role. Some of the few critical colonial "nostalgia" films which, interestingly, have been made by French women (Claire Denis' *Chocolat*, Marie-France Pisier's *Bal du Gouverneur*, and Brigitte Rouan's *Outremer*, all from 1990), shift their focus from male aggressivity to female domesticity, and to the glimmerings of a feminist/anticolonialist consciousness provoked by transgression of the taboo on inter-racial desire.

More often, colonialist imagery has been remarketed under the guise of humor and genre parody. Thus, in a moment of apparent imperial decline, Hollywood resuscitates the imperial romance, where the presumably parodic filmmaker celebrates the extinguished glories of "imperial conquest and dominion, of



Plate 21 The imperial family: *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*

virtually magical mobility and power, and of exotic life at the outposts of empire.”⁶⁵ The *Indiana Jones* series recycled Rider Haggard and Kipling for the Reagan–Bush era, charmingly resurrecting the colonial adventure genre. Even the films’ adolescent qualities recall the pubescent energies of imperial adventure tales for boys. Set in the 1930s, the very heyday of the imperial film, the series, like comic books, is premised on an imperialized globe, in which archeology professors can “rescue” artifacts from the colonized world for the greater benefit of science and civilization. “Indy” operates with ease only in colonized countries, portrayed as ontologically corrupt, awaiting Western salvation. The series assumes an uncontested empire, with no trace of any viable anticolonial opposition. In the Egypt of 1936 of *Raiders*, there is no popular agitation against the British, just as in the Shanghai of 1935 there is no word of Mao’s “Long March.”⁶⁶ The India of *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984), similarly, betrays none of the civil disobedience against the British that led to the Government of India Act of 1935. In the world of Indiana Jones, Third World cultures are synopsized as theme park clichés drawn from the orientalist repertoire: India is all dreamy spirituality, as in the Hegelian account; Shanghai is all gongs and rickshaws. Third World landscapes becomes the stuff of dreamy adventure. In a classic splitting operation, the Third World is both demonized and infantilized: non-Western adult characters are evil (Mola Ram, Chattrar Lal, Lao Che); children (Short Round and Little Maharajah) are eager, innocent, and pro-Western. In this imperial family order, the modernity embodied by the younger, pro-American children, will replace the hidebound tradition of the older, nationalist fathers. Indeed, the series shows most of the unwashed masses of the

Third World as passively waiting for Indy to save them from ambitious nationalists like Mola Ram, who constructs his own (religious) domino theory: "The British in India will be slaughtered. Then we will overrun the Moslems. Then the Hebrew God will fall. Then the Christian God will be cast down and forgotten." The blame-the-victim paradigm inherited from the western is globalized: the civilized West is threatened by the savage East, but the imperial family ultimately triumphs.

POSTMODERN WAR

That the imperial and Indian war conventions traced here, together with the Eurocentric tendencies of the media apparatus, have not reached an end became strikingly evident during the Persian Gulf war. The ground for the "popularity" of the war was prepared by a long intertextual chain: crusading-anti-Islamic tales, captivity narratives, the imperial adventure novel, the "manifest destiny" western, and more recent militaristic films like *Star Wars* (1977), the *Rambo* series (1982, 1985, 1988) and *Top Gun* (1988). An orientalist and imperialist imaginary was reactivated for the ideological purposes of the warrior state.⁶⁷ The Gulf war was presented as a macro-entertainment, one with a beginning (Desert Shield), a middle (Desert Sword), and an end (Desert Storm), all undergirded by a fictive telos: the "New World Order." The futuristic overtones of the phrase meshed anachronistically with the medievalist connotations of "shield" and "sword," evocative of a religious substratum of Crusades against Muslim infidels. Network logos – "Countdown to War," "Deadline in the Desert," "America at the Brink" – communicated a throbbing sense of inevitability, of an inexorable slouching toward war; provoking, even, a kind of spectatorial *desire* for war. Talk of peace, following administration cues, was treated not as a hope but as a "nightmare scenario," a kind of "coitus interruptus" within an irresistible orgasmic march.⁶⁸

Multigeneric, the Gulf war mini-series drew on the codes of the war film (soldiers silhouetted against the sky, thrilling martial music, *Top Gun* visuals); of the PBS educational show (military pedagogs with pointers, maps, and video blackboards); of sports programing (instant replay, expert-running commentary); and of the western (lines drawn in the sand, the implacable logic of the showdown). The Gulf war scenario had the elemental, childlike charm of the fable, the awesome pyrotechnics of apocalypse, and the didactic impulses of allegory. With this war, an already powerful media apparatus became "wedded" to another apparatus of the gaze – that of military simulation and surveillance. As a consequence, telespectators were encouraged to "enjoy" a quantum leap in prosthetic audio-visual power. Television news offered its spectator what Donna Haraway, in another context, calls the "conquering gaze from nowhere," a gaze that claims "the power to see and not be seen, to represent while escaping representation."⁶⁹ While TV coverage in general allows spectators to imagine themselves at the center of the globe's "hot spots," during the Gulf war the media

coaxed spectators to spy, thanks to an almost pornographic kind of surveillance, on a whole geographical region, whose nooks and crannies lay open to the military's panoptic view.⁷⁰

The fact that the military view literally *became* the spectator's view goes a long way toward explaining the massive public adherence in the US to the war. For quite apart from the pleasures of identification with a powerful military apparatus, the Gulf war coverage hyperbolized the normal pleasures of the televisual "apparatus" itself. While the semiotic theory of the cinematic apparatus requires "scanning" for television, since many of the factors that foster the realer-than-real subject effects in the cinema do not apply here, nevertheless TV does have its own pleasuring capacities and its own ways of encouraging spectatorial regression and narcissism. Indeed, TV affords pleasures even more multiform than those afforded by the cinema, for the televiewer identifies with an even wider array of viewpoints: notably those provided by film cameras, video-cameras, and their magnetic residue of images and sounds on tape, along with those provided by tapeless video-cameras directly transmitting images and sounds, all then relayed around the world through satellite transmission. TV thus confers perceptual powers in some ways superior to those of the relatively sluggish cinema, a medium that TV both includes and surpasses in its ability to "cover the world."⁷¹ The smaller screen, while preventing immersion in a deep, enveloping space, encourages in other ways a kind of narcissistic voyeurism. Larger than the figures on the screen, we quite literally oversee the world from a sheltered position – all the human shapes parading before us in TV's insubstantial pageant are scaled down to Lilliputian insignificance, two-dimensional dolls, their height rarely exceeding a foot.

The Gulf war mobilized atavistic passions, as televisual spectatorship became deeply implicated in an attempt to corral multiethnic spectators into a jingoistic communalism. A "feel-good" war became an (ultimately ineffective) electoral ploy, as global and domestic politics became linked to the Nielsen ratings. Much as the encirclement imagery model in the western engages literal point of view – the looking through the sights of a rifle, or through the windows of a fort – Gulf war "spectators" were made to see through the point of view of American pilots, and even through that of "smart bombs." Media coverage endowed the spectatorial eye with what Paul Virilio calls the "symbolic function of a weapon."⁷² The Gulf war telespectator, vicariously equipped with night-vision technology, infra-red vision, capable of zapping "enemy" tanks, planes, buildings, and heads of state, was prodded into feeling infinitely powerful. In a war where the same pilot's hand that released the missile simultaneously tripped the camera shutter, spectators were teleguided to see from the bomber's perspective, incorporated into the surveillance equipment, sutured into the sights of high-tech weaponry.

Gulf war media coverage paraded before the viewers innumerable candidates for what Metz calls "secondary identification," that is, identification with the human figures on the screen: the anchors, the correspondents, the generals, the

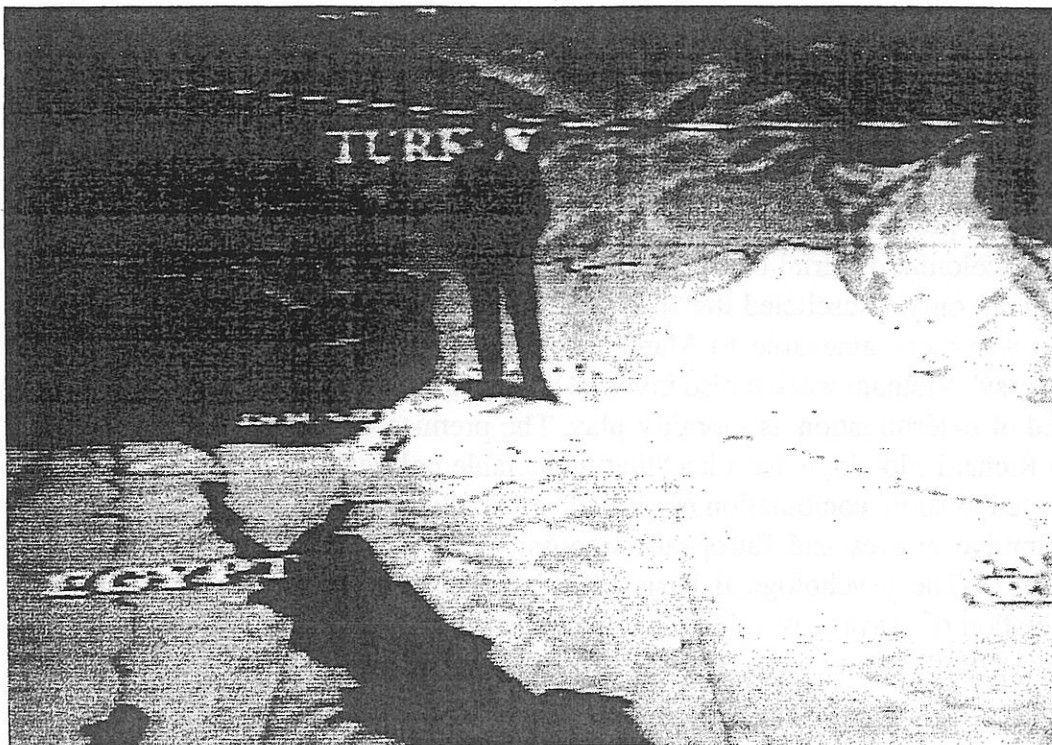


Plate 22 Peter Jennings "Striding the world like a Colossus"

experts, and the people interviewed on the street.⁷³ As "pivots" of identification, the anchors and correspondents played an especially crucial role. The latter-day descendants of the traveler and scientist heroes of the imperial adventure films, news anchors constitute authentic contemporary heroes. Their words have godlike efficacy; their mere designation of an event calls forth instant illustration in the form of animated miniatures, colorful maps, and live-action footage. As charismatic figures, comparable in power to the great stars of the cinema, the anchors facilitated a massive transfer of allegiance to the war, particularly in contexts where viewers lacked alternative sources of information and analysis.

During the Gulf war, the newscasters dropped their usual mask of neutrality and metamorphosed into partisan cheerleaders. The historical inertia of their reputation for "objectivity" functioned in favor of the war. The newscasters' pro-war stance took many forms: adjectival qualifications of the bombing as "beautiful" or "precise," facile references to soldier "heroes," the tendentious use of the word "patriotism" to refer only to pro-war actions and attitudes. Newscasters spoke of Iraq as the "enemy," as if they had personally joined the armed forces. Dan Rather "enlisted" by saluting the troops, Forest Sawyer by donning military fatigues, Howard Threlkel by frisking surrendering Iraqi prisoners. Throughout, the newscasters channeled empathy according to clear hierarchies of human value: at the apex stood Americans and Europeans, then came Israelis, then Arab allies, and lowest on the ladder were Arab enemies. Even the oil-suffocated cormorants in the Persian Gulf and the animals in the Kuwait

City Zoo garnered more sympathy than the Iraqi soldiers. The zealous citizens who sported "Nuke Iraq" T-shirts, or who patriotically roughed up people they took to be Arab-Americans (even those from countries allied to the US), intuitively understood the subliminal message sent out by the media: Third World life has no value a European (including an honorary European) need respect.

Although the Gulf war took place in the revised political context of the post-cold war period, many of the tropes, imagery, and narratives deployed were drawn from colonial/imperial discourse. Demonizing Saddam Hussein, the administration not only resuscitated the "just war" paradigm of World War II (thus making the war more amenable to Manichean dualisms of good versus evil than the "messy" Vietnam war), it also invoked the familiar paradigm of the "savage war" and of extermination as morality play. The premise of "savage war," according to Richard Slotkin, is the idea "that ineluctable political and social differences – rooted in some combination of "blood" and culture – make coexistence between primitive natives and Europeans impossible on any basis other than subjugation."⁷⁴ The psychological basis of public acceptance of massive force, in a situation of "savage war," is the expectation that a people (or leader) defined as savage will commit unimaginable atrocities, such as rape, massacre, or torture:

once such a *threatened* or rumored atrocity has been avenged with an actual atrocity, the mechanisms of projection become more (rather than less) powerful. Although we hopefully assert that our vengeance has had a chastening effect on the enemy, our belief that the enemy is "savage" suggests that we may merely have given him an additional motive for vengeance.⁷⁵

The melodramatic formula that cast Hussein as villain (a "Geronimo with Hitler's ambitions," as Slotkin puts it), Bush as hero, and Kuwait as the damsel in distress was a replay of countless colonial-western narratives. Basic to such narratives is the rescue of a White woman (and at times a dark one) from a dark rapist, and a happy conclusion entailing the restoration of a patriarchal-imperial world order and the punishment of the dark disobedient rapist, who must be humiliated in the name of the dishonored female. The Gulf war was fought in a gendered language, where the "rape of Kuwait" – the sexual violation of an innocent, passive, symbolically feminine persona – became the pretext for a manly penetration of Iraq. The metaphor of the rape of Kuwait, the circulating rumors about Iraqi rapes of Kuwaiti women, and the insinuation of possible rapes of American female soldiers by Iraqi captors became part of an imperial rescue fantasy eerily reminiscent of the medieval Crusades, when non-Christian enemies were also portrayed as licentious beasts.⁷⁶ At the same time, through a show of phallic vigor in the Gulf war, a senescent America imagined itself cured of the traumatic "impotence" it suffered in another war, in another Third World country – Vietnam.

Permeated by skull-and-crossbones-style male bonding, the Gulf war was machismo-driven from the start.⁷⁷ But in their mobilization of a national

imaginary, the administration and the media were careful not to make jingoistic militarism the spectator's sole locus of identification. They also provided more warm, more stereotypically "feminine" and "progressive" points of identification. Along with the smart bombs came yellow ribbons, along with the martial fifes and drums came the strains of violins. For those disinclined to identify with military puissance *per se*, less masculinist entries for identification were available – with the "multicultural" army on the ground, with women taking military roles, with the advance for Blacks represented by the leadership of Colin Powell, with the homeside families concerned about their loved ones.

In the Gulf war as western, Iraqi conscripts played the role of the Indians. The western's imagery of encirclement entails not only a particular perspective of siege but also the inflation of the external threat. Thus the Iraqi army, a largely conscript force with mediocre weaponry, unable to conquer Iran much less the assembled might of the world's most powerful armies, was promoted to the "fourth army in the world." When diverse pragmatic rationales for the war (oil, jobs, the American way of life) failed to catch fire with the electorate, the administration tapped into two interrelated cultural strains – idealistic exceptionalism and puritanical vindictiveness. On the one hand, the administration sounded lofty goals of regional peace and the New World Order; on the other, it demonized Hussein as "a man of evil standing against human life itself." Here Bush stood well within the tradition of what Michael Rogin calls "political demonology" – the creation of monsters through the "inflation, stigmatization, and dehumanization of political foes."⁷⁸ The "moderate" and "pragmatic" Hussein of earlier political rhetoric, ally of American policy and the darling of American, British, and German corporations, was transformed into a reincarnation of Hitler with the rapidity with which enemies for "Hate Week" were fabricated in Orwell's 1984. It was also within the logic of the Manichean allegory that Bush, invoking the venerable tradition of the righteous massacre, would ask for divine blessing for American armed forces in a National Day of Prayer, just as he thanked the pilots in the January 1992 bombings for "doing the Lord's work."⁷⁹ And since the Manichean allegory does not allow for two competing evils, or for lesser and greater evils, or for minor and major thugs, but only for good against evil, it also allows for only one legitimate outcome: the annihilation of evil in a ritual sacrifice or exorcism that "cleanses" the accumulated iniquity. "Allah creates," said one Gulf war ditty, "but we cremate."

While the media on the one hand forced a "dirty-handed" complicity with the war by positioning viewers among the soldiers – Ted Koppel placing us in the cockpit of a Saudi fighter, Diane Sawyer putting us inside a tank – they also symbolically cleansed those very same hands. The spectator was prompted to indulge infantile dreams of omnipotence, made to feel allied to immense destructive forces, but also to feel fundamentally pure and innocent. Any word or image implying that the American spectators or their tax dollars were somehow responsible for mass suffering would have destroyed the shaky edifice of non-culpability, an unflattering implication that might have hurt ratings. Despite its

lethal violence (estimates of over 150,000 dead, with an equal number dying later due to disease and malnutrition), the Gulf war was fought in the name of American victimization, in the tradition of the many wars in which reiterated claims of self-defense have masked overwhelming, disproportionate power.

In "Make My Day": Spectacle as Amnesia in Imperial Politics," Michael Rogin anatomizes the role of real and imaginary massacres in justifying military interventions. Citing Reagan's role-playing as Dirty Harry, Rogin recalls the context in which Clint Eastwood uses the phrase "make my day" in *Sudden Impact* (1983). In the scene, Eastwood is "daring a black man to murder a woman ... so that Dirty Harry can kill the black." In other words, "white men show how tough they are by resubordinating and sacrificing their race and gender others."⁸⁰ Running like a thread through North American history is the similar notion, recycled by countless westerns, that Indian "outrages" justified Euro-American massacres and appropriations. In 1622, in "A Declaration of the State of the Colonie and Affaires" in Virginia, Edward Waterhouse wrote with relief that "our hands which before were tied with gentleness and faire usage, are now set at liberty by the treacherous violence of the Savages [so that we may] invade the Country, and destroy them who sought to destroy us."⁸¹ Waterhouse's declaration anticipates what one might call the "make my day" syndrome, a desire for an outrage to justify even greater violence. The Gulf war reiterated the trope of "regeneration through violence" (in Slotkin's words), the process whereby the fictive "we" of national unity is reformed through salutary massacres. That President Bush had been figuratively in bed with the dictator Hussein merely betrays the binaristic splitting off of one's own impulses on to a phantasmic other that is so typical of colonialist thinking.

Our point is not that some national essence induces the American public into war – obviously antiwar protest and antimilitarism are equally part of American history – nor to suggest that Hussein is an innocent Third World victim, but rather to map the ways point-of-view conventions and a powerful media apparatus can be mobilized to shape public opinion for militaristic purposes. But these televisual tactics would not have "worked" so effectively had spectators not already been thoroughly "primed" by innumerable westerns, adventure films, and imperial epics.

The Gulf war revealed not only the continued reign of the imperial imaginary, but also the limitations of certain variants of postmodernism. Jean Baudrillard's account of the implosive collapse of boundaries in a mass-mediated global society, for example, is exhilaratingly apt in its rendering of the "feel" of life in the simulacral world of the postmodern, but his conceptions are ultimately inadequate for a phenomenon such as the Gulf war. In an article in the *Guardian* a few days before the outbreak of the war, Baudrillard treated the impending conflict as an impossibility, a figment of mass-media simulation techniques without real-world referents.⁸² And on March 29, 1991, shortly after the end of hostilities, playing with the Giraudoux title *La Guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu* (The Trojan War Will Not Take Place, 1934), Baudrillard declared in *Libération*

that "The Gulf War Has Not Taken Place."⁸³ On one level, there is no denying the descriptive canniness of Baudrillard's account. The representation of the most media-covered war in history did indeed seem to shift from classical realist representation to the brave new public-relations world of hyperreality. Not only was the war packaged as a spectatorial video-game, it also proliferated in simulacral strategies – computer simulations, fake bomb damage, fake missile silos, fake attacks, even fake heat to attract heat-seeking missiles. War on the electronic battlefield became a media experience *par excellence* even for its participants, demanding what Paul Virilio calls a "*dédoublement*" of observation – both an immediate perception and a media-inflected perception through video, radar, and computer simulation.⁸⁴

But if the Gulf war revealed the descriptive aptness of the Baudrillardian account of postmodernism, it also signaled that paradigm's political vacuousness; its disempowering combination of extreme cognitive skepticism and political quietism. For what the Gulf war revealed were fundamental asymmetries in how the depthless surfaces of postmodernity are lived; asymmetries not only between the experience of television and the experience of war, but also between the experiences of the combatants and the spectators engaged on different sides of the war. Some groups watched the war from an antiseptic distance, while others lived it in the company of death, dismemberment, disease, and famine. Technology facilitated seeing and hearing on the one side, and obliterated it on the other. While Americans, as Jonathon Schell puts it, waged war in "three dimensions," the foe was trapped, "like the creatures in certain geometrical games, in two dimensions . . . we kill and they die, as if a race of gods were making war against a race of human beings."⁸⁵

If postmodernism has spread the telematic feel of First World media around the world, in sum, it has hardly deconstructed the relations of power that marginalize, devalue, and time and time again massacre otherized peoples and cultures.⁸⁶ Baudrillard's radically ahistorical account misses the fact that time is palimpsestic; we live in many times, not just in the "new" time of advertising and the media. In the case of the Gulf war, the most sophisticated technology was used in the service of ideas drawn from millennial sources, from Christian Crusades against Muslims to "savage wars" against Indians. With the Gulf war, the fact of mass death itself, the radical discontinuity between the living and the dead, reveals the limitations of a world seen only through the prism of the simulacrum.

NOTES

- 1 See Jan Pieterse's chapter on "Colonialism and Popular Culture" in his *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1992); p. 77.
- 2 Robert Baden-Powell, *Scouting for Boys*, quoted in Joseph Bristow, *Empire Boys: Adventures in a Man's World* (London: HarperCollins, 1991), p. 170.
- 3 Bristow, *Empire Boys*, p. 19.
- 4 Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism 1830–1914*

- (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 11.
- 5 See John McClure, *Late Imperial Romance: Literature and Globalization from Conrad to Pynchon* (London: Verso, 1994).
- 6 Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. 58.
- 7 Etienne Balibar writes: "The histories of nations are presented to us in the form of a narrative which attributes to these entities the continuity of a subject." See Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 86.
- 8 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (New York: Verso, 1983), pp. 41–6.
- 9 For more on the extrapolation of Bakhtin's notion of the chronotope, see Robert Stam, *Subversive Pleasures: Bakhtin, Cultural Criticism, and Film* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989); Kobena Mercer, "Diaspora Culture and the Dialogic Imagination," in Mbye Cham and Claire Andrade-Watkins, eds, *Blackframes* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 1988); and Paul Willemen, "The Third Cinema Question: Notes and Reflections," in Jim Pines and Paul Willemen, eds, *Questions of Third Cinema* (London: BFI, 1989).
- 10 Movie theaters in the colonized world were at first built only in urban centers such as Cairo, Baghdad, Bombay. For early responses to the cinema in Baghdad, Ella Shohat has conducted a series of interviews with old Baghdadis from her own community, now dispersed in Israel/Palestine, England, and the US.
- 11 Christian Metz, "The Imaginary Signifier," in *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), p. 51.
- 12 For more on the "mobilized gaze" of the cinema, see Anne Friedberg's discussion in *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).
- 13 The photographs discussed in this section can be found in Maria Hambourg, Pierre Apraxine, Malcolm Daniel, Jeff L. Rosenheim, and Virginia Heckert, *The Waking Dream: Photography's First Century*, Selections from the Gilman Paper Company Collection (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1993).
- 14 For critical studies of anthropological discourse see for example, Talal Asad, ed., *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1973); James Clifford and George Marcus, eds, *Writing Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988); Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989); Edward Said, "Representing the Colonized: Anthropology's Interlocutors," *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 15, No. 2, pp. 205–25.
- 15 Jean Rouch in his critique of ethnographic filmmaking suggested that anthropologists should not observe their subject as if it were an insect but rather as if it were a "stimulant for mutual understanding." See "Camera and Man" in Mick Eaton, ed., *Anthropology-Reality-Cinema*, (London: BFI, 1979), p. 62. Ousmane Sembene, ironically, accused Rouch himself of filming Africans "comme des insectes." See special issue on Rouch, *Cinemaction*, No. 17 (1982).
- 16 For more on the question of science and spectacle, see Ella Shohat, "Imaging Terra Incognita: The Disciplinary Gaze of Empire," *Public Culture*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (Spring 1990), pp. 41–70.
- 17 Etienne-Jules Marey, a French physiologist interested in animal locomotion and in wildlife photography, called his 1882 camera a "fusil cinématographique," because of its gunlike apparatus, which made twelve rapid exposures on a circular glass plate that revolved like a bullet cylinder. The same notion was later trained against the colonial powers themselves in the Third Cinema notion of the "camera gun" and "guerilla cinema."

- 18 Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 52.
- 19 Egyptians at an orientalist exposition were amazed to discover that the Egyptian pastries on sale were authentic. See Tim Mitchell, *Colonizing Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), p. 10.
- 20 Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 236.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 See Pieterse, *White on Black*. On colonial safari as a kind of traveling mini-society see Donna Haraway, "Teddy Bear Patriarch: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York City, 1908-1936," *Social Text*, 11 (Winter 1984-5).
- 23 See Phillips Verner Bradford and Harvey Blume, *Ota Benga: The Pygmy in the Zoo* (New York: St Martins Press, 1992).
- 24 The African name of the "Hottentot Venus" remains unknown, since it was never referred to by those who "studied" her.
- 25 For further discussion on science and the racial/sexual body, see Sander Gilman, "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature," *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Autumn 1985); and in conjunction with early cinema, see Fatimah Tobing Rony, "Those Who Squat and Those Who Sit: The Iconography of Race in the 1859 Films of Félix-Louis Regnault," *Camera Obscura* No. 28, 1992 (a special issue on "Imaging Technologies, Inscribing Science," ed. Paula A. Treichler and Lisa Cartwright).
- 26 "Flower and Murie on the Dissection of a Bushwoman," *Anthropological Review*, No. 5 (July 1867), p. 268.
- 27 Richard Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 272.
- 28 Stephen Jay Gould, *The Flamingo's Smile* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1985), p. 292. On a recent visit to the Musée de l'Homme, we found no traces of the Hottentot Venus; neither the official catalog, nor officials themselves, acknowledged her existence.
- 29 Mitchell, *Colonizing Egypt*, p. 13.
- 30 The lure of the breast found its way even to the cover of a book on ethnographic cinema, Karl Heider's *Ethnographic Film* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1976), which features a cartoon of a "native" woman breast-feeding. Trinh T. Minh-ha's *Reassemblage* (1982), meanwhile, reflexively interrogates the focus on breasts in ethnographic cinema. The I-Max big-screen presentation *Secrets of the [Grand] Canyon* also reproduces the paradigm of Native American nudity/Euro-American dress.
- 31 Interestingly, Méliès' early fascination with spectacle dates back to his visits to the Egyptian Hall shows directed by Maskelyne and Cooke and devoted to fantastic spectacles.
- 32 For an analysis of the cinematic treatments of North Africa and the Arab world (especially in French films), see Pierre Boulanger, *Le Cinéma Colonial* (Paris: Seghers, 1975); Abdelghani Megherbi, *Les Algériens au Miroir du Cinéma Colonial* (Algiers: Editions SNED, 1982; and also the section on "Arabian Nights and Colonial Dreams," in Richard Abel, *French Cinema: The First Wave 1915-1929* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984).
- 33 For a survey of the British imperial films see Jeffrey Richards, *Visions of Yesterday* (London: Kegan and Paul, 1973).
- 34 From "Trinidad Government Principles of Censorship Applied to Cinematographic Films," internal circular in 1929, quoted in Ruth Vasey, "Foreign Parts: Hollywood's Global Distribution and the Representation of Ethnicity," *American Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 4 (December 1992).

- 35 Memo to United Artists, March 8, 1928, from the MPPDA (Motion Picture Producers and Directors of America, Inc) Archive, quoted in Vasey, "Foreign Parts."
- 36 A 1928 Resumé from the MPPDA Archive, cited by Vasey, "Foreign Parts."
- 37 Hala Salmane, Simon Hartog, and David Wilson, eds, *Algerian Cinema* (London: BFI, 1976). See also Ella Shohat, "Egypt: Cinema and Revolution," *Critical Arts*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (1983).
- 38 See Abel, *French Cinema*, p. 151.
- 39 See Jeffrey Richards, "Boys Own Empire," in John M. Mackenzie, ed., *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986.)
- 40 ABC's *A Line in the Sand* was broadcast on January 14, 1991, a day before the US "deadline" for Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait.
- 41 The statistical figure is from Edward Buscombe, ed., *The BFI Companion to the Western* (New York: DaCapo, 1988), p. 35.
- 42 See Ward Churchill, *Fantasies of the Master Race: Literature, Cinema and the Colonization of American Indians*, ed. M. Annette Jaimes (Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, 1992), p. 232.
- 43 Cited in Ralph Friar and Natasha Friar, *The Only Good Indian: The Hollywood Gospel* (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1972), p. 188.
- 44 See Churchill, *Fantasies of the Master Race*, p. 232.
- 45 "There's a hell of a part here for you," Raul Walsh would tell prospective actors, "you get to kill eight Indians." Raul Walsh interviewed by Richard Schikel in *Harper's* (October 1970).
- 46 Thomas Farnham, *Travels in the Great Western Prairies* [1843], in Thwaites, ed., *Early Western Travels*, Vol. XXVIII, pp. 123-4, quoted in Roy Harvey Pearce, *Savagism and Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988) p. 65.
- 47 In a pro-indigenous documentary entitled *To Protect Mother Earth* (1987), Native American women repeatedly lament what they call "the rape of Mother Earth."
- 48 Quoted in Noam Chomsky, *Year 501: The Conquest Continues* (Boston: South End Press, 1993), p. 232.
- 49 On Indian names, see Jack Weatherford, *Native Roots: How the Indians Enriched America* (New York: Ballantine, 1991). On Native American names in New York City, see Robert Steven Grumet, *Native American Place Names in New York City* (New York: Museum of the City of New York, 1981).
- 50 Passage from Henry Blackman Sell and Victor Weybright's *Buffalo Bill and the Wild West*, cited in Friar and Friar, *The Only Good Indian*, p. 74.
- 51 See Thomas Schatz, *Hollywood Genres* (New York: Random House, 1981).
- 52 Tom Engelhardt, "Ambush at Kamikaze Pass," in *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Winter-Spring 1971).
- 53 Ibid.
- 54 See Richard Drinnon, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire-Building* (New York: Schocken, 1980).
- 55 See Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Atheneum, 1992), p. 110.
- 56 Drinnon, *Facing West*, p. 221.
- 57 Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 314.
- 58 See Francis Fitzgerald, *Fire in the Lake: The Vietnamese and the Americans in Vietnam* (New York: Vintage, 1973), pp. 491-2.
- 59 See Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, p. 3.
- 60 Drinnon, *Facing West*, p. 404.
- 61 On imperialism in Disney, see Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart, *How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic* (New York: International General, 1975); Julianne Burton, "Don (Juanito) Duck and the Imperial-Patriarchal

- Unconscious: Disney Studios, the Good Neighbor Policy, and the Packaging of Latin America," in Andrew Parker, Mary Russo, Doris Sommer, and Patricia Yaeger, eds, *Nationalisms and Sexualities* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Eric Smoodin, *Animating Culture: Hollywood Cartoons from the Sound Era* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993).
- 62 Paul Sellors, "Selling Paranoia: *Gilligan's Island* and the Television Medium," unpublished paper.
 - 63 The Arab League protested the film for this very reason. See *New York Times* (April 29, 1985), p. C13.
 - 64 Salman Rushdie, "Outside the Whale," in *Imaginary Homelands* (London: Penguin, 1992).
 - 65 The words are John McClure's, from *Late Imperial Romance* (London: Verso, 1994).
 - 66 Our discussion here is indebted to Harel Calderon's unpublished paper, "I'm Goin' Home to Missouri, Where They Never Feed You Snakes before Ripping Your Heart out," written for a course in Third World cinema at New York University.
 - 67 Ironically, General H. Norman Schwarzkopf himself speaks of this intertext in his recently published memoirs, where he complains of the pressure of the "hawks":

These were guys who had seen John Wayne in *The Green Berets*, they'd seen *Rambo*, they'd seen *Patton*, and it was very easy for them to pound their desks and say: "By God, we've got to go in there . . . gotta punish that son of a bitch!" Of course, none of them was going to get shot at.

Quoted in *New York Times* (Sept. 20, 1992), p. 10.
 - 68 The recurrent trope of the war being "on schedule" was as much narratological as military. January 15 was set as the date for war, as Serge Daney pointed out, much as a date is set for the opening of a Hollywood blockbuster. See Serge Daney, "Mais que fait la Police," *Libération* (Feb. 15, 1991), p. 16.
 - 69 Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledge: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," included in Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 188.
 - 70 We focus here on the mechanisms of promoting identification; we do not suggest that these mechanisms were experienced in identical ways by, for example, Baghdadis or New Yorkers, Kuwaitis or Israelis, Christians or Muslims, leftists or rightists. Although the experience of war is mediated, there are differences within spectatorship. These spectatorial differences will be the subject of our last chapter.
 - 71 See Robert Stam, "Television News and Its Spectator," in Ann Kaplan, ed., *Regarding Television* (Fredricksburg, Md.: AFI, 1983).
 - 72 See Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception* (London: Verso, 1989).
 - 73 For Metz on "secondary identification," see *The Imaginary Signifier*.
 - 74 Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, p. 12.
 - 75 Ibid.
 - 76 The media also painted Hussein in the colors of orientalist fantasies of sexual perversity and excess. Entertainment magazines and television shows luxuriated in voyeuristic projections about Hussein's putative sexual perversions, including still photos of his bunker bedroom, his harem, and stories about his presumed penchant for killing his lovers, especially those who could testify to his failures in bed. The cover of a *National Examiner* (March 12, 1991) carried the headline "Saddam Hussein's Bizarre Sex Life: A Recent CIA Report Reveals," with a photomontage of Hussein as a crossdresser in a mini skirt. Geraldo's talk show (March 4, 1991) featured a series of so-called experts' titillating descriptions of torture, all delivered up to an insatiably repelled audience. Close-ups emphasized the responses of good

- Americans shocked by this cruel dark-skinned leader, compared to Idi Amin, Qaddafi, Noriega, Hitler, and Stalin. Hussein was frequently nicknamed the "Butcher from Baghdad" and "The Thief from Baghdad." See Ella Shohat, "The Media's War," *Social Text*, No. 28, Vol. IX, (1991).
- 77 Pilots reportedly watched porn videos before ejaculating their bombs over Iraq, thus turning pent-up sexual energy into military aggression, and recapitulating the transmutation of sex into violence that Leslie Fiedler, in *Love and Death in the American Novel*, discerned as characteristic of the American novel.
 - 78 Michael Rogin, *Ronald Reagan: The Movie* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p. xxi.
 - 79 See William Alberts, "Prayer as an Instrument of War," *Z* (April 1991).
 - 80 Michael Rogin, "'Make My Day': Spectacle as Amnesia in Imperial Politics," *Representations*, No. 29 (Winter 1990).
 - 81 Quoted in Pearce, *Savagism and Civilization*, p. 11.
 - 82 Jean Baudrillard, "The Reality Gulf," *Guardian* (Jan. 11, 1991).
 - 83 Jean Baudrillard, "La Guerre du Golfe n'a pas eu lieu," *Libération* (March 29, 1991).
 - 84 See Paul Virilio, "L'Acquisition d'Objectif," *Libération* (Jan. 30, 1991), p. 15.
 - 85 See Jonathon Schell, "Modern Might, Ancient Arrogance," *Newsday* (Feb. 12, 1991), p. 86.
 - 86 For more on the Gulf war, see Robert Stam, "Mobilizing Fictions: The Gulf War, the Media, and the Recruitment of the Spectator," *Public Culture*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (Spring 1992). This passage was written before the appearance of Christopher Norris' *Uncritical Theory: Postmodernism, Intellectuals, and the Gulf War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), which takes a parallel, although not identical, approach to the same topic. We are in full sympathy with Norris' critique of the "ideological complicity that exists between ... extreme anti-realist or irrationalist doctrine and the crisis of moral and political nerve among those whose voices should have been raised against the actions committed in their name" (p. 27).

The Possessive

Investment

in Whiteness

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CHAPTER 1

The Possessive Investment in Whiteness

Blacks are often confronted, in American life, with such devastating examples of the white descent from dignity; devastating not only because of the enormity of white pretensions, but because this swift and graceless descent would seem to indicate that white people have no principles whatever.

—JAMES BALDWIN

Shortly after World War II, a French reporter asked expatriate Richard Wright for his views about the “Negro problem” in America. The author replied, “There isn’t any Negro problem; there is only a white problem.”¹ By inverting the reporter’s question, Wright called attention to its hidden assumptions—that racial polarization comes from the existence of blacks rather than from the behavior of whites, that black people are a “problem” for whites rather than fellow citizens entitled to justice, and that, unless otherwise specified, “Americans” means “whites.”² But Wright’s formulation also placed political mobilization by African Americans during the civil rights era in context, connecting black disadvantages to white advantages and finding the roots of black consciousness in the systemic practices of aversion, exploitation, denigration, and discrimination practiced by people who think of themselves as “white.”

Whiteness is everywhere in U.S. culture, but it is very hard to see. As Richard Dyer suggests, “[W]hite power secures its dominance by seeming not to be anything in particular.”³ As the unmarked category against which difference is constructed, whiteness never has to speak its name, never has to acknowledge its role as an organizing principle in social and cultural relations.⁴ To identify, analyze, and oppose the destructive consequences of whiteness, we

need what Walter Benjamin called "presence of mind." Benjamin wrote that people visit fortune-tellers less out of a desire to know the future than out of a fear of not noticing some important aspect of the present. "Presence of mind," he suggested, "is an abstract of the future, and precise awareness of the present moment more decisive than foreknowledge of the most distant events."⁵ In U.S. society at this time, precise awareness of the present moment requires an understanding of the existence and the destructive consequences of the possessive investment in whiteness that surreptitiously shapes so much of our public and private lives."

Race is a cultural construct, but one with sinister structural causes and consequences. Conscious and deliberate actions have institutionalized group identity in the United States, not just through the dissemination of cultural stories, but also through systematic efforts from colonial times to the present to create economic advantages through a possessive investment in whiteness for European Americans. Studies of culture too far removed from studies of social structure leave us with inadequate explanations for understanding racism and inadequate remedies for combating it.

Desire for slave labor encouraged European settlers in North America to view, first, Native Americans and, later, African Americans as racially inferior people suited "by nature" for the humiliating subordination of involuntary servitude. The long history of the possessive investment in whiteness stems in no small measure from the fact that all subsequent immigrants to North America have come to an already racialized society. From the start, European settlers in North America established structures encouraging a possessive investment in whiteness. The colonial and early national legal systems authorized attacks on Native Americans and encouraged the appropriation of their lands. They legitimated racialized chattel slavery, limited naturalized citizenship to "white" immigrants, identified Asian immigrants as expressly unwelcome (through legislation aimed at immigrants from China in 1882, from India in 1917, from Japan in 1924, and from the Philippines in 1934), and provided pretexts for restricting the voting, exploiting the labor, and seizing the property of Asian Americans, Mexican Americans, Native Americans, and African Americans.⁶

The possessive investment in whiteness is not a simple matter of black and white; all racialized minority groups have suffered from it, albeit to different degrees and in different ways. The African slave trade began in earnest only after large-scale Native American slavery proved impractical in North America. The abolition of slavery led to the importation of low-wage labor from Asia. Legislation banning immigration from Asia set the stage for the recruitment of low-

wage labor from Mexico. The new racial categories that emerged in each of these eras all revolved around applying racial labels to “nonwhite” groups in order to stigmatize and exploit them while at the same time preserving the value of whiteness.

Although reproduced in new form in every era, the possessive investment in whiteness has always been influenced by its origins in the racialized history of the United States—by its legacy of slavery and segregation, of “Indian” extermination and immigrant restriction, of conquest and colonialism. Although slavery has existed in many countries without any particular racial dimensions to it, the slave system that emerged in North America soon took on distinctly racial forms. Africans enslaved in North America faced a racialized system of power that reserved permanent, hereditary, chattel slavery for black people. White settlers institutionalized a possessive investment in whiteness by making blackness synonymous with slavery and whiteness synonymous with freedom, but also by pitting people of color against one another. Fearful of alliances between Native Americans and African Americans that might challenge the prerogatives of whiteness, white settlers prohibited slaves and free blacks from traveling in “Indian country.” European Americans used diplomacy and force to compel Native Americans to return runaway slaves to their white masters. During the Stono Rebellion of 1739, colonial authorities offered Native Americans a bounty for every rebellious slave they captured or killed. At the same time, British settlers recruited black slaves to fight against Native Americans within colonial militias.⁷ The power of whiteness depended not only on white hegemony over separate racialized groups, but also on manipulating racial outsiders to fight against one another, to compete with each other for white approval, and to seek the rewards and privileges of whiteness for themselves at the expense of other racialized populations.

Aggrieved communities of color have often curried favor with whites in order to make gains at each other’s expense. For example, in the nineteenth century some Native Americans held black slaves (in part to prove to whites that they could adopt “civilized” European American ways), and some of the first chartered African American units in the U.S. army went to war against Comanches in Texas or served as security forces for wagon trains of white settlers on the trails to California. The defeat of the Comanches in the 1870s sparked a mass migration by Spanish-speaking residents of New Mexico into the areas of West Texas formerly occupied by the vanquished Native Americans.⁸ Immigrants from Asia sought the rewards of whiteness for themselves by asking the courts to recognize them as “white” and therefore eligible for naturalized citi-

zenship according to the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1790; Mexican Americans also insisted on being classified as white. In the early twentieth century, black soldiers accustomed to fighting Native Americans in the Southwest participated in the U.S. occupation of the Philippines and the punitive expedition against Pancho Villa in Mexico.⁹ Asian American managers cracked down on efforts by Mexican American farm workers to unionize, while the Pullman Company tried to break the African American Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters by importing Filipinos to work as porters. Mexican Americans and blacks took possession of some of the property confiscated from Japanese Americans during the internment of the 1940s, and Asian Americans, blacks, and Mexican Americans all secured advantages for themselves by cooperating with the exploitation of Native Americans.

Yet while all racialized minority groups have sometimes sought the rewards of whiteness, they have also been able to come together in interethnic antiracist alliances. Native American tribes often harbored runaway slaves and drew upon their expertise in combat against whites, as in 1711 when an African named Harry helped lead the Tuscaroras against the British.¹⁰ Native Americans secured the cooperation of black slaves in their attacks on the French settlement near Natchez in colonial Louisiana in 1729, and black Seminoles in Florida routinely recruited slaves from Georgia plantations to their side in battles against European Americans.¹¹ African Americans resisting slavery and white supremacy in the United States during the nineteenth century sometimes looked to Mexico as a refuge (especially after that nation abolished slavery), and in the twentieth century the rise of Japan as a successful non-white world power often served as a source of inspiration and emulation among African American nationalists. Mexican American and Japanese American farm workers joined forces in Oxnard, California, in 1903 to wage a successful strike in the beet fields, and subsequently members of the two groups organized an interracial union, the Japanese Mexican Labor Association.¹² Yet whether characterized by conflict or cooperation, all relations among aggrieved racialized minorities stemmed from recognition of the rewards of whiteness and the concomitant penalties imposed upon "nonwhite" populations.

Yet today the possessive investment is not simply the residue of conquest and colonialism, of slavery and segregation, of immigrant exclusion and "Indian" extermination. Contemporary whiteness and its rewards have been created and recreated by policies adopted long after the emancipation of slaves in the 1860s and even after the outlawing of *de jure* segregation in the 1960s. There has always been racism in the United States, but it has not always been the same

racism. Political and cultural struggles over power have shaped the contours and dimensions of racism differently in different eras. Antiracist mobilizations during the Civil War and civil rights eras meaningfully curtailed the reach and scope of white supremacy, but in each case reactionary forces engineered a renewal of racism, albeit in new forms, during succeeding decades. Racism has changed over time, taking on different forms and serving different social purposes in each time period.

Contemporary racism has been created anew in many ways over the past five decades, but most dramatically by the putatively race-neutral, liberal, social democratic reforms of the New Deal Era and by the more overtly race-conscious neoconservative reactions against liberalism since the Nixon years. It is a mistake to posit a gradual and inevitable trajectory of evolutionary progress in race relations; on the contrary, our history shows that battles won at one moment can later be lost. Despite hard-fought battles for change that secured important concessions during the 1960s in the form of civil rights legislation, the racialized nature of social policy in the United States since the Great Depression has actually increased the possessive investment in whiteness among European Americans over the past half century.

During the New Deal Era of the 1930s and 1940s, both the Wagner Act and the Social Security Act excluded farm workers and domestics from coverage, effectively denying those disproportionately minority sectors of the work force protections and benefits routinely afforded whites. The Federal Housing Act of 1934 brought home ownership within reach of millions of citizens by placing the credit of the federal government behind private lending to home buyers, but overtly racist categories in the Federal Housing Agency's (FHA) "confidential" city surveys and appraisers' manuals channeled almost all of the loan money toward whites and away from communities of color.¹³ In the post-World War II era, trade unions negotiated contract provisions giving private medical insurance, pensions, and job security largely to the white workers who formed the overwhelming majority of the unionized work force in mass production industries, rather than fighting for full employment, medical care, and old-age pensions for all, or even for an end to discriminatory hiring and promotion practices by employers in those industries.¹⁴

Each of these policies widened the gap between the resources available to whites and those available to aggrieved racial communities. Federal housing policy offers an important illustration of the broader principles at work in the possessive investment in whiteness. By channeling loans away from older inner-city neighborhoods and toward white home buyers moving into segregated

suburbs, the FHA and private lenders after World War II aided and abetted segregation in U.S. residential neighborhoods. FHA appraisers denied federally supported loans to prospective home buyers in the racially mixed Boyle Heights neighborhood of Los Angeles in 1939, for example, because the area struck them as a “‘melting pot’ area literally honeycombed with diverse and subversive racial elements.”¹⁵ Similarly, mostly white St. Louis County secured five times as many FHA mortgages as the more racially mixed city of St. Louis between 1943 and 1960. Home buyers in the county received six times as much loan money and enjoyed per capita mortgage spending 6.3 times greater than those in the city.¹⁶

The federal government has played a major role in augmenting the possessive investment in whiteness. For years, the General Services Administration routinely channeled the government’s own rental and leasing business to realtors who engaged in racial discrimination, while federally subsidized urban renewal plans reduced the already limited supply of housing for communities of color through “slum clearance” programs. In concert with FHA support for segregation in the suburbs, federal and state tax monies routinely funded the construction of water supplies and sewage facilities for racially exclusive suburban communities in the 1940s and 1950s. By the 1960s, these areas often incorporated themselves as independent municipalities in order to gain greater access to federal funds allocated for “urban aid.”¹⁷

At the same time that FHA loans and federal highway building projects subsidized the growth of segregated suburbs, urban renewal programs in cities throughout the country devastated minority neighborhoods. During the 1950s and 1960s, federally assisted urban renewal projects destroyed 20 percent of the central-city housing units occupied by blacks, as opposed to only 10 percent of those inhabited by whites.¹⁸ More than 60 percent of those displaced by urban renewal were African Americans, Puerto Ricans, Mexican Americans, or members of other minority racial groups.¹⁹ The Federal Housing Administration and the Veterans Administration financed more than \$120 billion worth of new housing between 1934 and 1962; but less than 2 percent of this real estate was available to nonwhite families—and most of that small amount was located in segregated areas.²⁰

Even in the 1970s, after most major urban renewal programs had been completed, black central-city residents continued to lose housing units at a rate equal to 80 percent of what had been lost in the 1960s. Yet white displacement declined to the relatively low levels of the 1950s.²¹ In addition, the refusal first to pass, then to enforce, fair housing laws has enabled realtors, buyers, and sell-

ers to profit from racist collusion against minorities largely without fear of legal retribution. During the decades following World War II, urban renewal helped construct a new "white" identity in the suburbs by helping to destroy ethnically specific European American urban inner-city neighborhoods. Wrecking balls and bulldozers eliminated some of these sites, while others were transformed by an influx of minority residents desperately competing for a declining supply of affordable housing units. As increasing numbers of racial minorities moved into cities, increasing numbers of European American ethnics moved out. Consequently, ethnic differences among whites became a less important dividing line in U.S. culture, while race became more important. The suburbs helped turn Euro-Americans into "whites" who could live near each other and intermarry with relatively little difficulty. But this "white" unity rested on residential segregation, on shared access to housing and life chances largely unavailable to communities of color.²²

During the 1950s and 1960s, local "pro-growth" coalitions led by liberal mayors often justified urban renewal as a program designed to build more housing for poor people, but it actually destroyed more housing than it created. Ninety percent of the low-income units removed for urban renewal during the entire history of the program were never replaced. Commercial, industrial, and municipal projects occupied more than 80 percent of the land cleared for these projects, with less than 20 percent allocated for replacement housing. In addition, the loss of taxable properties and the tax abatements granted to new enterprises in urban renewal zones often meant serious tax increases for poor, working-class, and middle-class home owners and renters.²³ Although the percentage of black suburban dwellers also increased during this period, no significant desegregation of the suburbs took place. From 1960 to 1977, 4 million whites moved out of central cities, while the number of whites living in suburbs increased by 22 million; during the same years, the inner-city black population grew by 6 million, but the number of blacks living in suburbs increased by only 500,000.²⁴ By 1993, 86 percent of suburban whites still lived in places with a black population below 1 percent. At the same time, cities with large numbers of minority residents found themselves cut off from loans by the FHA. For example, because of their growing black and Puerto Rican populations, neither Camden nor Paterson, New Jersey, in 1966 received one FHA-sponsored mortgage.²⁵

In 1968, lobbyists for the banking industry helped draft the Housing and Urban Development Act, which allowed private lenders to shift the risks of financing low-income housing to the government, creating a lucrative and thor-

oughly unregulated market for themselves. One section of the 1968 bill authorized FHA mortgages for inner-city areas that did not meet the usual eligibility criteria, and another section subsidized interest payments by low-income families. If administered wisely, these provisions might have promoted fair housing goals, but FHA administrators deployed them in ways that actually promoted segregation in order to provide banks, brokers, lenders, developers, realtors, and speculators with windfall profits. As a U.S. Commission on Civil Rights investigation later revealed, FHA officials collaborated with blockbusters in financing the flight of low income whites out of inner city neighborhoods, and then aided unscrupulous realtors and speculators by arranging purchases of substandard housing by minorities desperate to own their own homes. The resulting sales and mortgage foreclosures brought great profits to lenders (almost all of them white), but their actions led to price fixing and a subsequent inflation of housing costs in the inner city by more than 200 percent between 1968 and 1972. Bankers then foreclosed on the mortgages of thousands of these uninspected and substandard homes, ruining many inner-city neighborhoods. In response, the Department of Housing and Urban Development essentially red-lined inner cities, making them ineligible for future loans, a decision that destroyed the value of inner-city housing for generations to come.²⁶

Federally funded highways designed to connect suburban commuters with downtown places of employment also destroyed already scarce housing in minority communities and often disrupted neighborhood life as well. Construction of the Harbor Freeway in Los Angeles, the Gulf Freeway in Houston, and the Mark Twain Freeway in St. Louis displaced thousands of residents and bisected neighborhoods, shopping districts, and political precincts. The processes of urban renewal and highway construction set in motion a vicious cycle: population loss led to decreased political power, which made minority neighborhoods more vulnerable to further urban renewal and freeway construction, not to mention more susceptible to the placement of prisons, incinerators, toxic waste dumps, and other projects that further depopulated these areas.

In Houston, Texas—where blacks make up slightly more than one quarter of the local population—more than 75 percent of municipal garbage incinerators and 100 percent of the city-owned garbage dumps are located in black neighborhoods.²⁷ A 1992 study by staff writers for the *National Law Journal* examined the Environmental Protection Agency's response to 1,177 toxic waste cases and found that polluters of sites near the greatest white population received penalties 500 percent higher than penalties imposed on polluters in minority areas—an average of \$335,566 for white areas contrasted with \$55,318

for minority areas. Income did not account for these differences—penalties for low-income areas on average actually exceeded those for areas with the highest median incomes by about 3 percent. The penalties for violating all federal environmental laws regulating air, water, and waste pollution were 46 percent lower in minority communities than in white communities. In addition, superfund remedies left minority communities waiting longer than white communities to be placed on the national priority list, cleanups that began from 12 to 42 percent later than at white sites, and with a 7 percent greater likelihood of “containment” (walling off a hazardous site) than cleanup, while white sites experienced treatment and cleanup 22 percent more often than containment.²⁸

The federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry’s 1988 survey of children suffering from lead poisoning showed that among families with incomes under \$6,000 per year, 36 percent of white children but 68 percent of black children suffered from excess lead in their bloodstreams. Among families with incomes above \$15,000 per year, only 12 percent of white children but 38 percent of black children suffered from toxic levels of lead.²⁹ In the Los Angeles area, only 34 percent of whites inhabit areas with the most polluted air, but 71 percent of African Americans and 50 percent of Latinos live in neighborhoods with the highest levels of air pollution.³⁰ Nationwide, 60 percent of African Americans and Latinos live in communities with uncontrolled toxic waste sites.³¹

Scholarly studies reveal that even when adjusted for income, education, and occupational status, aggrieved racial minorities encounter higher levels of exposure to toxic substances than white people experience.³² In 1987, the Commission for Racial Justice of the United Church of Christ found race to be the most significant variable in determining the location of commercial hazardous waste facilities.³³ In a review of sixty-four studies examining environmental disparities, the National Wildlife Federation found that racial disparities outnumbered disparities by income, and in cases where disparities in race and income were both present, race proved to be more important in twenty-two out of thirty tests.³⁴ As Robert D. Bullard demonstrates, “race has been found to be an independent factor, not reducible to class” in predicting exposure to a broad range of environmental hazards, including polluted air, contaminated fish, lead poisoning, municipal landfills, incinerators, and toxic waste dumps.³⁵ The combination of exposure to environmental hazards and employment discrimination establishes a sinister correlation between race and health. One recent government study revealed that the likelihood of dying from nutritional deficiencies was two and a half times greater among African Americans than among European Ameri-

cans.³⁶ Another demonstrated that Asian and Pacific Islander recipients of aid for at-risk families exhibited alarming rates of stunted growth and underweight among children under the age of five.³⁷ Corporations systematically target Native American reservations when looking for locations for hazardous waste incinerators, solid waste landfills, and nuclear waste storage facilities; Navajo teenagers develop reproductive organ cancer at seventeen times the national average because of their exposure to radiation from uranium mines.”³⁸ Latinos in East Los Angeles encounter some of the worst smog and the highest concentrations of air toxins in southern California because of prevailing wind patterns and the concentration of polluting industries, freeways, and toxic waste dumps.³⁹ Environmental racism makes the possessive investment in whiteness literally a matter of life and death; if African Americans had access to the nutrition, wealth, health care, and protection against environmental hazards offered routinely to whites, seventy-five thousand fewer of them would die each year.⁴⁰

Minorities are less likely than whites to receive preventive medical care or costly operations from Medicare. Eligible members of minority communities are also less likely than European Americans to apply for food stamps.⁴¹ The labor of migrant farm workers from aggrieved racialized groups plays a vital role in providing adequate nutrition for others, but the farm workers and their children suffer disproportionately from health disorders caused by malnutrition.⁴² In her important research on health policy and ethnic diversity, Linda Wray concludes that “the lower life expectancies for many ethnic minority groups and subgroups stem largely from their disproportionately higher rates of poverty, malnutrition, and poor health care.”⁴³

Just as residential segregation and urban renewal make minority communities disproportionately susceptible to health hazards, their physical and social location gives these communities a different relationship to the criminal justice system. A 1990 study by the National Institute on Drug abuse revealed that while only 15 percent of the thirteen million habitual drug users in the United States were black and 77 percent were white, African Americans were four times more likely to be arrested on drug charges than whites in the nation as a whole, and seven to nine times more likely in Pennsylvania, Michigan, Illinois, Florida, Massachusetts, and New Jersey. A 1989 study by the Parents’ Resource Institute for Drug Education discovered that African American high school students consistently showed lower levels of drug and alcohol use than their European American counterparts, even in high schools populated by residents of low-income housing projects. Yet, while comprising about 12 percent of the U.S. population, blacks accounted for 10 percent of drug arrests in 1984, 40 percent in

1988, and 42 percent in 1990. In addition, white drug defendants receive considerably shorter average prison terms than African Americans convicted of comparable crimes. A U.S. Sentencing Commission study found in 1992 that half of the federal court districts that handled cases involving crack cocaine prosecuted minority defendants *exclusively*. A *Los Angeles Times* article in 1995 revealed that "black and Latino crack dealers are hammered with 10-year mandatory federal sentences while whites prosecuted in state court face a minimum of five years and often receive no more than a year in jail." Alexander Lichtenstein and Michael A. Kroll point out that sentences for African Americans in the federal prison system are 20 percent longer than those given to whites who commit the same crimes. They observe that if blacks received the same sentences as whites for these offenses, the federal prison system would require three thousand fewer prison cells, enough to close completely six of the new five-hundred bed institutions.⁴⁴

Racial animus on the part of police officers, prosecutors, and judges accounts for only a small portion of the distinctive experience that racial minorities have with the criminal justice system. Economic devastation makes the drug trade appealing to some people in the inner city, while the dearth of capital in minority neighborhoods curtails opportunities for other kinds of employment. Deindustrialization, unemployment, and lack of intergenerational transfers of wealth undermine parental and adult authority in many neighborhoods. The complex factors that cause people to turn to drugs are no more prevalent in minority communities than elsewhere, but these communities and their inhabitants face more stress while having fewer opportunities to receive private counseling and treatment for their problems.

The structural weaknesses of minority neighborhoods caused by discrimination in housing, education, and hiring also play a crucial role in relations between inner-city residents and the criminal justice system. Cocaine dealing, which initially skyrocketed among white suburban residents, was driven into the inner city by escalating enforcement pressures in wealthy white communities. Ghettos and barrios became distribution centers for the sale of drugs to white suburbanites. Former New York and Houston police commissioner Lee Brown, head of the federal government's antidrug efforts during the early years of the Clinton presidency and later mayor of Houston, noted, "There are those who bring drugs into the country. That's not the black community. Then you have wholesalers, those who distribute them once they get here, and as a rule that's not the black community. Where you find the blacks is in the street dealing."⁴⁵

You also find blacks and other minorities in prison. Police officers in large

cities, pressured to show results in the drive against drugs, lack the resources to effectively enforce the law everywhere (in part because of the social costs of deindustrialization and the tax limitation initiatives designed to shrink the size of government). These officers know that it is easier to make arrests and to secure convictions by confronting drug users in areas that have conspicuous street corner sales, that have more people out on the street with no place to go, and that have residents more likely to plead guilty and less likely to secure the services of attorneys who can get the charges against them dropped, reduced, or wiped off the books with subsequent successful counseling and rehabilitation. In addition, politicians supported by the public relations efforts of neo-conservative foundations often portray themselves to suburban voters as opponents of the "dangerous classes" in the inner cities.

Minority disadvantages craft advantages for others. Urban renewal failed to provide new housing for the poor, but it played an important role in transforming the U.S. urban economy from one that relied on factory production to one driven by producer services. Urban renewal projects subsidized the development of downtown office centers on previously residential land, and they frequently created buffer zones of empty blocks dividing poor neighborhoods from new shopping centers designed for affluent commuters. To help cities compete for corporate investment by making them appealing to high-level executives, federal urban aid favored construction of luxury housing units and cultural centers like symphony halls and art museums over affordable housing for workers. Tax abatements granted to these producer services centers further aggravated the fiscal crisis that cities faced, leading to tax increases on existing industries, businesses, and residences.

Workers from aggrieved racial minorities bore the brunt of this transformation. Because the 1964 Civil Rights Act came so late, minority workers who received jobs because of it found themselves more vulnerable to seniority-based layoffs when businesses automated or transferred operations overseas. Although the act initially made real progress in reducing employment discrimination, lessened the gaps between rich and poor and between black and white workers, and helped bring minority poverty to its lowest level in history in 1973, that year's recession initiated a reversal of minority progress and a reassertion of white privilege.⁴⁶ In 1977, the U.S. Civil Rights Commission reported on the disproportionate impact of layoffs on minority workers. In cases where minority workers made up only 10 to 12 percent of the work force in their area, they accounted for from 60 to 70 percent of those laid off in 1974. The principle of seniority, a trade union triumph designed to protect workers from age dis-

crimination, in this case guaranteed that minority workers would suffer most from technological changes, because the legacy of past discrimination by their employers left them with less seniority than white workers.⁴⁷

When housing prices increased dramatically during the 1970s, white homeowners who had been able to take advantage of discriminatory FHA financing policies in the past realized increased equity in their homes, while those excluded from the housing market by earlier policies found themselves facing even higher costs of entry into the market in addition to the traditional obstacles presented by the discriminatory practices of sellers, realtors, and lenders. The contrast between European Americans and African Americans is instructive in this regard. Because whites have access to broader housing choices than blacks, whites pay 15 percent less than blacks for similar housing in the same neighborhood. White neighborhoods typically experience housing costs 25 percent lower than would be the case if the residents were black.⁴⁸

A recent Federal Reserve Bank of Boston study revealed that Boston bankers made 2.9 times as many mortgage loans per 1,000 housing units in neighborhoods inhabited by low-income whites than in neighborhoods populated by low-income blacks.⁴⁹ In addition, loan officers were far more likely to overlook flaws in the credit records of white applicants or to arrange creative financing for them than they were with black applicants.⁵⁰ A Los Angeles study found that loan officers more frequently used dividend income and underlying assets as criteria for judging black applicants than for whites.⁵¹ In Houston, the NCNB Bank of Texas disqualified 13 percent of middle-income white loan applicants but 36 percent of middle-income black applicants.⁵² Atlanta's home loan institutions gave five times as many home loans to whites as to blacks in the late 1980s. An analysis of sixteen Atlanta neighborhoods found that home buyers in white neighborhoods received conventional financing four times as often as those in black sections of the city.⁵³ Nationwide, financial institutions receive more money in deposits from black neighborhoods than they invest in them in the form of home mortgage loans, making home lending a vehicle for the transfer of capital away from black savers toward white investors.⁵⁴ In many locations, high-income blacks were denied loans more often than low-income whites.⁵⁵

When confronted with evidence of systematic racial bias in home lending, defenders of the possessive investment in whiteness argue that the disproportionate share of loan denials to members of minority groups stems not from discrimination, but from the low net worth of minority applicants, even those who have high incomes. This might seem a reasonable position, but net worth

is almost totally determined by past opportunities for asset accumulation, and therefore is the one figure most likely to reflect the history of discrimination. Minorities are told, in essence, "We can't give you a loan today because we've discriminated against members of your race so effectively in the past that you have not been able to accumulate any equity from housing and to pass it down through the generations."

Most white families have acquired their net worth from the appreciation of property that they secured under conditions of special privilege in a discriminatory housing market. In their prize-winning book *Black Wealth/White Wealth*, Melvin Oliver and Thomas Shapiro demonstrate how the history of housing discrimination makes white parents more able to borrow funds for their children's college education or to loan money to their children to enter the housing market. In addition, much discrimination in home lending is not based on considerations of net worth; it stems from decisions made by white banking officials based on their stereotypes about minority communities. The Federal Reserve Bank of Boston study showed that black and Latino mortgage applicants are 60 percent more likely to be turned down for loans than whites, even after controlling for employment, financial, and neighborhood characteristics.⁵⁶ Ellis Cose reports on a white bank official confronted with evidence at a board of directors' meeting that his bank denied loans to blacks who had credit histories and earnings equal to those of white applicants who received loans. The banker replied that the information indicated that the bank needed to do a better job of "affirmative action," but one of his colleagues pointed out that the problem had nothing to do with affirmative action—the bank was simply letting prejudice stand in the way of its own best interests by rejecting loans that should be approved.⁵⁷

Yet bankers also make money from the ways in which discrimination creates artificial scarcities in the market. Minorities have to pay more for housing because much of the market is off limits to them. Blockbusters profit from exploiting white fears and provoking them into panic selling. Minority home owners denied loans in mainstream banks often turn to exploitative lenders who make "low end" loans at enormously high interest rates. If they fail to pay back these loans, regular banks can acquire the property cheaply and charge someone else exorbitant interest for a loan on the same property.

Federal home loan policies have put the power of the federal government at the service of private discrimination. Urban renewal and highway construction programs have enhanced the possessive investment in whiteness directly through government initiatives. In addition, decisions about where to locate

federal jobs have also systematically subsidized whiteness. Federal civilian employment dropped by 41,419 in central cities between 1966 and 1973, but total federal employment in metropolitan areas grew by 26,558.⁵⁸ While one might naturally expect the location of government buildings that serve the public to follow population trends, the federal government's policy of locating offices and records centers in suburbs aggravated the flight of jobs to suburban locations less accessible to inner-city residents. Because racial discrimination in the private sector forces minority workers to seek government positions disproportionate to their numbers, these moves exact particular hardships on them. In addition, minorities who follow their jobs to the suburbs must generally allocate more for commuter costs, because housing discrimination makes it harder and more expensive for them than for whites to relocate.

The policies of neoconservatives in the Reagan and Bush administrations during the 1980s and 1990s greatly exacerbated the racialized aspects of more than fifty years of these social welfare policies. Regressive policies that cut federal aid to education and refused to challenge segregated education, housing, and hiring, as well as the cynical cultivation of an antiblack consensus through attacks on affirmative action and voting rights legislation clearly reinforced possessive investments in whiteness. In the U.S. economy, where 86 percent of available jobs do not appear in classified ads and where personal connections prove the most important factor in securing employment, attacks on affirmative action guarantee that whites will be rewarded for their historical advantage in the labor market rather than for their individual abilities or efforts.⁵⁹

Attacking the civil rights tradition serves many functions for neoconservatives. By mobilizing existing racisms and generating new ones, neoconservatives seek to discredit the egalitarian and democratic social movements of the post-World War II era and to connect the attacks by those movements on wealth, special privilege, and elite control over education and opportunity to despised and unworthy racial "others."

Attacks on the gains made by civil rights activism also act as a wedge to divide potentially progressive coalitions along racial lines, a strategy that attained its peak moment with the defection of "blue collar" trade unionists from the Democratic Party in the 1980s to become "Reagan Democrats." In addition to protecting centralized power and wealth and dividing its opponents, the neoracism of contemporary conservatism also functions as an important unifying symbol for a disparate and sometimes antagonistic coalition that includes Hamiltonian big-government conservatives as well as antistate libertarians, and that incorporates born-again Christians into an alliance with

“objectivist” free market thinkers who celebrate selfishness and view the love of gain as the engine of human progress. This coalition often has trouble agreeing on the things it favors, but it has no difficulty agreeing about the alleged bad behavior and inferior morality of minority individuals and communities. Most important, by generating an ever repeating cycle of “moral panics” about the family, crime, welfare, race, and terrorism, neoconservatives produce a perpetual state of anxiety that obscures the actual failures of conservatism as economic and social policy, while promoting demands for even more draconian measures of a similar nature for the future. The neoracism of contemporary conservatism plays a vital role in building a countersubversive consensus because it disguises the social disintegration brought about by neoconservatism itself as the fault of “inferior” social groups, and because it builds a sense of righteous indignation among its constituents that enables them to believe that the selfish and self-interested politics they pursue are actually part of a moral crusade.

Yet even seemingly race-neutral policies supported by both neoconservatives and liberals in the 1980s and 1990s have increased the absolute value of being white. In the 1980s, changes in federal tax laws decreased the value of wage income and increased the value of investment income—a move harmful to minorities, who suffer from a gap between their total wealth and that of whites even greater than the disparity between their income and white income. The failure to raise the minimum wage between 1981 and 1989 and the decline of more than one-third in the value of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) payments injured all poor people, but they exacted special on costs on nonwhites, who faced even more constructed markets for employment, housing, and education than poor whites.⁶⁰

Similarly, the “tax reforms” of the 1980s made the effective rate of taxation higher on investment in actual goods and services than on profits from speculative enterprises. This change encouraged the flight of capital from industrial production with its many employment opportunities toward investments that can be turned over quickly to allow the greatest possible tax write-offs. Government policies thus discouraged investments that might produce high-paying jobs and encouraged investors to strip companies of their assets to make rapid short-term profits. These policies hurt almost all workers, but they fell particularly heavily on minority workers, who because of employment discrimination in the retail and small business sectors were overrepresented in blue-collar industrial jobs.

On the other hand, while neoconservative tax policies created incentives for

employers to move their enterprises elsewhere, they created disincentives for home owners to move. Measures like California's Proposition 13 (passed in 1978) granting tax relief to property owners badly misallocate housing resources, because they make it financially unwise for the elderly to move out of large houses, further reducing the supply of housing available to young families. While one can well understand the necessity for protecting senior citizens on fixed incomes from tax increases that would make them lose their homes, the rewards and punishments provided by Proposition 13 are so extreme that they prevent the kinds of generational succession that have routinely opened up housing to young families in the past. This reduction works particular hardships on those who also face discrimination by sellers, realtors, and lending institutions.

Subsidies to the private sector by government agencies also tend to enhance the rewards of past discrimination. Throughout the country, tax increment financing for redevelopment programs offers tax-free and low-interest loans to developers whose projects use public services, often without having to pay taxes to local school boards or county governments. In St. Louis, for example, tax abatements for wealthy corporations deprive the city's schools (and their majority African American population) of \$17 million a year. Even if these redevelopment projects eventually succeed in increasing municipal revenues through sales and earnings taxes, their proceeds go to funds that pay for the increased services these developments demand (fire and police protection, roads, sewers, electricity, lighting, etc.) rather than to school funds, which are dependent upon property tax revenues.⁶¹ Nationwide, industrial development bonds resulted in a \$7.4 billion tax loss in 1983, which ordinary taxpayers had to make up through increased payroll taxes. Compared to white Americans, people of color, more likely to be poor or working class, suffer disproportionately from these changes as taxpayers, as workers, and as tenants. A study by the Citizens for Tax Justice found that wealthy Californians spend less than eleven cents in taxes for every dollar earned, while poor residents of the state pay fourteen cents out of every dollar in taxes. As groups overrepresented among the poor, minorities have been forced to subsidize the tax breaks given to the wealthy.⁶² While holding property tax assessments for businesses and some home owners to about half of their market value, California's Proposition 13 deprived cities and counties of \$13 billion a year in taxes. Businesses alone avoided \$3.3 billion to \$8.6 billion in taxes per year under this statute.⁶³

Because they are ignorant of even the recent history of the possessive in-

vestment in whiteness—generated by slavery and segregation, immigrant exclusion and Native American policy, conquest and colonialism, but augmented by liberal and conservative social policies as well—Americans produce largely cultural explanations for structural social problems. The increased possessive investment in whiteness generated by disinvestment in U.S. cities, factories, and schools since the 1970s disguises as *racial* problems the general social problems posed by deindustrialization, economic restructuring, and neoconservative attacks on the welfare state. It fuels a discourse that demonizes people of color for being victimized by these changes, while hiding the privileges of whiteness by attributing the economic advantages enjoyed by whites to their family values, faith in fatherhood, and foresight—rather than to the favoritism they enjoy through their possessive investment in whiteness.

The demonization of black families in public discourse since the 1970s is particularly instructive in this regard. During the 1970s, the share of low-income households headed by blacks increased by one-third, while black family income fell from 60 percent of white family income in 1971 to 58 percent in 1980. Even adjusting for unemployment and for African American disadvantages in life-cycle employment (more injuries, more frequently interrupted work histories, confinement to jobs most susceptible to layoffs), the wages of full-time year-round black workers fell from 77 percent of white workers' income to 73 percent by 1986. In 1986, white workers with high school diplomas earned \$3,000 per year more than African Americans with the same education.⁶⁴ Even when they had the same family structure as white workers, blacks found themselves more likely to be poor.

Recent economic gains by blacks brighten the picture somewhat, but the deindustrialization and economic restructuring of the 1970s and 1980s imposes yet another racial penalty on wage earners from minority communities, who suffered setbacks while members of other groups accumulated equity-producing assets. And even when some minority groups show improvement, others do not. In 1995, for example, every U.S. ethnic and racial group experienced an increase in income except the twenty-seven million Hispanics, who experienced a 5.1 percent drop in income during that year alone.⁶⁵

Forty-six percent of black workers between the ages of twenty and twenty-four held blue-collar jobs in 1976, but only 20 percent by 1984. Earnings by young black families that had reached 60 percent of white families' income in 1973, fell to 46 percent by 1986. Younger African American families experienced a 50 percent drop in real earnings between 1973 and 1986, with the de-

cline in black male wages particularly steep.⁶⁶ Many recent popular and scholarly studies have delineated the causes for black economic decline over the past two decades.⁶⁷ Deindustrialization has decimated the industrial infrastructure that formerly provided high wage jobs and chances for upward mobility to black workers. Neoconservative attacks on government spending for public housing, health, education, and transportation have deprived members of minority groups of needed services and opportunities for jobs in the public sector. A massive retreat at the highest levels of government from the responsibility to enforce antidiscrimination laws has sanctioned pervasive overt and covert racial discrimination by bankers, realtors, and employers.

Yet public opinion polls of white Americans reflect little recognition of these devastating changes. Seventy percent of whites in one poll said that African Americans "have the same opportunities to live a middle-class life as whites," and nearly three-fourths of white respondents to a 1989 poll believed that opportunities for blacks had improved under Reagan.⁶⁸ If such optimism about the opportunities available to African Americans does not demonstrate ignorance of the dire conditions facing black communities, it indicates that many whites believe that blacks suffer deservedly, because they do not take advantage of the opportunities offered them. In opinion polls, favorable assessments of black chances for success often accompanied extremely negative judgments about the abilities, work habits, and character of black people. A National Opinion Research Report in 1990 disclosed that more than 50 percent of U.S. whites viewed blacks as innately lazy and less intelligent and less patriotic than whites.⁶⁹ More than 60 percent said that they believed that blacks suffer from poor housing and employment opportunities because of their own lack of will power. Some 56.3 percent said that blacks preferred welfare to employment, while 44.6 percent contended that blacks tended toward laziness.⁷⁰ Even more important, research by Mary Edsall and Thomas Byrne Edsall indicates that many whites structure nearly all of their decisions about housing, education, and politics in response to their aversions to black people.⁷¹

The present political culture in this country gives broad sanction for viewing white supremacy and antiblack racism as forces from the past, as demons finally put to rest by the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act.⁷² Jurists, journalists, and politicians have generally been more vocal in opposing what they call "quotas" and "reverse discrimination"—by which they usually mean race-specific measures, designed to remedy existing racial discrimination, that inconvenience or offend whites—than in challenging the thousands of well-documented cases every year of routine, systematic,

and unyielding discrimination against minorities. It is my contention that the stark contrast between nonwhite experiences and white opinions during the past two decades cannot be attributed solely to individual ignorance or intolerance, but stems instead from liberal individualism's inability to describe adequately the collective dimensions of our experience.⁷³ As long as we define social life as the sum total of conscious and deliberative individual activities, we will be able to discern as racist only *individual* manifestations of personal prejudice and hostility. Systemic, collective, and coordinated group behavior consequently drops out of sight. Collective exercises of power that relentlessly channel rewards, resources, and opportunities from one group to another will not appear "racist" from this perspective, because they rarely announce their intention to discriminate against individuals. Yet they nonetheless give racial identities their sinister social meaning by giving people from different races vastly different life chances.

The gap between white perception and minority experience can have explosive consequences. Little more than a year after the 1992 Los Angeles rebellion, a sixteen-year-old high school junior shared her opinions with a reporter from the *Los Angeles Times*. "I don't think white people owe anything to black people," she explained. "We didn't sell them into slavery, it was our ancestors. What they did was wrong, but we've done our best to make up for it." A seventeen-year-old senior echoed those comments, telling the reporter, "I feel we spend more time in my history class talking about what whites owe blacks than just about anything else when the issue of slavery comes up. I often received dirty looks. This seems strange given that I wasn't even alive then. And the few members of my family from that time didn't have the luxury of owning much, let alone slaves. So why, I ask you, am I constantly made to feel guilty?"⁷⁴

More ominously, after pleading guilty to bombing two homes and one car, vandalizing a synagogue, and attempting to start a race war by planning the murder of Rodney King and the bombing of Los Angeles's First African Methodist Episcopal Church, twenty-year-old Christopher David Fisher explained that "sometimes whites were picked on because of the color of their skin. . . . Maybe we're blamed for slavery."⁷⁵ Fisher's actions were certainly extreme, but his justification of them drew knowingly and precisely on a broadly shared narrative about the victimization of "innocent" whites by irrational and ungrateful minorities.

The comments and questions raised about the legacy of slavery by these young whites illuminate broader currents in our culture, with enormous implications for understanding the enduring significance of race in our country.

These young people associate black grievances solely with slavery, and they express irritation at what they perceive as efforts to make them feel guilty or unduly privileged because of things that happened in the distant past. The claim that one's own family did not own any slaves is frequently voiced in our culture. It is almost never followed with a statement to the effect that of course some people's families did own slaves and we will not rest until we track them down and make them pay reparations. This view never acknowledges how the existence of slavery and the exploitation of black labor after emancipation created opportunities from which immigrants and others benefited, even if they did not personally own slaves. Rather, it seems to hold that, because not all white people owned slaves, no white people can be held accountable or inconvenienced by the legacy of slavery. More important, having dispensed with slavery, they feel no need to address the histories of Jim Crow segregation, racialized social policies, urban renewal, or the revived racism of contemporary neoconservatism. On the contrary, Fisher felt that his discomfort with being "picked on" and "blamed" for slavery gave him good reason to bomb homes, deface synagogues, and plot to kill black people.

Unfortunately for our society, these young whites accurately reflect the logic of the language of liberal individualism and its ideological predispositions in discussions of race. In their apparent ignorance of the disciplined, systemic, and collective *group* activity that has structured white identities in U.S. history, they are in good company. In a 1979 law journal article, future Supreme Court justice Antonin Scalia argued that affirmative action "is based upon concepts of racial indebtedness and racial entitlement rather than individual worth and individual need" and is thus "racist."⁷⁶ Yet liberal individualism is not completely color-blind on this issue. As Cheryl I. Harris demonstrates, the legacy of liberal individualism has not prevented the Supreme Court from recognizing and protecting the group interests of *whites* in the Bakke, Croson, and Wygant cases.⁷⁷ In each case, the Court nullified affirmative action programs because they judged efforts to help blacks as harmful to whites; to white expectations of entitlement, expectations based on the possessive investment in whiteness they held as members of a group. In the Bakke case, for instance, where the plaintiff argued that medical school affirmative action programs disadvantaged white applicants like himself, neither Bakke nor the Court contested the legitimacy of medical school admissions standards that reserved five seats in each class for children of wealthy donors to the university or that penalized Bakke for being older than most of the other applicants. The group rights of not-wealthy people or of people older than their classmates did not compel the Court or Bakke

to make any claim of harm. But they did challenge and reject a policy designed to offset the effects of past and present discrimination when they could construe the medical school admission policies as detrimental to the interests of whites as a group—and as a consequence they applied the “strict scrutiny” standard to protect whites while denying that protection to people of color. In this case, as in so many others, the language of liberal individualism serves as a cover for coordinated collective group interests.

Group interests are not monolithic, and aggregate figures can obscure serious differences within racial groups. All whites do not benefit from the possessive investment in whiteness in precisely the same ways; the experiences of members of minority groups are not interchangeable. But the possessive investment in whiteness always affects individual and group life chances and opportunities. Even in cases where minority groups secure political and economic power through collective mobilization, the terms and conditions of their collectivity and the logic of group solidarity are always influenced and intensified by the absolute value of whiteness in U.S. politics, economics, and culture.⁷⁸

In the 1960s, members of the Black Panther Party used to say that “if you’re not part of the solution, you’re part of the problem.” But those of us who are “white” can only become part of the solution if we recognize the degree to which we are already part of the problem—not because of our race, but because of our possessive investment in it. Neither conservative “free market” policies nor liberal social welfare policies can solve the “white problem” in the United States, because both reinforce the possessive investment in whiteness. But an explicitly antiracist interethnic movement that acknowledges the existence and power of whiteness might make some important changes. Antiracist coalitions also have a long history in the United States—in the political activism of John Brown, Sojourner Truth, and the Magon brothers among others, but also in our rich cultural tradition of interethnic antiracism connected to civil rights activism of the kind detailed so brilliantly in rhythm and blues musician Johnny Otis’s book, *Upside Your Head! Rhythm and Blues on Central Avenue*. These all too infrequent but nonetheless important efforts by whites to fight racism, not out of sympathy for someone else but out of a sense of self-respect and simple justice, have never completely disappeared; they remain available as models for the present.⁷⁹

Walter Benjamin’s praise for “presence of mind” came from his understanding of how difficult it may be to see the present. But more important, he called for presence of mind as the means for implementing what he named “the only true telepathic miracle”—turning the forbidding future into the fulfilled

present.⁸⁰ Failure to acknowledge our society's possessive investment in whiteness prevents us from facing the present openly and honestly. It hides from us the devastating costs of disinvestment in America's infrastructure over the past two decades and keeps us from facing our responsibility to reinvest in human resources by channeling resources toward education, health, and housing—and away from subsidies for speculation and luxury. After two decades of disinvestment, the only further disinvestment we need is from the ruinous pathology of whiteness, which has always undermined our own best instincts and interests. In a society suffering so badly from an absence of mutuality, an absence of responsibility and an absence of justice, presence of mind might be just what we need.

WHITE

BY RICHARD DYER

THIS IS AN ARTICLE about a subject that, much of the time as I've been writing it, seems not to be there as a subject at all. Trying to think about the representation of whiteness as an ethnic category in mainstream film is difficult, partly because white power secures its dominance by seeming not to be anything in particular, but also because, when whiteness *qua* whiteness does come into focus, it is often revealed as emptiness, absence, denial or even a kind of death.

It is, all the same, important to try to make some headway with grasping whiteness as a culturally constructed category. 'Images of' studies have looked at groups defined as oppressed, marginal or subordinate - women, the working class, ethnic and other minorities (e.g., lesbians and gay men, disabled people, the elderly). The impulse for such work lies in the sense that how such groups are represented is part of the process of their oppression, marginalisation or subordination. The range and fertility of such work has put those groups themselves centre-stage in both analytical and campaigning activity, and highlighted the issue of representation as politics. It has, however, had one serious drawback, long recognised in debates about women's studies. Looking, with such passion and single-mindedness, at non-dominant groups has had the effect of reproducing the sense of the oddness, differentness, exceptionality of these groups, the feeling that they are departures from the norm. Meanwhile the norm has carried on as if it is the natural, inevitable, ordinary way of being human.

Some efforts are now being made to rectify this, to see that the norm too is constructed, although only with masculinity has anything approaching a proliferation of texts begun. Perhaps it is worth signalling here, before proceeding, two of the pitfalls in the path of such work, two convolutions that especially characterise male writing about masculinity - guilt and me too-ism. Let me state that, while writing here as a white person about whiteness, I do not mean either to display the expiation of my guilt about being white, nor to hint that it is also awful to be white

(because it is an inadequate, limiting definition of being human, because feeling guilty is such a burden). Studies of dominance by the dominant should not deny the place of the writer in relation to what s/he is writing about it, but nor should they be the green-light for self-recrimination or trying to get in on the act.

Power in contemporary society habitually passes itself off as embodied in the normal as opposed to the superior¹. This is common to all forms of power, but it works in a peculiarly seductive way with whiteness, because of the way it seems rooted, in common-sense thought, in things other than ethnic difference. The very terms we use to describe the major ethnic divide presented by Western society, 'black' and 'white', are imported from and naturalised by other discourses. Thus it is said (even in liberal text books) that there are inevitable associations of white with light and therefore safety, and black with dark and therefore danger; and that this explains racism (whereas one might well argue about the safety of the cover of darkness and the danger of exposure to the light); again, and with more justice, people point to the Judaeo-Christian use of white and black to symbolise good and evil, as carried still in such expressions as 'a black mark', 'white magic', 'to blacken the character' and so on.² I'd like to look at another aspect of commonsensical connotations of black and white as natural and ethnic categories by considering ideas of what colour is.

I was taught the scientific difference between black and white at primary school. It seemed a fascinating paradox. Black, which, because you had to add it to paper to make a picture, I had always thought of as a colour, was, it turned out, nothingness, the absence of all colour; whereas white, which looked just like empty space (or blank paper), was, apparently, all the colours there were put together. No doubt such explanations of colour have long been outmoded; what interests me is how they manage to touch on the construction of the ethnic categories of black and white in dominant representation. In the realm of categories, black is always marked as a colour (as the term 'coloured' egregiously acknowledges), and is always particularising; whereas white is not anything really, not an identity, not a particularising quality, because it is everything - white is no colour because it is all colours.

This property of whiteness, to be everything and nothing, is the source of its representational power. On the one hand, as one of the people in the video *Being White*³ observes, white domination is reproduced by the way that white people 'colonise the definition of normal'. Paul Gilroy similarly spells out the political consequences, in the British context, of the way that whiteness both disappears behind and is subsumed into other identities. He discusses the way that the language of 'the nation' aims to be unifying, permitting even socialists an appeal in terms of 'we' and 'our' 'beyond the margins of sectional interest', but goes on to observe that:

there is a problem in these plural forms: who do they include, or, more precisely for our purposes, do they help to reproduce blackness and Englishness

¹ cf. Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1964.

² cf. Winthrop Jordan, *White over Black*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1969; Peter Fryer, *Staying Power*, London, Pluto, 1984.

³ Made by Tony Downmunt, Maris Clark, Rooney Martin and Kobena Mercer for Albany Video, London.

as mutually exclusive categories? ... why are contemporary appeals to 'the people' in danger of transmitting themselves as appeals to the white people?⁴

On the other hand, if the invisibility of whiteness colonises the definition of other norms – class, gender, heterosexuality, nationality and so on – it also masks whiteness as itself a category. White domination is then hard to grasp in terms of the characteristics and practices of white people. No one would deny that, at the very least, there are advantages to being white in Western societies; but it is only avowed racists who have a theory which attributes this to inherent qualities of white people. Otherwise, whiteness is presented more as a case of historical accident, rather than a characteristic cultural/historical construction, achieved through white domination.

The colourless multi-colouredness of whiteness secures white power by making it hard, especially for white people and their media, to 'see' whiteness. This, of course, also makes it hard to analyse. It is the way that black people are marked as black (are not just 'people') in representation that has made it relatively easy to analyse their representation, whereas white people – not there as a category and everywhere everything as a fact – are difficult, if not impossible, to analyse *qua* white. The subject seems to fall apart in your hands as soon as you begin. Any instance of white representation is always immediately something more specific – *Brief Encounter* is not about white people, it is about English middle-class people; *The Godfather* is not about white people, it is about Italian-American people; but *The Color Purple* is about black people, before it is about poor, southern US people.

This problem clearly faced the makers of *Being White*, a pioneering attempt to confront the notion of white identity. The opening vox pop sequence vividly illustrates the problem. Asked how they would define themselves, the white interviewees refer easily to gender, age, nationality or looks but never to ethnicity. Asked if they think of themselves as white, most say that they don't, though one or two speak of being 'proud' or 'comfortable' to be white. In an attempt to get some white people to explore what being white means, the video assembles a group to talk about it and it is here that the problem of white people's inability to see whiteness appears intractable. Sub-categories of whiteness (Irishness, Jewishness, Britishness) take over, so that the particularity of whiteness itself begins to disappear; then gradually, it seems almost inexorably, the participants settle in to talking with confidence about what they know: stereotypes of black people.

Yet perhaps this slide towards talking about blackness gives us a clue as to where we might begin to see whiteness – where its difference from blackness is inescapable and at issue. I shall look here at examples of mainstream cinema whose narratives are marked by the fact of ethnic difference. Other approaches likely to yield interesting results include: the study of the characterisation of whites in Third World or diaspora cinema; images of the white race in avowedly racist and fascist cinema; the use of the 'commutation test', the imaginary substitution of black

⁴ Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, London, Hutchinson, 1987, pp 55-56. See also the arguments about feminism and ethnicity in Hazel Carby, 'White Woman Listen! Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood' in Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, *The Empire Strikes Back*, London, Hutchinson, 1982, pp 212-23.

⁵ John O Thompson, 'Screen Acting and the Commutation Test', *Screen Summer* 1978, vol 19 no 2, pp 55-70.

for white performers in films such as *Brief Encounter*, say, or *Ordinary People* (if these are unimaginable played by black actors, what does this tell us about the characteristics of whiteness?) or, related to this, consideration of what ideas of whiteness are implied by such widespread observations as that Sidney Poitier or Diana Ross, say, are to all intents and purposes 'white'. What all these approaches share, however, is reference to that which is not white, as if only non-whiteness can give whiteness any substance. The reverse is not the case – studies of images of blacks, Native Americans, Jews and other ethnic minorities do not need the comparative element that seems at this stage indispensable for the study of whites.

The representation of white *qua* white begins to come into focus – in mainstream cinema, for a white spectator – in films in which non-white characters play a significant role. I want to look at three very different examples here – *Jezebel* (USA, Warner Brothers, 1938), *Simba* (GB, Rank Studios, 1955) and *Night of the Living Dead* (USA, 1969). Each is characteristic of the particular genre and period to which it belongs. *Jezebel* is a large-budget Hollywood feature film (said to have been intended to rival *Gone with the Wind*) built around a female star, Bette Davis; its spectacular pleasures are those of costume and decor, of gracious living, and its emotional pleasures those of tears. *Simba* is a film made as part of Rank's bid to produce films that might successfully challenge Hollywood at the box office, built around a male star, Dirk Bogarde; its spectacular pleasures are those of the travelogue, its emotional ones excitement and also the gratification of seeing 'issues' (here, the Mau-Mau in Kenya) being dealt with. *Night of the Living Dead* is a cheap, independently-produced horror film with no stars; its spectacular and emotional pleasures are those of shock, disgust and suspense, along with the evident political or social symbolism that has aided its cult reputation.

The differences between the three films are important and will inform the ways in which they represent whiteness. There is some point in trying to see this continuity across three, nonetheless significantly different, films. There is no doubt that part of the strength and resilience of stereotypes of non-dominant groups resides in their variation and flexibility – stereotypes are seldom found in a pure form and this is part of the process by which they are naturalised, kept alive.⁶ Yet the strength of white representation, as I've suggested, is the apparent absence altogether of the typical, the sense that being white is co-terminous with the endless plenitude of human diversity. If we are to see the historical, cultural and political limitations (to put it mildly) of white world domination, it is important to see similarities, typicalities, within the seemingly infinite variety of white representation.

All three films share a perspective that associates whiteness with

⁶ See T E Perkins, 'Rethinking Stereotypes' in Michele Barrett et al (eds), *Representation and Cultural Practice*, New York, Croom Helm, pp 135-59; Steve Neale, 'The Same Old Story', *Screen Education* Autumn/Winter 1979/80, nos 32-33, pp 33-38. For a practical example see the British Film Institute study pack, *The Dumb Blonde Stereotype*.

order, rationality, rigidity, qualities brought out by the contrast with black disorder, irrationality and looseness. It is their take on this which differs. *Simba* operates with a clear black-white binarism, holding out the possibility that black people can learn white values but fearing that white people will be engulfed by blackness. *Jezebel* is far more ambivalent, associating blackness with the defiance of its female protagonist – whom it does not know whether to condemn or adore. *Night* takes the hint of critique of whiteness in *Jezebel* and takes it to its logical conclusion, where whiteness represents not only rigidity but death.

What these films also share, which helps to sharpen further the sense of whiteness in them, is a situation in which white domination is contested, openly in the text of *Simba* and explicitly acknowledged in *Jezebel*. The narrative of *Simba* is set in motion by the Mau-Mau challenge to British occupation, which also occasions set pieces of debate on the issues of white rule and black responses to it; the imminent decline of slavery is only once or twice referred to directly in *Jezebel*, but the film can assume the audience knows that slavery was soon ostensibly to disappear from the southern states. Both films are suffused with the sense of white rule being at an end, a source of definite sorrow in *Simba*, but in *Jezebel* producing that mixture of disapproval and nostalgia characteristic of the white representation of the ante-bellum South. *Night* makes no direct reference to the state of ethnic play but, as I shall argue below, it does make implicit reference to the black uprisings that were part of the historical context of its making, and which many believed would alter irrevocably the nature of power relations between black and white people in the USA.

The presence of black people in all three films allows one to see whiteness as whiteness, and in this way relates to the existential psychology that is at the origins of the interest in 'otherness' as an explanatory concept in the representation of ethnicity.⁷ Existential psychology, principally in the work of Jean-Paul Sartre, had proposed a model of human growth whereby the individual self becomes aware of itself as a self by perceiving its difference from others. It was other writers who suggested that this process, supposedly at once individual and universal, was in fact socially specific – Simone de Beauvoir arguing that it has to do with the construction of the male ego, Frantz Fanon relating it to the colonial encounter of white and black. What I want to stress here is less this somewhat metaphysical dimension⁸, more the material basis for the shifts and anxieties in the representation of whiteness suggested by *Simba*, *Jezebel* and *Night*.

The three films relate to situations in which whites hold power in society, but are materially dependent upon black people. All three films suggest an awareness of this dependency – weakly in *Simba*, strongly but still implicitly in *Jezebel*, inescapably in *Night*. It is this actual dependency of white on black in a context of continued white power and privilege that throws the legitimacy of white domination into question. What is called for is a demonstration of the virtues of whiteness that would justify continued domination, but this is a problem if whiteness is

⁷ See Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, London, Pluto, 1986; Edward Saïd, *Orientalism*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978; Homi K Bhabha, 'The Other Question – the Stereotype and Colonial Discourse', *Screen* November-December 1983, vol 24 no 6, pp 18-36.

⁸ See Benita Parry, 'Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse', *Oxford Literary Review*, vol 9, nos 1-2, 1987, pp 27-58.

also invisible, everything and nothing. It is from this that the films' fascinations derive. I shall discuss them here in the order in which they most clearly attempt to hang on to some justification of whiteness, starting, then, with *Simba* and ending with *Night*.

'Simba'

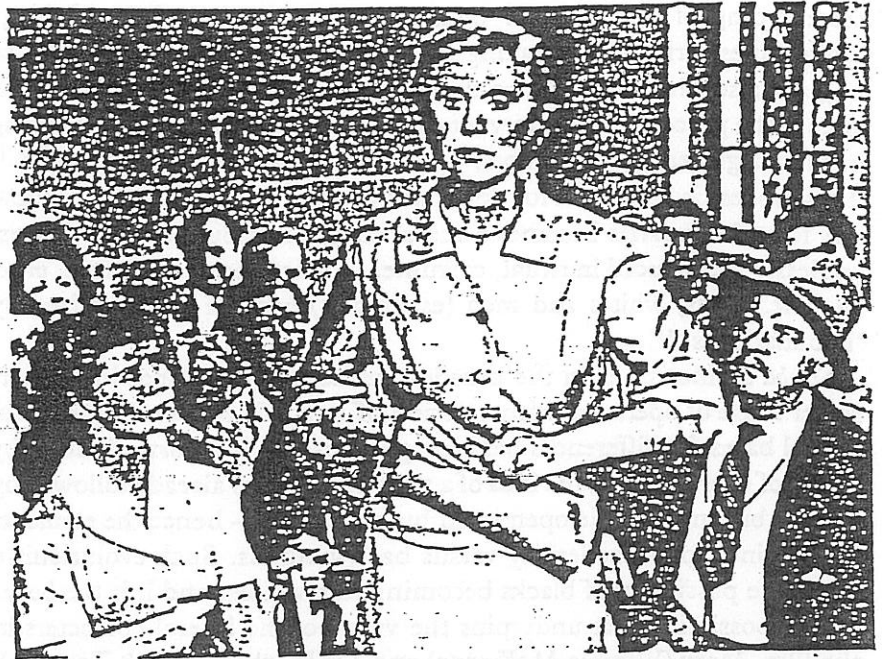
Simba is a characteristic product of the British cinema between about 1945 and 1965 – an entertainment film 'dealing with' a serious issue.⁹ It is a colonial adventure film, offering the standard narrative pleasures of adventure with a tale of personal growth. The hero, Alan (Bogarde), arrives in Kenya from England to visit his brother on his farm, finds he has been killed by the Mau-Mau and stays to sort things out (keep the farm going, find out who killed his brother, quell the Mau-Mau). Because the Mau-Mau were a real administrative and ideological problem for British imperialism at the time of the film's making, *Simba* also has to construct a serious discursive context for these pleasures (essentially a moral one, to do with the proper way to treat native peoples; toughness versus niceness). It does this partly through debates and discussions, partly through characters clearly representing what the film takes to be the range of possible angles on the subject (the bigoted whites, the liberal whites, the British-educated black man, the despotic black chief) but above all through the figure of the hero, whose adventures and personal growth are occasioned, even made possible, through the process of engaging with the late colonial situation. The way this situation is structured by the film and the way Alan/Bogarde rises to the occasion display the qualities of whiteness.

Simba is founded on the 'Manicheism delirium' identified by Frantz Fanon as characteristic of the colonialist sensibility¹⁰; it takes what Paul Gilroy refers to as an 'absolutist view of black and white cultures, as fixed, mutually impermeable expressions of racial and national identity, [which] is a ubiquitous theme in racial "common sense"'.¹¹ The film is organised around a rigid binarism, with white standing for modernity, reason, order, stability, and black standing for backwardness, irrationality, chaos and violence. This binarism is reproduced in every detail of the film's *mise-en-scène*. A sequence of two succeeding scenes illustrates this clearly – a meeting of the white settlers to discuss the emergency, followed by a meeting of the Mau-Mau. The whites' meeting takes place in early evening, in a fully lit room; characters that speak are shot with standard high key lighting so that they are fully visible; everyone sits in rows and although there is disagreement, some of it hot-tempered and emotional, it is expressed in grammatical discourse in a language the British viewer can understand; moreover, the meeting consists of nothing but speech. The black meeting, on the other hand, takes place at dead of night, out of doors, with all characters in shadow; even the Mau-Mau leader is lit with extreme sub-Expressionist lighting that dramatises and distorts his face; grouping is in the form of a broken, uneven

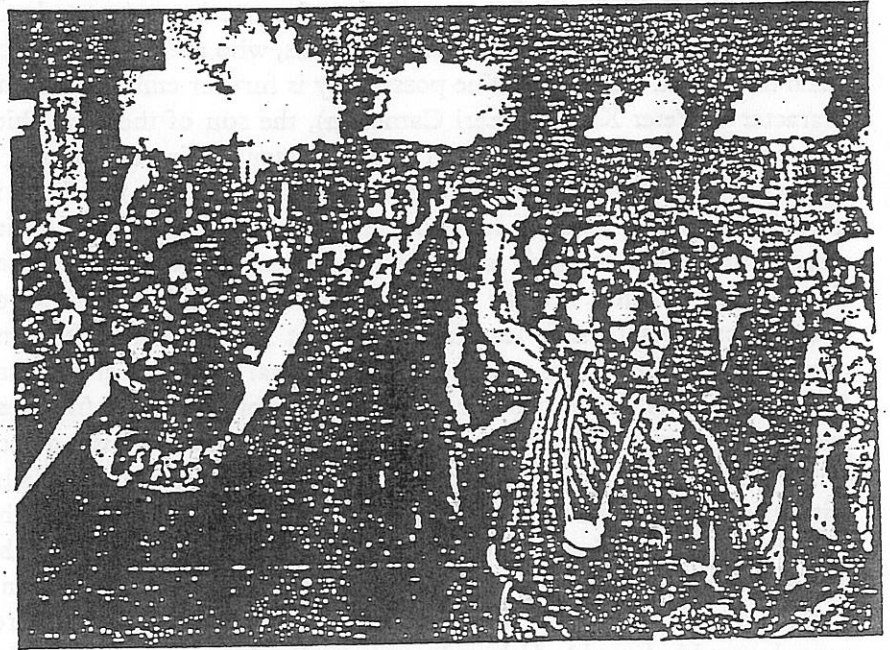
⁹ See John Hill, *Sex, Class and Realism*, London, British Film Institute, 1986, chaps 4 and 5.

¹⁰ Frantz Fanon, *op cit*, p 183.

¹¹ Paul Gilroy, *op cit*, p 61; see Errol Lawrence, 'In the Abundance of Water the Fool is Thirsty: Sociology and Black Pathology', in Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, *op cit*, pp 95-142.



Binarism in *Simba's*
mise-en-scène: white
culture (above) and
black culture (below).



circle; what speech there is is ritualised, not reasoned, and remains untranslated (and probably in no authentic language anyway), and most vocal sounds are whooping, gabbling and shrieking; the heart of the meeting is in any case not speech, but daubing with blood and entrails and scarring the body. The return to whiteness after this sequence is once again a return to daylight, a dissolve to the straight lines of European fencing and vegetable plots.

The emphasis on the visible and bounded in this *mise-en-scène* (main-

rained throughout the film) has to do with the importance of fixity in the stereotyping of others – clear boundaries are characteristic of things white (lines, grids; not speaking till someone else has finished and so on), and also what keeps whites clearly distinct from blacks. The importance of the process of boundary establishment and maintenance has long been recognised in discussions of stereotyping and representation.¹² This process is functional for dominant groups, but through it the capacity to set boundaries becomes a characteristic attribute of such groups, endlessly reproduced in ritual, costume, language and, in cinema, *mise-en-scène*. Thus, whites and men (especially) become characterised by 'boundariness'.¹³

Simba's binarism is in the broadest sense racist, but not in the narrower sense of operating with a notion of intrinsic and unalterable biological bases for differences between peoples.¹⁴ It is informed rather by a kind of evolutionism, the idea of a path of progress already followed by whites, but in principle open to all human beings – hence the elements in the binarism of modernity versus backwardness. Such evolutionism raises the possibility of blacks becoming like whites, and it is the belief in this possibility that underpins the views of the liberal characters in the film, Mary (Virginia McKenna) and Dr Hughes (Joseph Tomelty), the latter pleading with his fellow settlers at the meeting to 'reason', not with the Mau-Mau but with the other Africans, who are not beyond the reach of rational discussion. The possibility is further embodied in the character of Peter Karanja (Earl Cameron), the son of the local chief (Orlando Martins), who has trained to be a doctor and is now running a surgery in the village. The film is at great pains to establish that Peter is indeed reasonable, rational, humane, liberal. It is always made quite clear to the viewer that this is so and the representatives of liberalism always believe in him; it is the whites who do not trust him, and one of Alan's moral lessons is in learning to respect Peter's worth. It seems then that part of the film is ready to take the liberal evolutionist position. Yet it is also significant that the spokespeople for liberalism (niceness and reason) are socially subordinate; a woman and an Irish doctor (played for comic eccentricity most of the time), and that liberalism fails, with its representatives (Mary, Peter and now won-over Alan) left at the end of the film crouched in the flames of Alan's farm, rescued from the Mau-Mau in the nick of time by the arrival of the white militia, and Peter dying from wounds inflicted on him by the Mau-Mau (represented as a black mob). Although with its head, as it were, the film endorses the possibility of a black person becoming 'white', this is in fact deeply disturbing, setting in motion the anxiety attendant on any loosening of the fixed visibility of the colonised other. This anxiety is established from the start of the film and is the foundation of its narrative.

As is customary in colonial adventure films, *Simba* opens with a panoramic shot of the land, accompanied here by birdsong and the sound of an African man singing. While not especially lush or breathtaking, it is peaceful and attractive. A cry of pain interrupts this mood and we see the man who has been singing stop, get off his bicycle and walk towards

¹² e.g., Homi Bhabha, *op cit*; Richard Dyer, 'Stereotyping' in Richard Dyer (ed), *Gay and Film*, London, British Film Institute, 1977, pp 27-39; Sandor L Gilman, *Difference and Pathology*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1985.

¹³ cf, Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1978.

¹⁴ Michael Banton, *The Idea of Race*, London, Tavistock, 1977; this restrictive definition of racism has been disputed by, inter alia, Stuart Hall, 'Race, Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance' in UNESCO, *Sociological Theories: Race and Colonialism*, Paris, UNESCO, 1980.

its source to find a white man lying covered in blood on the ground. The black man kneels by his side, apparently about to help him, but then, to the sound of a drum-roll on the soundtrack, draws his machete and plunges it (off screen) into the wounded man. He then walks back to his bike and rides off. Here is encapsulated the fear that ensues if you can't see black men behaving as black men should, the deceptiveness of a black man in Western clothes riding a bike. This theme is then reiterated throughout the film. Which of the servants can be trusted? How can you tell who is Mau-Mau and who not? Why should Alan trust Pétér?

This opening sequence is presented in one long take, using panning. As the man rides off, the sound of a plane is heard, the camera pans up and there is the first cut of the film, to a plane flying through the clouds. There follows (with credits over) a series of aerial shots of the African landscape, in one of which a plane's shadow is seen, and ending with shots of white settlement and then the plane coming to land. Here is another aspect of the film's binarism. The credit sequence uses the dynamics of editing following the more settled feel of the pre-credit long take; it uses aerial shots moving through space, rather than pans with their fixed vantage point; it emphasises the view from above, not that from the ground, and the modernity of air travel after the primitivism of the machete. It also brings the hero to Africa (as we realise when we see Bogarde step off in the first post-credit shot); brings the solution to the problems of deceptive, unfixed appearances set up by the pre-credit sequence.

Simba's binarism both establishes the differences between black and white and creates the conditions for the film's narrative pleasures – the disturbance of the equilibrium of clear-cut binarism, the resultant conflict that the hero has to resolve. His ability to resolve it is part of his whiteness, just as whiteness is identified in the dynamism of the credit sequence (which in turn relates to the generic expectations of adventure) and in the narrative of personal growth that any colonial text with pretensions also has. The Empire provided a narrative space for the realisation of manhood, both as action and maturation.¹⁵ The colonial landscape is expansive, enabling the hero to roam and giving us the entertainment of action; it is unexplored, giving him the task of discovery and us the pleasures of mystery; it is uncivilised, needing taming, providing the spectacle of power; it is difficult and dangerous, testing his machismo, providing us with suspense. In other words, the colonial landscape provides the occasion for the realisation of white male virtues, which are not qualities of being but of doing – acting, discovering, taming, conquering. At the same time, colonialism, as a social, political and economic system, even in fictions, also carries with it challenges of responsibility, of the establishment and maintenance of order, of the application of reason and authority to situations. These, too, are qualities of white manhood that are realised in the process of the colonial text, and very explicitly in *Simba*. When Alan arrives at Nairobi, he is met by Mary, a woman to whom he had proposed when she was visiting England; she

¹⁵ cf. Stuart Hall, 'The Whites of their Eyes: Racist Ideologies and the Media' in George Bridges and Rosalind Brunt (eds), *Silver Linings*, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1981, pp 28-52.

had turned him down, telling him, as he recalls on the drive to his brother's farm, that he had 'no sense of responsibility'. Now he realises that she was right; in the course of the film he will learn to be responsible in the process of dealing with the Mau-Mau, and this display of growth will win him Mary.

But this is a late colonial text, characterised by a recognition that the Empire is at an end, and not unaware of some kinds of liberal critique of colonialism. So *Simba* takes a turn that is far more fully explored by, say, *Black Narcissus* (1947) or the Granada TV adaptation of *The Jewel in the Crown* (1982). Here, maturity involves the melancholy recognition of failure. This is explicitly stated, by Sister Clodagh in *Black Narcissus*, to be built into the geographical conditions in which the nuns seek to establish their civilising mission ('I couldn't stop the wind from blowing'); it is endlessly repeated by the nice whites in *The Jewel in the Crown* ('There's nothing I can do!') and symbolised in the lace shawl with butterflies 'caught in the net' that keeps being brought out by the characters. I have already suggested the ways in which liberalism is marginalised and shown to fail in *Simba*. More than this, the hero also fails to realise the generically promised adventure experiences: he is unable to keep his late brother's farm going, nor does he succeed in fighting off a man stealing guns from his house; he fails to catch the fleeing leader of the Mau-Mau, and is unable to prevent them from destroying his house and shooting Peter. The film ends with his property in flames and – a touch common to British social conscience films – with a shot of a young black boy who symbolises the only possible hope for the future.

The repeated failure of narrative achievement goes along with a sense of white helplessness in the face of the Mau-Mau (the true black threat), most notably in the transition between the two meeting scenes discussed above. Alan has left the meeting in anger because one of the settlers has criticised the way his brother had dealt with the Africans (too soft); Mary joins him, to comfort him. At the end of their conversation, there is a two-shot of them, with Mary saying of the situation, 'it's like a flood, we're caught in it'. This is accompanied by the sound of drums and is immediately followed by a slow dissolve to black people walking through the night towards the Mau-Mau meeting. The drums and the dissolve enact Mary's words, that the whites are helpless in the face of the forces of blackness.

Simba is, then, an endorsement of the moral superiority of white values of reason, order and boundedness, yet suggests a loss of belief in their efficacy. This is a familiar trope of conservatism. At moments, though, there are glimpses of something else, achieved inadvertently perhaps through the casting of Dirk Bogarde. It becomes explicit in the scene between Mary and Alan just mentioned, when Alan says to Mary, 'I was suddenly afraid of what I was feeling', referring to the anger and hatred that the whole situation is bringing out in him and, as Mary says, everyone else. The implication is that the situation evokes in whites the kind of irrational violence supposedly specific to blacks. Of course, being white means being able to repress it and this is what we seem to

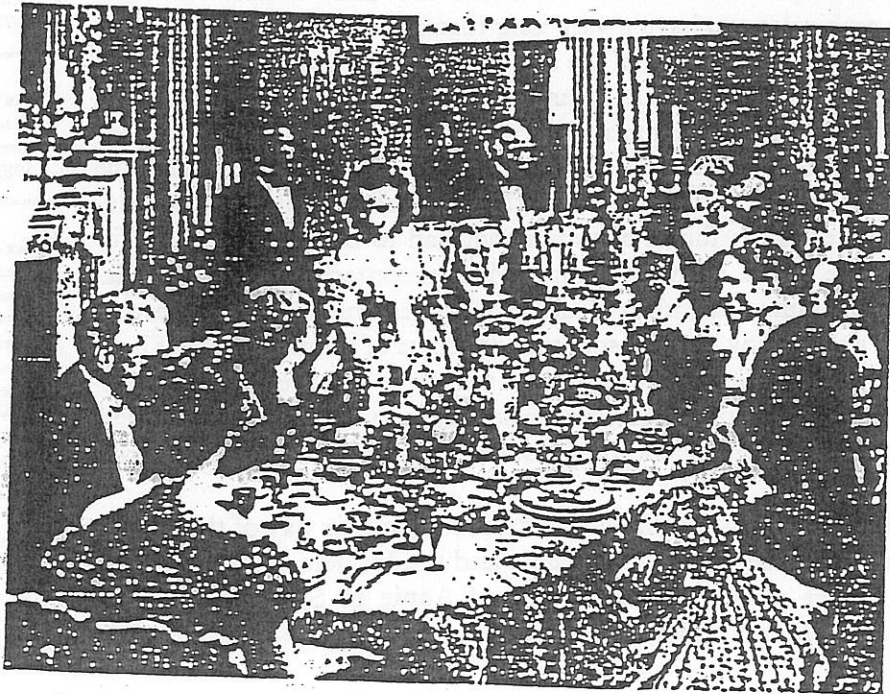
¹⁶ See Andy Medhurst, 'Dirk Bogarde' in Charles Barr, *All Our Yesterdays*, London, British Film Institute, 1986, pp 346-54.

see in Alan throughout the film. Such repression constitutes the stoic glory of the imperial hero, but there is something about Bogarde in the part that makes it seem less than admirable or desirable. Whether this is suggested by his acting style, still and controlled, yet with fiercely grinding jaws, rigidly clenched hands and very occasional sudden outbursts of shouting, or by the way Rank was grooming him against the grain of his earlier, sexier image (including its gay overtones)¹⁶, it suggests a notion of whiteness as repression that leads us nearly on to *Jezebel*.

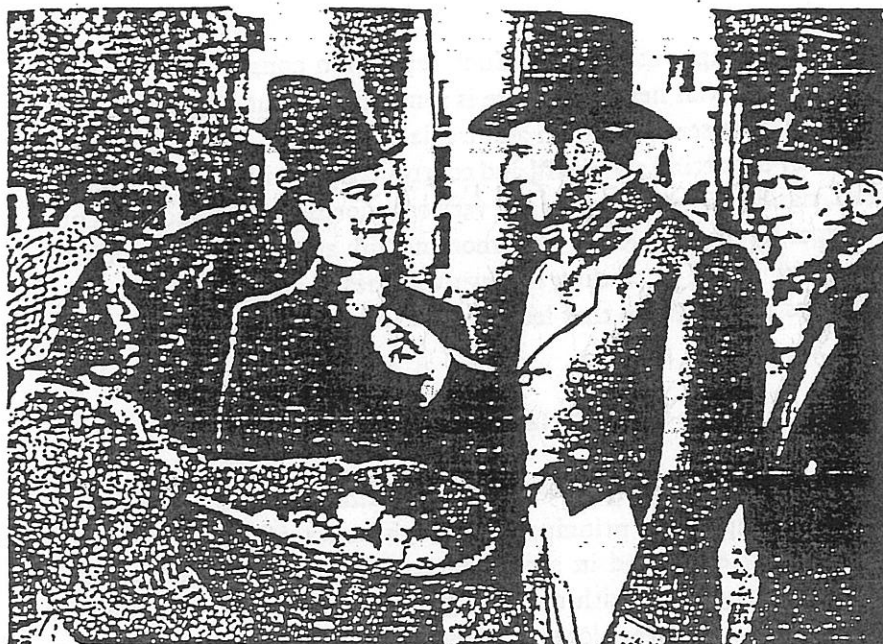
'Jezebel'

Like *Simba*, *Jezebel* depicts a white society characterised by order and rigidity, here expressed principally through codes of behaviour and rules of conduct embodied in set-piece receptions, dinner parties and balls. This does contrast with the bare glimpses we get of black life in the film, but *Jezebel* also explores the ways in which whiteness is related to blackness, materially and emotionally dependent on it yet still holding sway over it.

Compositionally, *Jezebel* frequently foregrounds black people – scenes often open with the camera moving from a black person (a woman selling flowers in New Orleans, a servant carrying juleps, a boy pulling on a rope to operate a ceiling fan) across or towards white characters; black people often intrude into the frame while white characters talk. This is particularly noticeable during a dinner-table discussion of the future of slavery; when one of the characters, Pres (Henry Fonda), says that the South will be defeated by machines triumphing over 'unskilled slave labour', the chief black character, Cato (Lou Payton), leans across our field of



A set piece dinner party in *Jezebel*: whiteness dependent on blackness, yet holding sway over it.



A black character intruding in the frame, while white people talk: selling flowers in New Orleans.

vision to pour Pres' wine, literally embodying the fact of slave labour. The film's insistence upon the presence of black people is important in its perception and construction of the white South. As Jim Pines puts it, 'black characters do not occupy a significant dramatic function in the film, but their social role nevertheless plays an explicit and relevant part in the conflict that arises between the principal white characters'¹⁷.

Jezebel is distantly related, through the sympathies of its stars, director and production studio, to progressive ideas on race, making it, as Pines says, 'within the plantation movie tradition... undoubtedly the most liberal-inclined'¹⁸. These ideas have to do with the belief or suspicion that black people have in some sense more 'life' than whites. This idea, and its ambivalences, have a very long history which cannot detain us here. It springs from ideas of the closeness of non-European (and even non-metropolitan) peoples to nature, ideas which were endemic to those processes of European expansion variously termed exploration, nation-building and colonialism.¹⁹ Expansion into other lands placed the humans encountered there as part of the fauna of those lands, to be construed either as the forces of nature that had to be subjugated or, for liberals, the model of sweet natural Man uncontaminated by civilisation. At the same time, ideas of nature have become central to Western thought about being human, such that concepts of human life itself have become inextricable from concepts of nature. Thus the idea that non-whites are more natural than whites also comes to suggest that they have more 'life', a logically meaningless but commonsensically powerful notion.

Jezebel relates to a specific liberal variation on this way of thinking, a tradition in which *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the Harlem Renaissance are key reference points²⁰, as is the role of Annie in Sirk's *Imitation of Life*.²¹ Ethel Mannin's statement may be taken as emblematic:

¹⁷ Jim Pines, *Blacks in Films*, London, Studio Vista, 1975, p 54.

¹⁸ *ibid*, p 55. See also Thomas Cripps, *Slow Fade to Black*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1977, pp 299, 304.

¹⁹ See Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism*, London, Zed Books, 1983.

²⁰ See George Frederickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind*, New York, Harper and Row, 1972; David Levering Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, New York, Knopf, 1981.

²¹ I have discussed this in 'Four Films of Lana Turner', *Movie*, no 25, pp 30-52.

²² Ethel Mannin, *Confessions and Impressions*, New York, Doubleday, Doran, 1930, p 157.

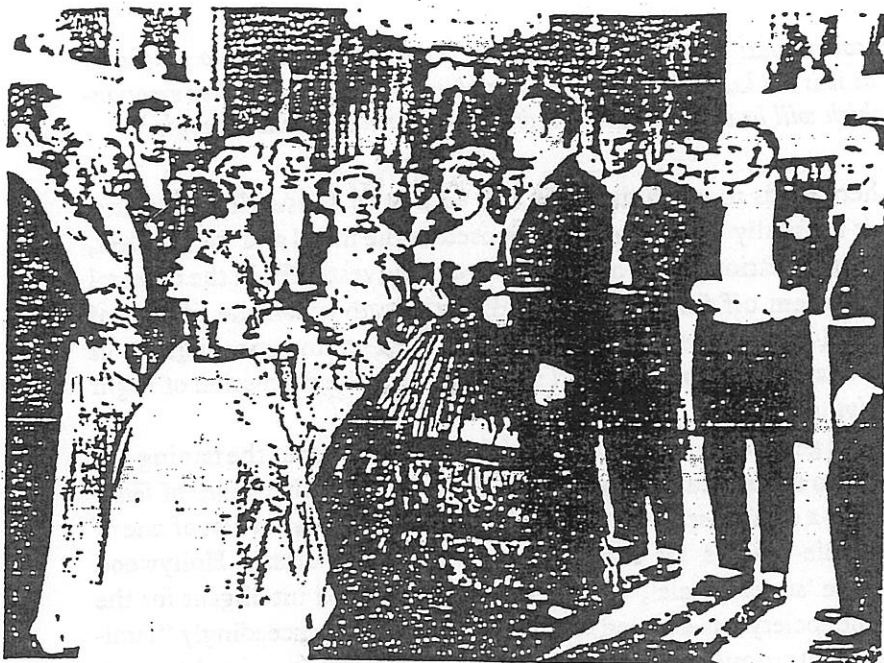
²³ Molly Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape*, New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, p 214.

*It is of course that feeling for life which is the secret of the Negro people, as surely as it is the lack of it, and slow atrophy of the capacity to live emotionally, which will be the ultimate decadence of the white civilised people.*²²

'Life' here tends to mean the body, the emotions, sensuality and spirituality; it is usually explicitly counterposed to the mind and the intellect, with the implication that white people's over-investment in the cerebral is cutting them off from life and leading them to crush the life out of others and out of nature itself. The implicit counterposition is, of course, 'death', a point to which I shall return in the discussion of *Night of the Living Dead*.

Jezebel is generally, and rightly, understood to be about the taming of a woman who refuses to live by the Old South's restrictive codes of femininity. It is a clear instance of Molly Haskell's characterisation of one of the available models for strong women's roles in classic Hollywood movies, the 'superfemale', who is 'too ambitious and intelligent for the docile role society has decreed she play' but remains 'exceedingly "feminine" and flirtatious' and 'within traditional society', turning her energies on those around her, 'with demonic results'.²³ Davis' character, Julie, is strong, defiant of convention (for example, striding into the bank, a place that women do not enter), refusing to behave in the genteel way her fiancé, Pres, requires of her. The trajectory of the narrative is her punishment and moral growth, in two stages. She learns to conceal her defiance and energy beneath an assumption of femininity, but this is still not enough, since it is still there in the malignant form indicated by Haskell; it is only by literally sacrificing herself (accompanying Pres, who has caught yellow jack fever, to Red Island, where fever victims are isolated) that the film is able to reach a satisfactory, transcendently punishing climax. All of this is entirely understandable within a gender frame of reference; but the film also relates Julie's energies to blackness, suggesting that her trajectory is a specifically white, as well as female, one.

The most famous scene in the film is the Olympus Ball, at which all the unmarried women wear white. Julie, to embarrass Pres and to cock a snook at out-dated convention ('This is 1852, not the Dark Ages - girls don't have to simper about in white just 'cos they're not married'), decides to wear a red dress. The immediate scandal is not just the refusal to conform and uphold the celebration of virginity that the white dress code represents, but the sexual connotations of the dress itself, satin and red, connotations made explicit in a scene at the dress-maker's ('Saucy, isn't it?', says Julie; 'And vulgar', says her aunt, with which Julie enthusiastically concurs). This is the dress of Julie's that her black maid Zette (Theresa Harris) most covets, and after the ball, Julie gives it to her. It is precisely its *colourfulness* that, stereotyping informs us, draws Zette - the dress is 'marked' as coloured, a definite, bold colour heightened by a flashy fabric, just as black representation is. Thus what appears to be symbolism (white for virginity, colour for sex) within a universally applicable communication circuit becomes ethnically specific. The primary association of white with chastity is inextricably tied to not



Flouting convention:
the red dress at the
Olympus Ball.

being dark and colourful, not being non-white, and the defiance and vitality narratively associated with Julie's wearing of the dress is associated with the qualities embodied by black women, qualities that Julie as a white woman must not display, or even have. Of course, the red dress looks merely dark in this black and white film.

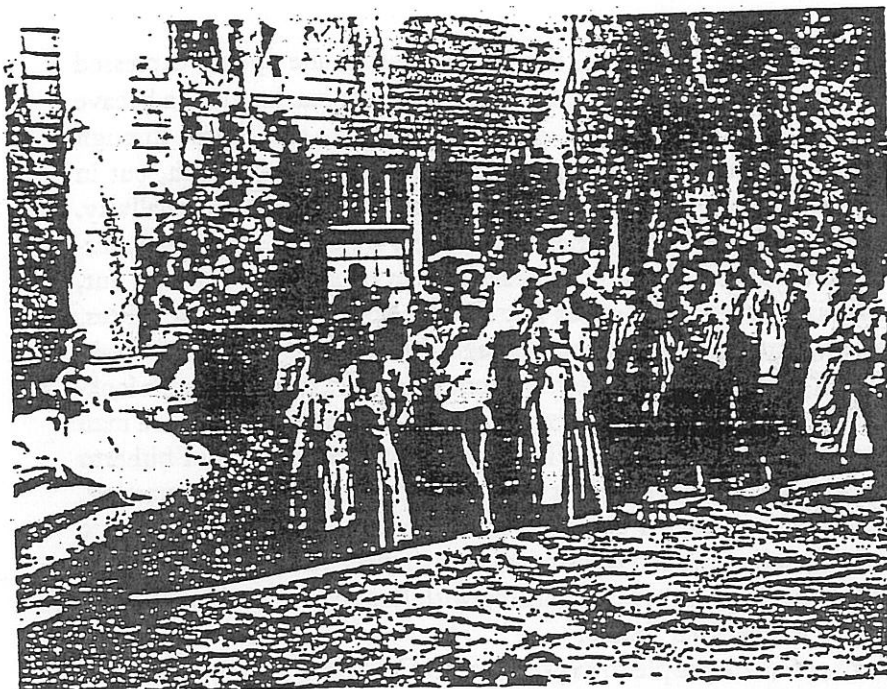
Wearing the dress causes a rift between Julie and Pres; shortly after, he leaves for the North on business. By the time he returns, Julie has learned to behave as a white woman should. Once again, the specific whiteness of this is revealed through the figure of Zette. There is, for instance, a scene in which Julie is getting ready for the arrival of Pres at a house party at her aunt's plantation. In her room she moves restlessly about, with Zette hanging on to her as she tries to undo Julie's dress at the back; Zette's movements are entirely determined by Julie's but Zette is attending to the basic clothing while Julie is just fussing about. When Julie thinks she hears a carriage coming, she sends Zette to check; Zette runs from the room, and the film cuts to the huge hallway, showing us all of Zette's rapid descent of the stairs and run to the door, before cutting again to show her calling out to the man and boy in livery waiting for carriages at the gate. This apparently unnecessarily elongated sequence not only helps whip up excitement and anticipation at Pres' arrival, but also gives Julie time to take off one dress and put on another, a potentially titillating sight that would not be shown in this kind of film in this period. But using a sequence centred on a black woman is not only a device to heighten suspense and by-pass a taboo image – it works as seamlessly well as it does because it is also appropriate to show a black woman here.

By this stage in the film, Julie has learned the behaviour appropriate to a

white woman in her position. Earlier in the film she openly expressed her passion and defiance; now, awaiting Pres, she has learned to behave as she should. She no longer expresses feeling – she ‘lives’ through Zette. Zette has to express excited anticipation, not in speech, but in physical action, running the length of a long stair and spacious hallway. It is Zette’s excited body in action that we see, instead of Julie’s body disrobed and enrobed. When Julie hears the servants at the gate call out, ‘Carriage is coming!’, she sends Zette to the window to see if it is Pres. The excitement mounts as the carriage draws near. There is a rapid montage of black people: Zette shot from below at a dynamic angle looking for the carriage, the servants at the gate no longer still but the man moving about, the boy leaping in anticipation, and crowds of hitherto unseen black children running to the gate, jumping and cavorting. Meanwhile Julie remains perfectly still, only her eyes, in characteristic Davis fashion, darting and dilating with suspense; perfectly, luminously lit, she says nothing, expresses nothing with her body – it is black people who bodily express her desire.

This use of black people to express, to ‘live’, the physical dimension of Julie’s life is found throughout the film, most notably after her manipulations have gone awry to the point that one of her old flames, Buck (George Brent), is now about to duel with Pres’ brother. The black plantation workers have gathered at the house to entertain the white guests (‘a quaint old custom down here’, says Julie to Pres’ new, and Northern, wife, Amy). As they arrive they sing a song about marrying, heard over shots of Julie, a bitterly ironic counterpoint. She shushes the chorus and tells them to start singing, ‘Gonna Raise a Ruckus To-night’, then goes to the edge of the verandah and sits down, beckoning the black children to gather close round her, before joining in with the singing. The song is a jolly one and the shots of the black singers show them in happy-go-lucky Sambo style, but the last shot of the sequence closes on Julie, near to tears against the sound of this cheerful singing. The power of the sequence does not come from this ironic counterpoint alone, but also from the way that Julie, by merging as nearly as possible with the singers and joining in the song, is able to express her pent-up feelings of frustration, anger, jealousy and fear, feelings for which there is no white mode of expression, which can only be lived through blacks.

The point of *Jezebel* is not that whites are different from blacks, but that whites live by different rules. Unlike the two women with whom she is compared, her aunt and Amy, Julie cannot be ‘white’. It is her aunt and Amy who confirm that whites are calm, controlled, rational; Julie transgresses, but in the process reveals white calm as an imposition, a form of repression of life. The film’s ambivalence lies in its being a vehicle for Davis. She/Julie is a ‘Jezebel’, a by-word for female wickedness, but nonetheless a star with a huge female following, and who is shot here with the kind of radiance and glow Hollywood reserved for its favoured women stars. There is no doubt that what Julie does is wicked and that her punishment is to be understood as richly deserved; but there is also no doubt that she is to be adored and precisely, as I’ve tried



Julie with the
plantation workers
gathered to entertain
her guests

to argue, because she does not conform to notions of white womanhood.

'Night of the Living Dead'

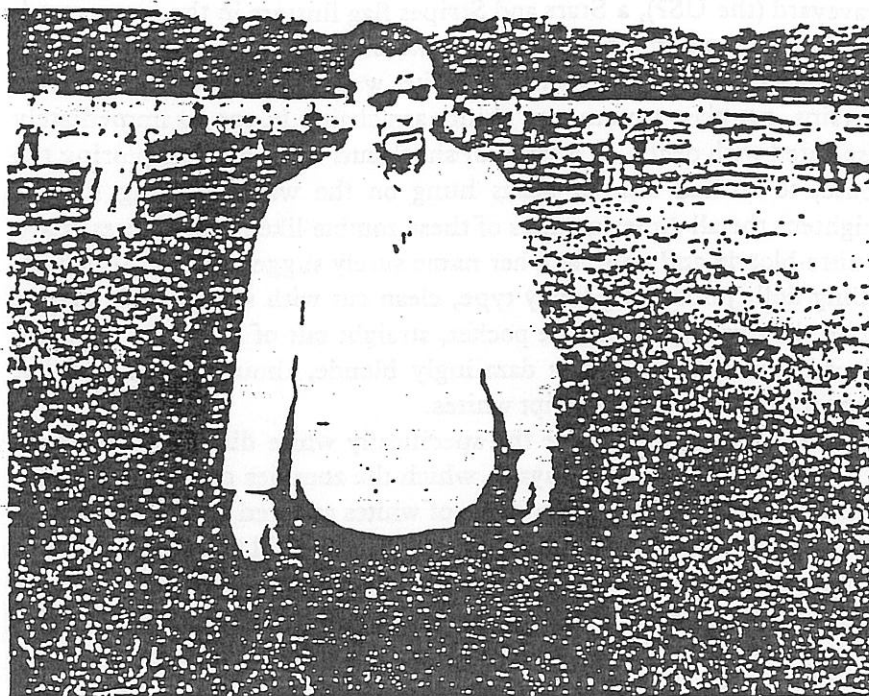
If blacks have more 'life' than whites, then it must follow that whites have more 'death' than blacks. This thought has seldom been explored so devastatingly as in the living dead films directed by George Romero – *Night of the Living Dead* (1969), *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) and *Day of the Dead* (1985).

The *Dead* films are unusual among horror films for the explicitness of their political allegory and unique for having as their heroes 'positive' black men. In general, the latter have been applauded merely as an instance of affirmative action, casting colour blind a black man in a part which could equally well have gone to a white actor. As Robin Wood notes, however, 'it is not true that [their] colour is arbitrary and without meaning'; Ben's blackness in *Night* is used 'to signify his difference from the other characters, to set him apart from their norms'²⁴, while Peter's in *Dawn* again indicates 'his separation from the norms of white-dominated society and his partial exemption from its constraints'²⁵. In all three films, it is significant that the hero is a black man, and not just because this makes him 'different', but because it makes it possible to see that whites are the living dead. I shall confine detailed discussion here to the first film of the trilogy.

All the dead in *Night* are whites. In a number of places, the film shows that living whites are like, or can be mistaken for, the dead. The radio states that the zombies are 'ordinary looking people', and the first one we see in the film does look in the distance like some ordinary old white

²⁴ Robin Wood, *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1986, p 116.

²⁵ *ibid*, p 120.



Whiteness and death
equated in *Night of
the Living Dead*.

guy wandering about the cemetery, somehow menacing, yet not obviously abnormal. John, the brother in the opening sequence, recalls pretending to be something scary to frighten Barb when they visited the graveyard as children; he imitates the famous zombie voice of Boris Karloff to scare her now. Halfway through the film, Barb becomes catatonic, like a dead person. The other developed white characters emerge from where they have been hiding, 'buried' in the cellar. Towards the end of the film, there is an aerial shot from the point of view of a helicopter involved in the destruction of the zombies; it looks down on a straggling line of people moving forward uncertainly but inexorably, in exactly the same formation as earlier shots of the zombies. It is only with a cut to a ground level shot that we realise this is a line of vigilantes, not zombies.

Living and dead whites are indistinguishable, and the zombies' sole *raison d'être*, to attack and eat the living, has resonances with the behaviour of the living whites. The vigilantes shoot and destroy the zombies with equanimity. ('Beat 'em or burn 'em - they go up pretty good', says their leader, Chief McLelland), finally including the living - the hero, Ben (Duane Jones) - in their single-minded operations. Brother John torments Barb while living, and consumes her when he is dead. Helen and Harry Cooper bicker and snipe constantly, until their dead daughter Carrie first destroys, then eats them. The young couple, Tom and Judy, destined generically to settle down at the end of the film, instead go up in flames through Tom's stupidity and Judy's paralysed response to danger.

If whiteness and death are equated, both are further associated with the USA. That the film can be taken as a metaphor for the United States is established right at the start of the film. It opens on a car driving through apparently unpopulated back roads suggesting the road tradition of 1950s and '60s US culture - the novel *On the Road* (1957), the film *Easy Rider*

(1969) with its idea of the 'search for America'. When the car reaches the graveyard (the US?), a Stars and Stripes flag flutters in the foreground. The house in which the characters take shelter is archetypally middle, backwoods North American - a white wooden structure, with lace curtains, cut-glass ornaments, chintz armchairs. It, too, is immediately associated with death, in a series of shock cuts from Barb, exploring the house, to stuffed animal heads hung on the walls. Casting further heightens the all-Americanness of these zombie-like living whites. Barb is ultra-blonde and pale, and her name surely suggests the USA's best-selling doll; John is a preppy type, clean cut with straight fair hair, a white shirt with pens in the pocket, straight out of a Brooks Brothers advertisement. Judy too is dazzlingly blonde, though Tom and the Coopers are more nondescript whites.

What finally forces home the specifically white dimension of these zombie-US links are the ways in which the zombies can be destroyed. The first recalls the liberal critique of whites as ruled by their heads; as the radio announcer says, 'Kill the brain and you kill the ghoul' since, it seems, zombies/whites are nothing but their brains. The film diverges from earlier representations of the black/white, life/death opposition by representing Ben's 'life' quality in terms of practical skill, rather than innate qualities of 'being'. Particularly striking is a scene in which Ben talks about what they need to do as he dismantles a table to make boards for the windows, while Barb takes the lace cloth from it, folds and cradles it, hanging on uselessly to this token of gentility while Ben tries to ensure their survival.

The alternative way of destroying the zombies is burning. Some of the imagery, particularly the molotov cocktails going up around empty cars, seems to recall, in its grainy black-and-white texture, newspaper coverage of the ghetto uprisings of the late '60s, and the 'fire', as an image of Black Power's threat to white people, had wide currency (most notably in the title of James Baldwin's 1963 *The Fire Next Time*). The zombies are scared of light as well as fire, and Ben is associated with both, not only because of his skill in warding off the zombies with torches, but in the way he is introduced into the film. Barb wanders out of the house into the glare of a car's headlights, out of which Ben seems to emerge; a shot of the lights glaring into the camera is followed by another with Ben moving into the frame, his white shirt first, then his black face filling the frame in front of the light, in a reversal of the good/bad, white/black, light/darkness antinomies of Western culture.

The film ends with the white vigilantes (indistinguishable from the zombies, remember) killing Ben, the representative of life in the film. Much of the imagery of *Night* carries over into *Dawn*, despite their many differences (most notably the latter's strong vein of humour). The opening sequence has white militia gleefully destroying living blacks and Hispanics who refuse to leave their tenement homes during the zombie emergency; as in *Night*, the black hero, Peter (Ken Forcé), emerges from the light (this time from behind a white sheet with strong, bright light flooded unnaturally behind it); it is his practical skills that enable

him to survive, skills that only the white woman, Fran (Gaylen Ross), is ultimately able to emulate. Zombieness is still linked with whiteness, even though some of the dead are black or Hispanic – a black zombie who attacks a living black man in the tenement is whited up, the colour contrast between the two emphasised in a shot of the whitened black zombie biting the living black man's neck; in the shopping mall, an overt symbol of the US way of life, editing rhymes the zombies with the shop mannequins, all of whom are white.

Day extends the critique of US values to the military-industrial complex, with its underpinnings in masculine supremacy²⁶. As Robin Wood argues, the white men and the zombies alike are characterised by 'the conditioned reflex', the application to human affairs of relentless rationality; the scientist, Logan, teaches one of the zombies to be human again, which in practice means killing the military leader, Rhodes, out of atavistic loyalty to Logan. When Logan earlier tells Rhodes that what he is teaching the zombies is 'civility', to make them like the living, there is a sudden cut to a sequence of the men gleefully, sadistically corralling the zombies to be specimens for Logan's crazed experiments. The whiteness of all this is pointed, as before, by the presence of a black character, John (Terry Alexander), who is even more dissociated from both zombies and white male values than were Ben and Peter in the earlier films. He is not only black but West Indian, and he offers the idea of finding an island as the only hope for the two white characters (a WASP woman, Sarah, and an Irish man, Billy) not irrevocably implicated in white male values. He and Billy are not only socially marginal, but also live separately from the soldiers and scientists, having set up a mock home together in the outer reaches of the underground bunker they all share. All the other living characters are redneck males, and although there is a power struggle between them, they are both more like each other and like the zombies than they are like John, Sarah or Billy. At the end of one scene, where Rhodes has established his authority over Logan, there is a final shot of John, who has looked on saying nothing; he rubs the corner of his mouth with his finger ironically, then smiles sweetly at Rhodes, an expression of ineffably insolent refusal of the white boys' games.

The *Dead* films are of course horror movies and there is a danger, as Pete Boss has pointed out, that the kind of political readings that I and others have given them may not be easy 'to integrate . . . with the fantasies of physical degradation and vulnerability' characteristic of the contemporary horror film²⁷. However, the use of 'body horror' in the *Dead* films to represent whiteness is not simply symbolism, making use of what happens to the genre's current conventions. On the contrary, body horror is the horror of whiteness and the films' gory pleasures are like an inverted reprise of the images of whiteness that are touched on in *Simba* and *Jezebel*.

The point about Ben, Peter and John is that in their different ways they all have control over their bodies, are able to use them to survive, know how to do things with them. The white characters (with the excep-

²⁶ Robin Wood, 'The Woman's Nightmare: Masculinity in "The Day of the Dead"', *CineAction!*, no 6, August 1986, pp 45-49.

²⁷ Pete Boss, 'Vile Bodies and Bad Medicine', *Screen* January-February 1986, vol 27 no 1, p 18.

tion of Fran, Sarah and Billy) lose that control while alive, and come back in the monstrously uncontrolled form of zombieness. The hysterical boundedness of the white body is grotesquely²⁸ transgressed as whites/zombies gouge out living white arms, pull out organs, munch at orifices. The spectre of white loss of control is evoked by the way the zombies stumble and dribble in their inexorable quest for blood, often with intestines spilling out or severed limbs dangling. White overinvestment in the brain is mercilessly undermined as brains spatter against the wall and zombies flop to the ground. 'The fear of one's own body, of how one controls it and relates to it'²⁹ and the fear of not being able to control other bodies, those bodies whose exploitation is so fundamental to capitalist economy, are both at the heart of whiteness. Never has this horror been more deliriously evoked than in these films of the *Dead*.

STEREOTYPE, REALISM AND THE STRUGGLE OVER REPRESENTATION

Much of the work on ethnic/racial and colonial representation in the media has been "corrective," devoted to demonstrating that certain films, in some respect or other, "got something wrong" on historical, biographical, or other grounds of accuracy. While these "stereotypes and distortions" analyses pose legitimate questions about social plausibility and mimetic accuracy, about negative and positive images, they are often premised on an exclusive allegiance to an esthetic of verisimilitude. ~~An~~ An obsession with "realism" casts the question as simply one of "errors" and "distortions," as if the "truth" of a community were unproblematic, transparent, and easily accessible, and "lies" about that community easily unmasked. Debates about ethnic representation often break down on precisely this question of "realism," at times leading to an impasse in which diverse spectators or critics passionately defend their version of the "real."

THE QUESTION OF REALISM

These debates about realism and accuracy are not trivial, not just a symptom of the "veristic idiocy," as a certain poststructuralism would have it. Spectators (and critics) are invested in realism because they are invested in the idea of truth, and reserve the right to confront a film with their own personal and cultural knowledge. No deconstructionist fervor should induce us to surrender the right to find certain films sociologically false or ideologically pernicious, to see *Birth of a Nation* (1915), for example, as an "objectively" racist film. That films are only representations does not prevent them from having real effects in the world; racist films can mobilize for the Ku Klux Klan, or prepare the ground for retrograde social policy. Recognizing the inevitability and the inescapability of representation does not mean, as Stuart Hall has put it, that "nothing is at stake."

The desire to reserve a right to judgment on questions of realism comes into play especially in cases where there are real-life prototypes for characters and situations, and where the film, whatever its conventional disclaimers, implicitly makes, and is received as making, historical-realist claims. (Isaac Julien's *Looking for Langston*, 1989, dodges the problem through a generic "end run" by labeling itself as a "meditation" on Langston Hughes.) The veterans of the 1960s



Plate 33 History whitewashed in *Mississippi Burning*

civil rights struggle are surely in a position to critique *Mississippi Burning* (1988) for turning the movement's historical enemy – the racist FBI which harassed and sabotaged the movement – into the film's heroes, while turning the historical heroes – the thousands of African-Americans who marched and braved beatings and imprisonment and sometimes death – into the supporting cast, passive victim-observers waiting for official White rescue.² This struggle over meaning matters because *Mississippi Burning* might induce audiences unfamiliar with the facts into a fundamental misreading of American history, idealizing the FBI and regarding African-Americans as mute witnesses of history rather than its makers.³

Thus although there is no absolute truth, no truth apart from representation and dissemination, there are still contingent, qualified, perspectival truths in which communities are invested.

Poststructuralist theory reminds us that we live and dwell within language and representation, and have no direct access to the "real." But the constructed, coded nature of artistic discourse hardly precludes all reference to a common social life. Filmic fictions inevitably bring into play real-life assumptions not only about space and time but also about social and cultural relationships. Films which represent marginalized cultures in a realistic mode, even when they do not claim to represent specific historical incidents, still implicitly make factual claims. Thus critics are right to draw attention to the complacent ignorance of Hollywood portrayals of Native Americans, to the cultural flattening which erases the geographical and cultural differences between Great Plains tribes and those from

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*Post
struct.*

other regions, which have Indians of the northeast wearing Plains Indians clothing and living in Hopi dwellings, all collapsed into a single stereotypical figure, the "instant Indian" with "wig, war bonnet, breechclout, moccasins, phony bead-work."⁴

Many oppressed groups have used "progressive realism" to unmask and combat hegemonic representations, countering the objectifying discourses of patriarchy and colonialism with a vision of themselves and their reality "from within." But this laudable intention is not always unproblematic. "Reality" is not self-evidently given and "truth" is not immediately "seizable" by the camera. We must distinguish, furthermore, between realism as a goal - Brecht's "laying bare the causal network" - and realism as a style or constellation of strategies aimed at producing an illusionistic "reality effect." Realism as a goal is quite compatible with a style which is reflexive and deconstructive, as is eloquently demonstrated by many of the alternative films discussed in this book.

In his work, Mikhail Bakhtin reformulates the notion of artistic representation in such a way as to avoid both a naive faith in "truth" and "reality" and the equally naive notion that the ubiquity of language and representation signifies the end of struggle and the "end of history." Human consciousness and artistic practice, Bakhtin argues, do not come into contact with the "real" directly but rather through the medium of the surrounding ideological world. Literature, and by extension cinema, do not so much refer to or call up the world as represent its languages and discourses. Rather than directly reflecting the real, or even refracting the real, artistic discourse constitutes a refraction of a refraction; that is, a mediated version of an already textualized and "discursivized" socioideological world. This formulation transcends a naive referential verism without falling into a "hermeneutic nihilism" whereby all texts become nothing more than a meaningless play of signification. Bakhtin rejects naive formulations of realism, in other words, without abandoning the notion that artistic representations are at the same time thoroughly and irrevocably social, precisely because the discourses that art represents are themselves social and historical. Indeed, for Bakhtin art is incontrovertibly social, not because it represents the real but because it constitutes a historically situated "utterance" - a complex of signs addressed by one socially constituted subject or subjects to other socially constituted subjects, all of whom are deeply immersed in historical circumstance and social contingency.

The issue, then, is less one of fidelity to a preexisting truth or reality than one of a specific orchestration of ideological discourses and communitarian perspectives. While on one level film is mimesis, representation, it is also utterance, an act of contextualized interlocation between socially situated producers and receivers. It is not enough to say that art is constructed. We have to ask: Constructed for whom? And in conjunction with which ideologies and discourses? In this sense, art is a representation not so much in a mimetic as a political sense, as a delegation of voice.⁵ Within this perspective, it makes more sense to say of *The Gods Must Be Crazy* (1984) not that it is untrue to "reality," but that it relays the colonialist discourse of official White South Africa. The racist

discourse of the film posits a Manichean binarism contrasting happy and noble but impotent Bantustan "Bushman," living in splendid isolation, with dangerous but incompetent mulatto-led revolutionaries. Yet the film camouflages its racism by a superficial critique of White technological civilization. A discursive approach to *First Blood (Rambo)* (1983), similarly, would not argue that it "distorts" reality, but rather that it "really" represents a rightist and racist discourse designed to flatter and nourish the masculinist fantasies of omnipotence characteristic of an empire in crisis. By the same token, representations can be convincingly verisimilar, yet Eurocentric, or conversely, fantastically "inaccurate," yet anti-Eurocentric. The analysis of a film like *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985), sociologically flawed from a mimetic perspective – given its focus on wealthy Asians rather than more typically working-class Asians in London – alters considerably when regarded as a constellation of discursive strategies, as a provocative symbolic inversion of conventional expectations of a miserabilist account of Asian victimization.

* That something vital is at stake in these debates becomes obvious in those instances when entire communities passionately protest the representations that are made of them in the name of their own experiential sense of truth. Hollywood stereotypes have not gone unremarked by the communities they portrayed. Native Americans, very early on, vocally protested misrepresentations of their culture and history.⁶ A 1911 issue of *Moving Picture World* (August 3) reports a Native American delegation to President Taft protesting erroneous representations and even asking for a Congressional investigation. In the same vein, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) protested *Birth of a Nation*, Chicanos protested the *bandido* films, Mexicans protested *Viva Villa!* (1934), Brazilians protested *Rio's Road to Hell* (1931), Cubans protested *Cuban Love Song* (1931), and Latin Americans generally protested the caricaturing of their culture. The Mexican government, threatened to block distribution of Hollywood films in Mexico if the US film industry did not stop exporting films caricaturing Mexico, Mexican Americans, and the Mexican revolution. More recently, Turks protested *Midnight Express* (1978), Puerto Ricans protested *Fort Apache the Bronx* (1981), Africans protested *Out of Africa* (1985) and Asian-Americans protested *The Year of the Dragon* (1985). Native Americans so vigorously protested the TV series *Mystic Warrior*, based on Ruth Beebe Hill's Ayn Rand-inflected pseudo-Indian saga *Hanta Yo* (1979), that the film version could not be made in the US. One (American Indian Movement) pamphlet distributed during protests offered ironic guidelines on "How to Make an Indian Movie":

How to make an Indian Movie. Buy 40 Indians. Totally humiliate and degrade an entire Indian nation. Make sure all Indians are savage, cruel and ignorant ... Import a Greek to be an Indian princess. Introduce a white man to become an "Indian" hero. Make the white man compassionate, brave and understanding ... Pocket the profits in Hollywood.

Critical spectators can thus exert pressure on distribution and exhibition, and even affect subsequent productions. While such pressure does not guarantee sympathetic representations, it does at least mean that aggressively hurtful portrayals will not go unchallenged.

Although total realism is a theoretical impossibility, then, spectators themselves come equipped with a "sense of the real" rooted in their own experience, on the basis of which they can accept, question, or even subvert a film's representations. In this sense, the cultural preparation of a particular audience can generate counter-pressure to a racist or prejudicial discourse. Latin American audiences laughed Hollywood's know-nothing portrayals of them off the screen, finding it impossible to take such misinformed images seriously. The Spanish-language version of *Dracula*, for example, made concurrently with the 1931 Bela Lugosi film, mingled Cuban, Argentine, Chilean, Mexican, and peninsular Spanish in a linguistic hodge-podge that struck Latin American audiences as ludicrous. At the same time, spectators may look beyond caricatural representations to see the oppressed performing self. African-Americans were not likely to take Step'n Fetchit as a typical, synecdochic sample of Black behavior or attitudes; Black audiences knew he was acting, and understood the circumstances that led him to play subservient roles. In the same vein, in a kind of double consciousness, spectators may enjoy what they know to be misrepresentations; Baghdadi spectators could enjoy *The Thief of Baghdad* (1940), for example, because they took it as an escapist fantasy, as a Western embroidery of an already fantastic tale from *A Thousand and One Nights*, with no relation to the "real" historical Baghdad.

THE BURDEN OF REPRESENTATION

The hair-trigger sensitivity about racial stereotypes derives partly from what has been labeled the "burden of representation." The connotations of "representation" are at once religious, esthetic, political, and semiotic. On a religious level, the Judeo-Islamic censure of "graven images" and the preference for abstract representations such as the arabesque cast theological suspicion on directly figurative representation and thus on the very ontology of the mimetic arts.⁷ Representation also has an esthetic dimension, in that art too is a form of representation, in Platonic or Aristotelian terms, a mimesis. Representation is theatrical too, and in many languages "to represent" means "to enact" or play a role. The narrative and mimetic arts, to the extent that they represent ethos (character) and ethnos (peoples) are considered representative not only of the human figure but also of anthropomorphic vision. On another level, representation is also political, in that political rule is not usually direct but representative. Marx said of the peasantry that "they do not represent themselves; they must be represented." The contemporary definition of democracy in the West, unlike the classical Athenian concept of democracy, or that of various Native American communities, rests on the notion of "representative government," as in the

rallying cry of "No taxation without representation." Many of the political debates around race and gender in the US have revolved around the question of self-representation, seen in the pressure for more "minority" representation in political and academic institutions. What all these instances share is the semiotic principle that something is "standing for" something else, or that some person or group is speaking on behalf of some other persons or groups. On the symbolic battlegrounds of the mass media, the struggle over representation in the simulacral realm homologizes that of the political sphere, where questions of imitation and representation easily slide into issues of delegation and voice. The heated debate around which celebrity photographs, whether of Italian-Americans or of African-Americans, will adorn the wall of Sal's Pizzeria in Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* (1989) vividly exemplifies this kind of struggle within representation.

Since what Memmi calls the "mark of the plural" projects colonized people as "all the same," any negative behavior by any member of the oppressed community is instantly generalized as typical, as pointing to a perpetual backsliding toward some presumed negative essence. Representations thus become allegorical; within hegemonic discourse every subaltern performer/role is seen as synecdochically summing up a vast but putatively homogenous community. Representations of dominant groups, on the other hand, are seen not as allegorical but as "naturally" diverse, examples of the ungeneralizable variety of life itself.⁸ Socially empowered groups need not be unduly concerned about "distortions and stereotypes," since even occasionally negative images form part of a wide spectrum of representations. A corrupt White politician is not seen as an "embarrassment to the race;" financial scandals are not seen as a negative reflection on White power. Yet each negative image of an underrepresented group becomes, within the hermeneutics of domination, sorely overcharged with allegorical meaning as part of what Michael Rogin calls the "surplus symbolic value" of oppressed people; the way Blacks, for example, can be made to stand for something beside themselves.⁹ *as individuals*

This sensitivity operates on a continuum with other representations and with everyday life, where the "burden" can indeed become almost unbearable. It is this continuum that is ignored when analysts place stereotypes of so-called ethnic Americans, for example, on the same level as those of Native Americans or African-Americans. While all negative stereotypes are hurtful, they do not all exercise the same power in the world. The facile catch-all invocation of "stereotypes" elides a crucial distinction: stereotypes of some communities merely make the target group uncomfortable, but the community has the social power to combat and resist them; stereotypes of other communities participate in a continuum of prejudicial social policy and actual violence against disempowered people, placing the very body of the accused in jeopardy. Stereotypes of Polish-Americans and Italian-Americans, however regrettable, have not been shaped within the racial and imperial foundation of the US, and are not used to justify daily violence or structural oppression against these communities. The

media's tendency to present all Black males as potential delinquents, in contrast, has a searing impact on the actual lives of Black people. In the Stuart case in Boston, the police, at the instigation of the actual (White) murderer, interrogated and searched as many Black men as they could in a Black neighborhood, a measure unthinkable in White neighborhoods, which are rarely seen as representational sites of crime. In the same way, the 1988 Bush campaign's "allegorical" deployment of the "Black buck" figure of Willie Horton to trigger the sexual and racial phobias of White voters, dramatically sharpened the burden of representation carried by millions of Black men, and indirectly by Black women.

The sensitivity around stereotypes and distortions largely arises, then, from the powerlessness of historically marginalized groups to control their own representation. A full understanding of media representation therefore requires a comprehensive analysis of the institutions that generate and distribute mass-mediated texts as well as of the audience that receives them. Whose stories are told? By whom? How are they manufactured, disseminated, received? What are the structural mechanisms of the film and media industry? Who controls production, distribution, exhibition? In the US, in 1942, the NAACP made a compact with the Hollywood studios to integrate Blacks into the ranks of studio technicians, yet very few have become directors, scriptwriters, or cinematographers. Minority directors of all racial groups constitute less than 3 per cent of the membership of the almost 4,000-member Directors' Guild of America.¹⁰ An agreement between several film unions and the US Justice Department in 1970 required that minorities be integrated into the industry's general labor pools, but the agreement's good intentions were undercut by growing unemployment throughout the industry and by a seniority system that favored older (therefore White male) members. The most recent report on Hollywood employment practices released by the NAACP reveals that Blacks are underrepresented in "each and every aspect" of the entertainment industry. The 1991 study, entitled "Out of Focus - Out of Synch," claims that Blacks are unable to make final decisions in the motion picture process. Despite the success of people like Oprah Winfrey, Bill Cosby, and Arsenio Hall, only a handful of African-Americans hold executive positions within film studios and television networks. Although Blacks purchase a disproportionate share of domestic movie tickets, nepotism, cronyism, and racial discrimination combine to bar Blacks and Black-owned businesses from the industry.¹¹ Spike Lee speaks of a "glass ceiling" restricting how much money will be spent on Black-made films, based on the assumption that Blacks cannot be trusted with large sums of money.¹² And Blacks are not the only disadvantaged group in this respect. While producers assume that Italian-American directors should direct films about Italian Americans, for example, they choose Anglos to direct films about Latinos.¹³

Furthermore, in that the Hollywood system favors big-budget blockbusters, it is not only classist but also Eurocentric, in effect if not in explicit intention; to be a player in this game one needs to have economic power. Third World

filmmakers are asked, in practice, to worship an unreachable standard of cinematic "civility." Moreover, many Third World countries themselves reinforce hegemony by discriminating against their own cultural productions. (Brazilian TV, for example, systematically favors American films.) In the news and information fields, similarly, it is First World institutions (CNN, AP, and the rest) that provide the filter for the world's news. Distribution advantages too tend to lie with the First World countries. Hollywood films often arrive in the Third World "preadvertised," in that much of the media hype revolving around big-budget productions reaches the Third World through journalistic articles and TV even before these films are released locally. American popular music also buttresses the dissemination of Hollywood films, with movies such as *Saturday Night Fever* (1977), *Purple Rain* (1984), *Truth or Dare* (1991), and *The Bodyguard* (1992) all arriving preadvertised by airtime, given that their music has been played on multinational-dominated radio and TV. Even the Oscar ceremonies constitute a powerful form of advertising; the audience is global, yet the product promoted is almost always American, the "rest of the world" usually being corraled into the restricted category of "foreign film."

The "Third World," then, is doubly weakened by cinematic neocolonialism. Brazilian filmmaker/poet Arnaldo Jabor has denounced this situation in an incendiary poem entitled "Jack Valenti's Brazilian Agenda":

Jack Valenti,
with Republican grin, star-spangled tie,
diamond smile and the pale semblance of the perfect
executive
hints of Dick Tracy, George Wallace, Westmoreland, Liberace,
Billy Graham, and so many other robots of infinite guffaw,
at exactly this moment
with his portfolio of indestructible designs
and the audacity that our Foreign Debt has lately given
international executives,
Jack Valenti will descend from his astral airplane
into the land of promised and overdue payments

Jabor inventories the psychic deformations caused by Hollywood:

... under Valenti's non-Brazilian shoes
the red carpets of hospitality will roll
and no one will see the cinematic crimes in the air
nor the remains of our poor dead minds,
no one will see the wounds
since there will be no corpse
no coroner to discover the bruises in our soul
purple wounds, pink wounds, rainbow wounds
stardust in our eyes, the tattooed people we have become

UNTHINKING EUROCENTRISM

of Hollywood's thousand and one adventures
invisible victims of a thousand dazzling fairy wounds
Eastmancolor burns
seven-colored napalm
kodak-yellow of our hunger

For Jabor, even dominant narrative conventions form part of an imperial mindset:

... In a few hours,
Valenti will take from his portfolio of indestructible designs
the most sacred values of the imperial Occident:
logic, symmetry, continuity,
beginning, middle, end,
the happy end, the "individual" and
the sinister American vision of goodness.¹⁴

Jabor's poem assumes a situation in which Hollywood films, with easy access to Third World distribution circuits, display tantalizingly opulent production values virtually impossible for the Third World to emulate and often inappropriate to its concerns. The astronomical budget of one First World blockbuster may be the equivalent of decades of production for a Third World country. As such films bludgeon audiences with their maximum-impact Dolby Sound thrill-a-minute style, they create what one might call a "Spielberg effect" of seduction and intimidation for Third World filmmakers and spectators. At the same time, economic neocolonialism and technological dependency raise filmmaking costs in the Third World itself, where imported film, cameras, and accessories often cost two or three times as much as in the "First World." Even well-established Third World filmmakers are likely to find their work blocked by First World-dominated channels of distribution, and when US distributors buy their films it is often at derisory prices. Major Arab filmmakers – the Egyptian Youssef Chahine, for example – have rarely enjoyed commercial openings in the US. Even radical directors remain dependent on multinational companies for their equipment and film stock. And the film stocks themselves may be said to discriminate against darker-complected people: they are sensitive to particular skin tones and must be "stopped down" or specially lit for others. In *A Diary of a Young Soul Rebel*, Isaac Julien attributes the difficulty in lighting dark and light skin in the same frame to the fact that film technology favors lighter skin tones.¹⁵ The celluloid itself is racially inscribed.

1 * The Eurocentrism of audiences can also inflect cinematic production. Here the
0 dominant audience, whose ideological assumptions must be respected if a film is
to be successful, or even made at all, exerts a kind of indirect hegemony.
"Universal" becomes a codeword for palatable to the Western spectator as the
"spoiled child" of the apparatus. A number of big-budget anti-apartheid films –
Cry Freedom (1987), *A World Apart* (1988), and *A Dry White Season* (1989) –
X betray traces of "representational adjustments" as the values of a radical liberation

struggle are watered down for a predominantly liberal American audience. In these films, Rob Nixon argues, the challenge of bridging cultural difference becomes "overlaid with problems of profound ideological incompatibility." As a result, the story of Steve Biko in *Cry Freedom* gives way to a story of the "friendship that rocked the world." The radical discourse of the Black Consciousness movement is replaced with a "palatable liberal discourse of moral decency and human rights." Nixon contrasts the experience of *Cry Freedom* with the more radical *Mapantsula* (1989), a film that, simply to be made, had to disguise itself as an "apolitical gangster movie." In *Mapantsula*, moralistic concerns do not shoulder aside strategic institutional questions. The film's refusal to observe the "mass market conventions of translating a radical South African narrative into a white-mediated, liberal idiom" resulted in its failure to draw a major distributor.¹⁶

water
down
message
for
white
audience

The production processes of individual films, their means of production and relations of production, bring up questions concerning the filmmaking apparatus, and the participation of "minorities" within that apparatus. It seems noteworthy, for example, that in multiethnic but White-dominated societies such as South Africa, Brazil, and the US, Blacks have tended to participate in the filmmaking process mainly as performers rather than as producers, directors, and scriptwriters. In South Africa, Whites finance, script, direct, and produce films with all-Black casts. In the US in the 1920s, all-White filmmaking crews shot all-Black musicals like *Hearts in Dixie* (1929) and *Hallelujah* (1929). Blacks appeared in these films, just as women still frequently do in Hollywood, as images in spectacles whose social thrust is primarily shaped by others: "Black souls as White man's artifact" (Fanon). And since commercial films are designed to make profits, we must also ask to whom these profits go. J. Uys, the director of *The Gods Must Be Crazy*, paid his star actor N!Xau only 2,000 Rand for *Gods I* and 5,000 Rand for *Gods II*.¹⁷ Similarly, it was not blacks who profited from the American blaxploitation films of the early 1970s; these films were financed, produced, and packaged by the same Whites who received the lion's share of the profits. The thousands of Black Brazilians who played at an out-of-season carnival, with virtually no pay, for the benefit of Marcel Camus' French cameras, never saw any of the millions of dollars that *Black Orpheus* (1959) made around the world.¹⁸

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To a certain extent, a film inevitably mirrors its own processes of production as well as larger social processes. At times, minoritarian filmmakers directing films about police harassment have themselves been harassed by police. During the making of Haile Gerima's *Bush Mama* (1975), a film partly about police repression in the inner cities, the crew members themselves became police targets; Black men with cameras, the police assumed, like Black men with guns, could be up to no good.¹⁹ In other cases, we find a contradiction between a film's overt politics and its politics of production. The presumably anticolonial film *Gandhi* (1982), dedicated to the patron saint of non-violent struggle, deployed a differential pay scale that favored European technicians and performers. In

Hearts of Darkness (1989), the documentary about the production of *Apocalypse Now* (1979), Francis Ford Coppola speaks of the low cost of Filipino labor. In this sense he inherits the same privileges accorded the corporate manager who relocates to the Third World to take advantage of local cheap labor.

Victor Masayesva's *Imagining Indians* (1992) explores the commodification inflicted on Native American culture when it is filtered through a Eurocentric industry, even when those doing the filtering are "sympathetic to the Indian." More precisely, the film examines the problematic negotiations between the Hopi and the producers of *Dark Wind*, a film shot on Hopi land (not yet released at the time of writing). Combining interviews with native extras on Hollywood films, excerpts from the films discussed, sequences showing sacred sites, and a staged story of a native woman's encounter with a condescending White dentist, the film shows the tribal elders raising objections to the project but ultimately going along with it, in a process that recalls the treaty negotiations between indigenous nations and the US government. At times, native resistance has been more aggressive. When Werner Herzog tried to film *Fitzcarraldo* (1982) with Aguaruna Indians, the newly formed Aguaruna Council objected, refusing to be represented in the way Herzog planned, and even surrounded Herzog's camp and forced the crew to move downriver.²⁰

The importance of the participation of colonized or formerly colonized people in the process of production becomes obvious when we compare Gillo Pontecorvo's *La Battaglia di Algeri* (Battle of Algiers, 1966) to his later *Burn* (1970). In the former film, a relatively low-budget (\$800,000) Italian-Algerian co-production, Algerian non-professional actors represent themselves in a staged reconstruction of the Algerian war of independence. The Algerians were intimately involved in every aspect of the production, with actors often playing their own historical roles at the very sites where the events took place. They collaborated closely with screenwriter Franco Solanas, who rewrote the scenario numerous times in response to their critiques and observations. As a result, the Algerians exist as socially complex people, and as agents of national struggle. Pontecorvo's multimillion dollar *Burn*, on the other hand, involved no such collaboration. An Italo-French co-production, the film casts Marlon Brando as a British colonial agent against Evaristo Marques, a non-professional actor of peasant background. By pitting one of the First World's most charismatic actors against a completely inexperienced Third World non-professional chosen only for his physiognomy, Pontecorvo, while on one level subverting the star system, on another disastrously tips the scales of spectatorial fascination in favor of the colonizer, in a film whose didactic intention, ironically, was to support anticolonial struggle. The lack of Caribbean participation in the film's production leads to a one-dimensional portrayal of the colonized, seen as shadowy figures devoid of cultural definition.

THE RACIAL POLITICS OF CASTING

Film and theater casting, as an immediate form of representation, constitutes a kind of delegation of voice with political overtones. Here too Europeans and Euro-Americans have played the dominant role, relegating non-Europeans to supporting roles and the status of extras. Within Hollywood cinema, Euro-Americans have historically enjoyed the unilateral prerogative of acting in "blackface," "redface," "brownface," and "yellowface," while the reverse has rarely been the case. From the nineteenth-century vaudeville stage through such figures as Al Jolson in *Hi Lo Broadway* (1933), Fred Astaire in *Swing Time* (1936), Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland in *Babes in Arms* (1939), and Bing Crosby in *Dixie* (1943), the tradition of blackface recital furnished one of the most popular of American pop-cultural forms. Even Black minstrel performers like Bert Williams, as the film *Ethnic Notions* (1987) points out, were obliged to carry the mark of caricature on their own bodies; burnt cork literalized, as it were, the trope of Blackness.

Political considerations in racial casting were quite overt in the silent period. In *The Birth of a Nation* subservient Negroes were played by actual Blacks, while aggressive, threatening Blacks were played largely by Whites in blackface. But after protests by the NAACP, Hollywood cautiously began to cast black actors in small roles. Nevertheless, even in the sound period, White actresses were called on to play the "tragic mulattas" of such films as *Pinky* (1949), *Imitation of Life* (1959), and even of the Cassavetes underground film *Shadows* (1959). Meanwhile, real-life "mulattas" were cast for Black female roles – for example Lena Horne in *Cabin in the Sky* (1943) – although they could easily have "passed" for White roles. In other words, it is not the literal color of the actor that mattered in casting. Given the "blood" definition of "Black" versus "White" in Euro-American racist discourse, one drop of "Black blood" was sufficient to disqualify an actress like Horne from representing White women.

African-Americans were not the only "people of color" to be played by Euro-Americans; the same law of unilateral privilege functioned in relation to other groups. Rock Hudson, Joey Bishop, Boris Karloff, Tom Mix, Elvis Presley, Anne Bancroft, Cyd Charisse, Loretta Young, Mary Pickford, Dame Judith Anderson and Douglas Fairbanks Jr are among the many Euro-American actors who have represented Native American roles, while Paul Muni, Charlton Heston, Marlon Brando, and Natalie Wood are among those who have played Latino characters. As late as *Windwalker* (1973), the most important Indian roles were not played by Native Americans. Dominant cinema is fond of turning "dark" or Third World peoples into substitutable others, interchangeable units who can "stand in" for one another. Thus the Mexican Dolores del Rio played a South Seas Samoan in *Bird of Paradise* (1932), while the Indian Sabu played a wide range of Arab-oriental roles. Lupe Velez, actually Mexican, portrayed Chinese, "Eskimos" (Inuit), Japanese, Malaysians, and American-Indian women, while Omar Sharif, an Egyptian, played Che Guevara.²¹ This asymmetry in representational power has

generated intense resentment among minoritarian communities, for whom the casting of a non-member of the "minority" group is a triple insult, implying (a) you are unworthy of self-representation; (b) no one from your community is capable of representing you; and (c) we, the producers of the film, care little about your offended sensibilities, for we have the power and there is nothing you can do about it.

These practices have implications even on the brute material level of literal self-representation, that is, the need for work. The racist idea that a film, to be economically viable, must use a "universal" (i.e. white) star, reveals the intrication of economics and racism. That people of color have historically been limited to racially designated roles, while Whites are ideologically seen as "beyond" ethnicity, has had disastrous consequences for "minority" artists. In Hollywood, this situation is only now changing, with star actors like Larry Fishburne, Wesley Snipes, and Denzel Washington winning roles originally earmarked for White actors. At the same time, even "affirmative action" casting can serve racist purposes, as when the role of the White judge in the novel *Bonfire of the Vanities* (1990) was given to Morgan Freeman in the Brian de Palma film, but only as a defense mechanism to ward off accusations of racism.

Nor does chromatically literal self-representation guarantee non-Eurocentric representation. The system can simply "use" the performer to enact the dominant set of codes; even, at times, over the performer's objection. Josephine Baker's star status did not enable her to alter the ending of *Princess Tam Tam* (1935) to have her North African (Berber) character marry the French aristocrat instead of the North African servant, or to marry the working-class Frenchman played by Jean Gabin in *Zou Zou* (1934). Instead, *Zou Zou* ends up alone, performing as a caged bird pining for the Caribbean. Despite her protests, Baker's roles were circumscribed by the codes that forbade her screen access to White men as legitimate marriage partners. Their excessive performance styles allowed actresses like Josephine Baker and Carmen Miranda to undercut and parody stereotypical roles, but could not gain them substantive power. Even the expressive performance of the politically aware Paul Robeson was enlisted, despite the actor's protests, in the encomium to European colonialism in Africa that is *Sanders of the River* (1935). In recent years Hollywood has made gestures toward "correct" casting; African-American, Native American, and Latino/a performers have been allowed to "represent" their communities. But this "realistic" casting is hardly sufficient if narrative structure and cinematic strategies remain Eurocentric. An epidermically correct face does not guarantee community self-representation, any more than Clarence Thomas's black skin guarantees his representation of African-American legal interests.

A number of film and theater directors have sought alternative approaches to literally self-representative casting. Orson Welles staged all-Black versions of Shakespeare plays, most notably his "Voodoo Macbeth" in Harlem in 1936. Peter Brook, similarly, cast a rainbow of multicultural performers in his filmic adaptation of the Hindu epic *The Mahabharata* (1990). Glauber Rocha deliber-

ately confused linguistic and thespian self-representations in his *Der Leone Have Sept Cabecas* (1970), whose very title subverts the linguistic positioning of the spectator by mingling five of the languages of Africa's colonizers. Rocha's Brechtian fable animates emblematic figures representing the diverse colonizing nations, suggesting imperial homologues among them by having an Italian-accented speaker play the role of the American, a Frenchman play the German and so forth.

Such antiliteral strategies provoke an irreverent question: what is wrong with non-originary casting? Doesn't acting always involve a ludic play with identity? Should we applaud Blacks playing Hamlet but not Laurence Olivier playing Othello? And have not Euro-American and European performers often ethnically substituted for one another (for example, Greta Garbo and Cyd Charisse as Russians in *Ninotchka*, 1939, and *Silk Stockings*, 1957)? Casting, we would argue, has to be seen in contingent terms, in relation to the role, the political and esthetic intention, and to the historical moment. We cannot equate a gigantic charade whereby a whole foreign country is represented by players not from that country and is imagined as speaking a language not its own (a frequent Hollywood practice), with cases where non-literal casting forms part of an alternative esthetic. The casting of Blacks to play Hamlet, for example, militates against a traditional discrimination that denied Blacks any role, literally and metaphorically, in both the performing arts and in politics, while the casting of Laurence Olivier as Othello prolongs a venerable history of deliberately bypassing Black talent. We see the possibilities of epidermically incorrect casting in *Seeing Double* (1989), a San Francisco Mime Troupe play about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where an ethnically diverse cast takes on shifting roles in such a way as to posit analogical links between communities. An African-American actor plays both a Palestinian-American and a Jewish-American, for example, thus hinting at a common history of exclusion binding Blacks, Jews, and Arabs.

THE LINGUISTICS OF DOMINATION

The same issues of self-representation arise in relation to language. As potent symbols of collective identity, languages are the foci of deep loyalties existing at the razor's edge of national and cultural difference. Although languages as abstract entities do not exist in hierarchies of value, languages as lived operate within hierarchies of power. Inscribed within the play of power, language becomes caught up in the cultural hierarchies typical of Eurocentrism. English, especially, has often served as the linguistic vehicle for the projection of Anglo-American power, technology, and finance. Hollywood films, for their part, betray a linguistic hubris bred of empire. Hollywood proposed to tell not only its own stories but also those of other nations, and not only to Americans but also to the other nations themselves, and always in English. In Cecil B. de Mille epics, both the ancient Egyptians and the Israelites, not to mention God, speak English. By ventriloquizing the world, Hollywood indirectly diminished the possibilities of

linguistic self-representation for other nations. Hollywood both profited from and itself promoted the world-wide dissemination of the English language, thus contributing indirectly to the subtle erosion of the linguistic autonomy of other cultures.

Since for the colonizer to be human was to speak the colonizing language, colonized people were encouraged to abandon their languages. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o tells of Kenyan children being punished for speaking their own languages, made to carry plaques saying "I am stupid,"²² a situation portrayed in the Senegalese film *Le Symbole* (1994). But the colonized are denied speech in a double sense, first in the idiomatic sense of not being allowed to speak, and second in the more radical sense of not being recognized as capable of speech.²³ It is this historical sense of tying tongues that has provoked protest against countless films, where linguistic discrimination and colonialist "tact" go hand in hand with condescending characterization and distorted social portraiture. The "Indians" of classic Hollywood westerns, denuded of their own idiom, mouth pidgin English, a mark of their inability to master the "civilized" language. In many First World films set in the Third World, the "word of the other" is elided, distorted, or caricatured. In films set in North Africa, for example, Arabic is an indecipherable murmur, while the "real" language of communication is the French of Jean Gabin in *Pépé le Moko* (1936) or the English of Bogart and Bergman in *Casablanca* (1942). In Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), which is pretentiously, even ostentatiously sympathetic to the Arabs, we hear almost no Arabic at all but rather English spoken in a motley of accents, almost all of them (Omar Sharif's being the exception) having little to do with Arabic. And, more recently, Bertolucci's *The Sheltering Sky* (1991), set in North Africa, privileges the English of its protagonists and does not bother to translate Arabic dialog. Given this film history, the relative advance of *Dances with Wolves* (1990), and *Black Robe* (1991), trigger hopes for a sea-change in linguistic representation.

Many Third World filmmakers have reacted against the hegemonic deployment of European languages in dominant cinema. Although English, for example, has become the literary *lingua franca* for postcolonials like Ben Okri, Derek Walcott, Bharati Mukherjee, Salman Rushdie, and Vikram Seth, and in this sense is no longer the possession of its original "owners," it has also been met with the anti-neocolonial demand of return to one's linguistic sources. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's challenge to African writers – that they write in African rather than European languages – has to some extent been taken up by African filmmakers, for whom the use of African languages (with subtitles) is standard procedure. Ousmane Sembene, for example, has filmed in diverse African languages, notably Diola and Wolof. Sembene has also foregrounded the issue of language and power within the colonial situation. His *Xala* (1974), for example, links issues of linguistic and social representation. The protagonist, El Hadji, a polygamous Senegalese businessman, embodies the neocolonized attitudes of the African elite so vehemently denounced by Fanon. Sembene structures the film around the opposition of Wolof and French. While the elite don African dress and make

nationalist speeches in Wolof, they speak French among themselves and reveal European suits beneath their African garb. Many of the characterizations revolve around the question of language. El Hadji's first wife, Adja, representing the precolonial African woman, speaks Wolof and wears traditional clothes. The second wife, Oumi, mimics European fashions, affects French, and wears wigs, sunglasses, and low-cut dresses. Finally, El Hadji's daughter, Rama, representing the progressive hybrid of Africa and Europe, knows French but insists on speaking Wolof to her francophile father, who prefers she seal her lips. Instead, she performs what Gloria Anzaldúa calls "linguistic code-switching" in the face of censorious forces, "transforming silence with (an)other alphabet."²⁴ Thus conflicts involving language-shifts are made to carry a strong charge of social and cultural tension.

As a social battleground, language forms the site where political struggles are engaged both collectively and intimately. People do not enter simply into language as a master code; they participate in it as socially constituted subjects whose linguistic exchange is shaped by power relations. In the case of colonialism, linguistic reciprocity is simply out of the question. In Sembene's *La Noire de ...* (Black Girl, 1966), the female protagonist Diouana stands at the convergence of multiple structures of inequality – as Black, as maid, as woman – and her oppression is conveyed specifically through language. Diouana overhears her French employer say of her: "She understands French ... by instinct ... like an animal." The colonialist here transforms a defining human characteristic – the capacity for language – into a sign of animality, even though Diouana knows French while her employers, after years in Senegal, know nothing of her language and culture. It is this regime of linguistic non-reciprocity which distinguishes colonial bilingualism from ordinary linguistic dualism. For the colonizer, the refusal of the colonized's language is linked to the denial of political self-determination, while for the colonized mastery of the colonizer's tongue testifies both to a capacity for survival and a daily drowning out of one's voice. Colonial bilingualism entails the inhabiting of conflicting psychic and cultural realms.

The neocolonial situation, in which the Hollywood language becomes the model of "real" cinema, has as its linguistic corollary the view of European languages as inherently more "cinematic" than others. The English phrase "I love you," some Brazilian critics argued without irony in the 1920s, was intrinsically more beautiful than the Portuguese *eu te amo*. The particular focus on amorous language reflects not only the lure of Hollywood's romantic model of cinema projecting glamor and popular stars, but also an intuitive sense of the erotics of linguistic neocolonialism – that is, the sense that the imperializing language exercises a kind of phallic power and attraction. Carlos Diegues' *Bye Bye Brazil* (1980), titled in English even in Brazil, looks at English, as it were, "through" Brazilian Portuguese. The name of the film's traveling entertainment troupe – Caravana Rolidei – phonetically transcribes the Brazilian pronunciation of the English "holiday," in a spirit of creative distortion. This refusal to "get it straight"

reveals a typical colonial ambivalence, melding sincere affection and resentful parody. The Chico Buarque theme song features expressions like "bye bye," "night and day," and "OK" as indices of the Americanization (and in this case the multinationalization) of a world where Portuguese-speaking Amazonian tribal chiefs wear designer jeans and backwoods rock groups sound like the Bee Gees, embodying a palimpsestic America. In sum, the issue of linguistic self-representation does not simply entail a return to "authentic" languages but rather the orchestration of languages for emancipatory purposes.²⁵

WRITING HOLLYWOOD AND RACE

Important work has already been done on the ethnic/racial representation of oppressed communities within Hollywood cinema. Critics such as Vine Deloria, Ralph and Natasha Friar, Ward Churchill, Annette Jaimes, and many others have discussed the binaristic splitting that has turned Native Americans into blood-thirsty beasts or noble savages. Native American critics have denounced the "redface" convention, the practice of having non-Native Americans – White (Rock Hudson), Latino (Ricardo Montalban), or Japanese (Sessue Hayakawa) – play Native American roles. They have also pointed to the innumerable representational blunders of Hollywood films, which have had Indians perform grotesque dog-eating rituals (*The Battle at Elderbush Gulch*, 1913), and wrist-cutting ceremonies (*Broken Arrow*, 1950), and have misascribed specific ceremonies to the wrong tribes (the Sioux Sun-Dance presented as the *okipa* ceremony of the Mandans). Churchill points out that even "sympathetic" films like *A Man Called Horse* (1970), hailed as an authentic, positive portrayal, depicts a people "whose language is Lakota, whose hairstyles range from Assiniboi through Nez Perce to Comache, whose tipi design is Crow, and whose Sun Dance ceremony . . . [is] typically Mandan."²⁶ The film has the Anglo captive teach the Indians the finer points of the bow, a weapon which had been in use by Native Americans for countless generations, thus demonstrating "the presumed inherent superiority of Eurocentric minds."²⁷

How can one account for Hollywood films that show some sensitivity to issues of self-representation? A popular film like *Dances with Wolves* demonstrates the need for a nuanced multivalent analysis. The film did break ground by casting Native Americans to play themselves, yet it was less politically audacious in placing its story in the distant past, cordoned off from the contemporary struggles of living native people. However, a thoroughgoing analysis must see the film as contradictory, affirming at the same time that it (1) constitutes a relatively progressive step for Hollywood in its adoption of a pro-indigenous perspective, and (2) in respecting the linguistic integrity of the Native Americans; yet that (3) this progressive step is in part undermined by the traditional split portrayal of bad Pawnees/good Sioux; that (4) it is further compromised by its elegiac emphasis on the remote past and (5) by the foregrounding of a Euro-American protagonist and his (6) idyll with a non-Indian lover; yet that (7) this Euro-American

focalization, given the mass audience's identificatory propensities, also guaranteed the film's wide impact; and (8) that this impact indirectly helped open doors for Native American filmmakers, without (9) introducing major institutional changes within the industry, but also (10) altering the ways in which such films are likely to be made in the future, while (11) still forming part, ultimately, of a capitalist/modernist project that has fostered the destruction of Native American peoples.²⁸ A textually subtle, contextualized analysis, then, must take into account all these apparently contradictory points at the same time, without lapsing into a Manichean good film/bad film binaristic schema, the "politically correct" equivalent of "bad object" criticism.²⁹

A number of scholars, notably Donald Bogle, Daniel Leab, James Snead, Jim Pines, Jacquie Jones, Pearl Bowser, Clyde Taylor, and Thomas Cripps, have explored how preexisting stereotypes – for example the jiving sharpster and shuffling stage sambo – were transferred from antecedent media to film. In *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies and Bucks*, Bogle surveys representations of Blacks in Hollywood cinema, especially foregrounding the unequal struggle between Black performers and the stereotypical roles offered them by Hollywood. Bogle's very title announces the five major stereotypes:

1. the servile "Tom" (going back to Uncle Tom in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*);
2. the "Coon" (Step'n Fetchit is the archetypal example), a type itself subdivided into the "pickanniny" (the harmless eye-popping clown figure) and the Uncle Remus (naive, congenial folk philosopher);
3. the "Tragic Mulatto," usually a woman, victim of a dual racial inheritance, who tries to "pass for White" in such films as *Pinky* and *Imitation of Life*; or else the demonized mulatto man, devious and ambitious, like Silas Lynch in *Birth of a Nation*;
4. the "Mammy," the fat, cantankerous but ultimately sympathetic female servant who provides the glue that keeps households together (the Aunt Jemima "handkerchief head" is one variant), such as Hattie McDaniel in *Gone with the Wind*; and
5. the "Buck," the brutal, hypersexualized Black man, a figure of menace inherited from the stage, whose most famous filmic incarnation is perhaps Gus in *Birth of a Nation*, and which George Bush resuscitated for electoral purposes in the figure of Willie Horton.

Bogle's book goes beyond stereotypes to focus on the ways African-American performers have "signified" and subverted the roles forced on them. For Bogle, the history of Black performance is one of battling against confining types and categories, a battle homologous to the quotidian struggle of three-dimensional Blacks against the imprisoning conventions of an apartheid-style system. It is interesting to compare Bogle's largely implicit theory of performance in film with James C. Scott's anthropology of performance and resistance in everyday life. If we see performance as completely determined from above, Scott argues, we "miss the agency of the actor in appropriating the performance for his own

ends."³⁰ Thus subaltern performance encodes, often in sanitized, ambiguous ways, what Scott calls the "hidden transcripts" of a subordinated group. A kind of "euphemization" occurs when hidden transcripts are expressed within power-laden situations by actors who prefer to avoid the sanctions that a direct statement might bring. At their best, Black performances undercut stereotypes by individualizing the type or slyly standing above it. The "flamboyant bossiness" of McDaniel's "Mammy" in *Gone with the Wind*, her way of looking Scarlett right in the eye, within this perspective, indirectly translates hostility toward a racist system. Bogle emphasizes the resilient imagination of Black performers obliged to play against script and studio intentions, their capacity to turn demeaning roles into resistant performance. Thus "each major black actor of the day managed to reveal some unique quality of voice or personality that audiences immediately responded to. Who could forget Bojangles' urbanity? Or Rochester's cement-mixer voice? Or Louise Beavers' jollity? Or Hattie McDaniel's haughtiness?"³¹ Performance itself intimated liberatory possibilities.

Historically, Hollywood has tried to "teach" Black performers how to conform to its own stereotypes. Beavers' voice had no trace of dialect or southern patois; she had to school herself in the southern drawl considered compulsory for Black performers. Robert Townsend's *Hollywood Shuffle* (1987) satirizes these racial conventions by having White directors oblige Black actors to conform to White stereotypes about Blackness. The White directors give lessons in street jive, gestures and mannerisms, all of which the Black actor-protagonist finds distasteful. The protagonist's own dream, presented in a fantasy sequence, is to play prestigious hero roles such as Superman and Rambo or tragic roles like King Lear. The desire for dignified and socially prestigious dramatic roles reflects a desire to be taken seriously, not always to be the butt of the joke, to win access to the generic prestige historically associated with tragedy and epic, even if Townsend's film relays this desire, paradoxically, in parodic form.

Apart from studies on Native Americans and African-Americans, important work has also been done on the stereotypes of other ethnic groups. In *The Latin Image in American Film*, Allen Woll points to the substratum of male violence common to Latino male stereotypes – the bandito, the greaser, the revolutionary, the bullfighter. Latina women, meanwhile, call up the heat and passionate salsa evoked by the titles of the films of Lupe Velez: *Hot Pepper* (1933), *Strictly Dynamite* (1934), and *Mexican Spitfire* (1940). Arthur G. Pettit, in *Images of the Mexican American in Fiction and Film*, traces the intertext of such imagery to the Anglo "conquest fiction" of writers like Ned Buntline and Zane Grey. Already in conquest fiction, Pettit argues, the Mexican is defined negatively, in terms of "qualities diametrically opposed to an Anglo prototype." Anglo conquest authors transferred to the *mestizo* Mexicans the prejudices previously directed toward the Native American and the Black. They excoriate miscegenation and repeatedly sound the theme of the inevitable decline and degeneracy of Mexicans due to race mixing: "the Spaniards and their 'polluted' descendants have committed racial and national self-genocide by mixing voluntarily with inferior dark-skinned races."³²

STEREOTYPE, REALISM

In conquest novels, Mexicans are not called Mexicans but "greasers," "yallers," "mongrels," and "niggers". Hollywood inherited these stereotypes – the bandito, the greaser, the "half-breed" whore – along with the positively connoted elite figures of the Castillian gentleman and the high-caste Castillian woman. Morality, in such works, is color-coordinated; the darker the color, the worse the character.³³

A number of didactic documentaries address the issue of stereotypes. The Media Show: North American Indians (1991) critically dissects the portrayal of "Indians" in Hollywood films (including *Dances with Wolves*). Phil Lucas and Robert Hagopian's *Images of Indians* (1979) examines Hollywood films as purveyors of Native American stereotypes. This documentary is divided into five half-hour segments: "The Great Movie Massacre" examines the warrior image of the Indian; "Heathen Injuns and the Hollywood Gospel" addresses the misrepresentation of indigenous religion; "How Hollywood Wins the West" focusses on the one-sided representations of history; "The Movie Reel Indians" speaks of industry attitudes toward Native Americans; and "Warpaint and Wigs" speaks of the constructedness and artificiality of the Hollywood Indian. *Black History: Lost, Stolen, and Strayed* (1967), narrated by Bill Cosby, criticizes the historical misrepresentations and stereotypical portrayals of Blacks. Marlon Riggs' *Ethnic Notions* stresses the pain caused by stereotypes incarnated in racist cartoons, toys, and films, and alternates citations of racist materials with interviews with African-American performers and scholars. Gloria Ribe's *From Here, from This Side* (1988) deploys Hollywood films and archival material to communicate a vision of cultural domination from the Mexican side. The Edward Said-narrated *In the Shadow of the West* (1984) critiques orientalist imagery in part through conversations with Palestinians, Lebanese, and Arab intellectuals living in the US. Renee Tajima and Christine Choy's *Who Killed Vincent Chin?* (1988), a film about the murder by White autoworkers of a Chinese-American whom they took to be Japanese, uses media materials in its portrayal of anti-Asian discrimination. Valerie Soe's *All Orientals Look the Same* (1986) undercuts the orientalizing "mark of the plural" by having very diverse Asian-American faces dissolve into one another. Christine Choy's and Renee Tajima's *Yellow Tale Blues* (1990) juxtaposes media imagery with the actual situations of Asian-Americans. Shu Lea Cheang's *Color Schemes* (1989) spoofs American melting-pot ideals through the metaphor of "color wash" to explore the ambiguities of racial assimilation. Twelve performers evoke four ethnic "wash cycles": soak, wash, rinse, extract. Deborah Gee's *Slaying the Dragon* (1987), finally, uses film clips (for example, from *The World of Suzie Wong*, 1960) and interviews to show how Asian women have been stereotyped as docile and exotic.

Riggs' *Color Adjustment* (1991) chronicles the history of Black representation on TV, moving from the caricatural days of *Amos and Andy* through Black sitcoms like *Good Times* and through *Roots* up to the ultimate Black American family: the Huxtables of *The Cosby Show*. Throughout, *Color Adjustment* speaks less about "authentic" representation than about the fundamental paradigm lurking behind

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most of the shows – the idealized suburban nuclear family. In one of the quoted programs, *All in the Family*, Edith Bunker praises Black progress: “They used to all be servants, and maids, and waiters, and now they’re lawyers and doctors. They’ve come a long way on television!” But this simulacral meliorism, *Color Adjustment* suggests, is deeply inadequate. Even if TV were peopled exclusively by African-American doctors and lawyers, the concrete situation of African-Americans would not thereby be substantially improved. *Color Adjustment* underlines this contrast between media image and social reality by suggestively juxtaposing sitcom episodes with documentary street footage, sometimes by way of contrast (*The Brady Bunch* versus police attacks on civil rights marches), sometimes by way of comparison (scenes of anti-bussing demonstrators hurling racial epithets juxtaposed with Archie Bunker’s racial inanities). *Fade to Black* (1989), finally, aggressively orchestrates very diverse materials: a capsule history of Blacks in films, Althusser-influenced theoretical interventions, clips from feature films (*Vertigo*, 1958; *Taxi Driver*, 1976), rap music and a hard-hitting voice-over commentary. The voice-overs by two Black men contrast White verbal denials of racism with everyday “proxemic” expressions of fear and hostility: the White motorist who clicks the car door lock upon seeing a Black man, the White matron who clutches her purse upon seeing a Black man approach.

THE LIMITS OF THE STEREOTYPE

We would like both to argue for the importance of the study of stereotyping in popular culture and to raise some methodological questions about the underlying premises of character- or stereotype-centered approaches. (We are not implying that the work of the writers just mentioned is reducible to “stereotype analysis.”) To begin, the stereotype-centered approach, the analysis of repeated, ultimately pernicious constellations of character traits, has made an indispensable contribution by:

1. revealing oppressive patterns of prejudice in what might at first glance have seemed random and inchoate phenomena;
2. highlighting the psychic devastation inflicted by systematically negative portrayals on those groups assaulted by them, whether through internalization of the stereotypes themselves or through the negative effects of their dissemination; and
3. signaling the social functionality of stereotypes, demonstrating that they are not an error of perception but rather a form of social control, intended as what Alice Walker calls “prisons of image.”³⁴

The call for “positive images,” in the same way, corresponds to a profound logic which only those accustomed to having their narcissism stroked can fail to understand. Given a dominant cinema that trades in heroes and heroines, “minority” communities rightly ask for their fair share of the representational pie as a simple matter of representational parity.

At the same time, the stereotype approach entails a number of theoretical-political pitfalls. First, the exclusive preoccupation with images, whether positive or negative, can lead to a kind of essentialism, as less subtle critics reduce a complex variety of portrayals to a limited set of reified formulae. Such criticism is procrustean; the critic forces diverse fictive characters into preestablished categories. Behind every Black child performer the critic discerns a "pickaninny"; behind every sexually attractive Black actor a "buck"; behind every corpulent or nurturing Black female a "mammy." Such reductionist simplifications run the risk of reproducing the very racial essentialism they were designed to combat.

This essentialism generates in its wake a certain ahistoricism; the analysis tends to be static, not allowing for mutations, metamorphoses, changes of valence, altered function; it ignores the historical instability of the stereotype and even of language. Some of the basic terminology invoked by Bogle was not always anti-Black. The word "coon," for example, originally referred to rural Whites, becoming a racial slur only around 1848. At the time of the American revolution, the term "buck" evoked a "dashing, virile young man"; and became associated with Blacks only after 1835.³⁵ Stereotype analysis also fails to register the ways that imagery might be shaped, for example, by structural changes in the economy. How does one reconcile the "lazy Mexican" from the "greaser films" with the media's present-day "illegal alien" overly eager to work long hours at half pay? On the other hand, images may change, while their function remains the same, or vice versa. Riggs' *Ethnic Notions* explains that the role of the Uncle Tom was not to represent Blacks but rather to reassure Whites with a comforting image of Black docility, just as the role of the Black buck, ever since Reconstruction, has been to frighten Whites in order to subordinate them to elite manipulation, a device invented by southern Dixiecrats but subsequently adopted by the Republican Party. The positive images of TV sitcoms with Black casts, such as *Different Strokes* and *The Jeffersons*, Herman Gray argues, idealize "racial harmony, affluence, and individual mobility" and thus "deflect attention from the persistence of racism, inequality, and differential power."³⁶ The Huxtables' success, as Jhally and Lewis put it, "implies the failure of the majority of black people."³⁷ Contemporary stereotypes, moreover, are inseparable from the long history of colonialist discourse. The "sambo" type is on one level merely a circumscribed characterological instantiation of the infantilizing trope. The "tragic mulatto", in the same vein, is a cautionary figure premised on the trope of purity, the loathing of mixing characteristic of a certain racist discourse. Similarly, many of the scandalously racist statements discussed in the media are less eccentric views than throwbacks to colonialist discourses. Seen in historical perspective, TV commentator Andy Rooney's widely censured remark that Blacks had "watered down their genes" is not a maverick "opinion" but rather a return to the nostrums of "racial degeneracy" theories.

A recent *Tom Brokaw Report* (April 1993) on the subject of immigration illustrates the need to historicize the discussion of stereotyping and media racism. In the report, we accompany the efforts of the border police to catch "illegal

* Theoretical pitfalls of a stereotype research

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Function

cosplay

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Mexican Immigrant AS

UNTHINKING EUROCENTRISM

*mexicans
illegal
aliens*

aliens" coming from Mexico. In the greenish light of surveillance cameras, we see the "aliens" making their way over fences, across highways, through cracks. The portrayal suggests a kind of ineradicable vermin who proliferate like mice and are just as difficult to stomp out. One of "them" appears briefly, not to explain their perspective but only to warn that nothing will stop them, that arrest and expulsion are not major obstacles. There is no historicization, nothing about the brutality of the border police, and no explanation that this entire area was once part of Mexico, that "illegal" Mexicans were there before "legal" Anglos, and that many Chicanos and Mexicans regard themselves as part of a transborder nation. We then move to New York, where a Black Dominican medic reports on the high levels of crime in the neighborhood he serves; he calls for more "selective" immigration. After hearing about the "bad" ethnics (predictably Black and Latino), we meet the "good ethnics": this time Russian Jews who work hard, do not complain, and are deeply appreciative of America's gifts. The same signs shift valence according to an ethnic hierarchy. Both Dominicans and Russians are shown dancing, for example, but only with the Russians does the voice-over "anchor" the dancing as a sign of "*joie de vivre*." Then we meet another "model minority," a Korean businessman who "teaches discipline" to young Blacks, who praise the Korean for improving their neighborhood. The Koreans, we are told, work long hours, respect their elders, and get ahead, but their success causes resentment. (Given the LA rebellions, we suspect that the "resenters" might be Blacks and Latinos.) Three White male "experts" address us: one, a liberal, argues for tolerance; the other two argue for greater restrictions. The few Black voices in the program speak up not for their community but rather for other communities (the Koreans) or for stricter immigration policy; no one speaks up for the Blacks. Not a word about racism, about widely divergent histories and relations to colonialism, slavery, or capitalism.

A moment's reflection reveals why this scenario seems so familiar. We are hearing echoes of the nineteenth-century racial hierarchy theories developed by such thinkers as Hegel, Gobineau, and Renan, now embedded in "culture of poverty" ideology. For Gobineau, Blacks are on the lowest rung, incapable of development, while the "Yellow" race is superior to the Black, but still passive and susceptible to despotism. The White race, characterized by intelligence, orderliness, and a taste for liberty, occupies the top position. For Renan too, Blacks (along with indigenous peoples) are at the bottom, with Asians as an "intermediate race" and White Europeans positioned at the top. In the Brokaw program, the qualities posited have changed (the Asians are no longer passive but rather hardworking; European Jews, once the object of anti-Semitic hostility, have been promoted), yet the basic hierarchizing mechanism remains intact. White superiority is not so much asserted as assumed – Whites are the objective ones, the experts, the uncontroversial ones, those who cause no problems, those who judge, those "at home" in the world, whose prerogative it is to create laws in the face of alien disorder.

pepfall → The focus on "good" and "bad" characters in image analysis confronts racist

discourse on that discourse's favored ground. It easily slides into moralism, and thus into fruitless debates about the relative virtues of fictive characters (seen not as constructs but as if they were real flesh-and-blood people) and the correctness of their fictional actions. This kind of anthropocentric moralism, deeply rooted in Manichean schemas of good and evil, leads to the treatment of complex political issues as if they were matters of individual ethics, in a manner reminiscent of the morality plays staged by the right, in which virtuous American heroes do battle against demonized Third World villains. Thus Bush/Reagan regime portrayals of its enemies drew on the "Manichean allegories" (in the words of Abdul Jan Mohamed) of colonialism: the Sandinistas were portrayed as latter-day banditos, the *mestizo* Noriega was made to incarnate Anglo phobias about Latino men (violent, drug-dealing, voodoo-practicing), and Saddam Hussein triggered the intertextual memory of Muslim fanatics and Arab assassins.

The media discussion of racism often reflects this same personalistic bias. Mass-media debates often revolve around sensational accusations of personal racism; the accusation and the defense are framed in individual terms. Accused of racism for exploiting the image of Willie Horton, Bush advertised his personal animosity toward bigotry and his tenderness for his little brown grandchildren, exemplifying an ideological penchant for personalizing and moralizing essentially political issues. The usual sequence in media accusations of racism, similarly, is that the racist statement is made, offense is expressed, punishment is called for: all of which provokes a series of counter-statements – that the person in question is not racist, that some of the person's best friends belong to the race in question, and so forth. The process has the apparently positive result of placing certain statements beyond the pale of civil speech; blatant racism is stigmatized and punished. But the more subtle, deeper forms of discursively and institutionally structured racism remain unrecognized. The discussion has revolved around the putative racism of a single individual; the problem is assumed to be personal, ethical. The result is a lost opportunity for antiracist pedagogy: racism is reduced to an individual, attitudinal problem, distracting attention from racism as a systematic self-reproducing discursive apparatus that itself shapes racist attitudes. Stereotypic analysis is likewise covertly premised on individualism in that the individual character, rather than larger social categories (race, class, gender, nation, sexual orientation), remains the point of reference. Individual morality receives more attention than the larger configurations of power. This apolitical approach to stereotypes allows pro-business "content analysts" to lament without irony the TV's "stereotyping" of American businessmen, forgetting that television as an institution, at least, is permeated by the corporate ethos, that its commercials and even its shows are commercials for business.

The focus on individual character also misses the ways in which social institutions and cultural practices, as opposed to individuals, can be misrepresented without a single character being stereotyped. The flawed mimesis of many Hollywood films dealing with the Third World, with their innumerable ethnographic, linguistic, and even topographical blunders, has less to do with

stereotypes *per se* than with the tendentious ignorance of colonialist discourse. The social institutions and cultural practices of a people can be denigrated without individual stereotypes entering into the question. The media often reproduce Eurocentric views of African spirit religions, for example, by regarding them as superstitious cults rather than as legitimate belief-systems, prejudices enshrined in the patronizing vocabulary ("animism," "ancestor worship," "magic") used to discuss the religions.³⁸ Within Eurocentric thinking, superimposed Western hierarchies work to the detriment of African religions:

1. oral rather than written, they are seen as lacking the cultural imprimatur of the religions "of the Book" (when in fact the text simply takes distinct, oral-semiotic form, as in Yoruba praise songs);
2. they are regarded as polytheistic rather than monotheistic (a debatable hierarchy and in any case a misrepresentation of most African religions);
3. they are viewed as superstitious rather than scientific (an inheritance from the positivist view of religion as evolving from myth to theology to science), when in fact all religions involve a leap of faith;
4. they are considered disturbingly corporeal and ludic (danced) rather than abstractly and austere theological;
5. they are thought insufficiently sublimated (for example, involving actual animal sacrifice rather than symbolic or historically commemorative sacrifice); and
6. they are seen as wildly gregarious, drowning the personality in the collective transpersonal fusions of trance, rather than respecting the unitary, bounded individual consciousness. The Christian ideal of the *visio intellectualis*, which Christian theology inherited from the neo-Platonists, flees in horror from the plural trances and visions of the "trance" religions of Africa and of many indigenous peoples.³⁹ In a less Eurocentric perspective, all these "deficiencies" might become advantages: the lack of a written text precludes fundamentalist dogmatism; the multiplicity of spirits allows for historical change; bodily possession betokens an absence of puritanical asceticism; the dance and music are an aesthetic resource.

Diasporic syncretic religions of African origin are almost invariably caricatured in dominant media. The affiliation of such "voodoo" films as *Voodoo Man* (1944), *Voodoo Woman* (1957), and *Voodoo Island* (1957) with the horror genre already betrays a viscerally phobic attitude to African religion. But in recent films positivist phobias about "magical" practices, coupled with monotheist diabolization of "godless" rituals, still surface. *The Believers* (1986) presents Santeria as a cult dominated by ritual child-murderers, in a manner reminiscent of the "unspeakable rites" invoked by colonialist literature. Any number of films eroticize African religion in a way that betrays ambivalent attraction and repulsion. *Angel Heart* (1987) has Lisa Bonet, as Epiphany Proudfoot the voodoo priestess, thrash around with Mickey Rourke in a sanguinary love scene. Another Mickey Rourke vehicle, *Wild Orchid* (1989), exploits the religious atmosphere of

the Afro-Brazilian religion Candomblé as what Tomas Lopez-Pumarejo calls an "Afro-dysiac." And the Michael Caine comedy *Blame it on Rio* (1984) stages Umbanda as a frenetic orgy in which the priestess (*mãe de santo*) doles out amorous advice in English to tourists.⁴⁰ The electronic media also participate in these defamatory portrayals. Local "Eyewitness News" reports, in New York at least, present Santeria as a problem for law enforcement, or as an issue of "cruelty to animals." Habitual chicken-eaters, forgetful of the scandalous conditions of commercial poultry production, become horrified at the ritual slaughter of small numbers of chickens, while officials openly call for an "end to Santeria," a call unthinkable in the case of "respectable" religions.⁴¹ In sum, Eurocentric procedures can treat complex cultural phenomena as deviant without recourse to a character stereotype. point

A moralistic and individualistic approach also ignores the contradictory nature of stereotypes. Black figures, in Toni Morrison's words, come to signify polar opposites: "On the one hand, they signify benevolence, harmless and servile guardianship and endless love," and on the other "insanity, illicit sexuality, chaos."⁴² A moralistic approach also sidesteps the issue of the relative nature of "morality," eliding the question: positive for whom? It ignores the fact that oppressed people might not only have a *different* vision of morality, but even an *opposite* vision of a hypocritical moralism which not only covers over institutional injustice but which is also oppressive in itself. Even the Decalogue becomes less sacrosanct in bitter situations of social oppression. Within slavery, for example, might it not be admirable and therefore "good" to lie to, manipulate, and even murder a slave-driver? The "positive image" approach assumes a bourgeois morality intimately linked to status quo politics. What is seen as "positive" by the dominant group, for instance the acts of those "Indians" in westerns who spy for the Whites, might be seen as treason by the dominated group. The taboo in Hollywood was not so much on "positive images" but rather on images of racial anger, revolt, and empowerment. politics of "positive" what is position?

The privileging of character over narrative and social structure places the burden on oppressed people to be "good" rather than on the privileged to remove the knife from the back. The counterpart of the "good Black" on the other side of the racial divide is the pathologically vicious racist Richard Widmark in *No Way Out* (1950) or Bobby Darin in *Pressure Point* (1962). Such films let "ordinary racists" off the hook, unable to recognize themselves in the raving maniacs on the screen. And in order to be equal, the oppressed are asked to be better, whence all the stoic 'ebony saints' (Bogle's words) of Hollywood, from Louise Beavers in *Imitation of Life* (1934 version), through Sidney Poitier in *The Defiant Ones* (1961), to Whoopi Goldberg in *Clara's Heart* (1988). Furthermore, the saintly Black forms a Manichean pair with the demon Black, in a moralistic schema reminiscent of that structuring *Cabin in the Sky*. Saints inherit the Christian tradition of sacrifice and tend to be desexualized, deprived of normal human attributes, along the lines of the "Black eunuch," cast in decorative or subservient poses.⁴³ The privileging of positive images also elides the patent

Critique
Approach

* differences, the social and moral heteroglossia (Bakhtin's term signifying "many-languagedness"), characteristic of any social group. A cinema of contrivedly positive images betrays a lack of confidence in the group portrayed, which usually itself has no illusions concerning its own perfection. A cinema in which all the Black characters resembled Sidney Poitier might be as much a cause for alarm as one in which they all resembled Step'n Fetchit. It is often assumed, furthermore, that control over representation leads automatically to the production of "positive images." But African-made films like *Laaqi* (1991) and *Finzan* (1990) do not offer positive images of African society; rather, they offer critical African perspectives on African society. The demand that Third World or minoritarian filmmakers produce only "positive images," in this sense, can be a sign of anxiety. Hollywood, after all, has never worried about sending films around the world which depict the US as a violent land. Rather than deal with the contradictions of a community, "positive image" cinema prefers a mask of perfection.

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* Image analysis, furthermore, often ignores the issue of function. Tonto's "positive" image, in the *Lone Ranger* series, is less important than his structural subordination to the White hero and to expansionist ideology. Similarly, a certain cynical integrationism simply inserts new heroes and heroines, this time drawn from the ranks of the oppressed, into the old functional roles that were themselves oppressive, much as colonialism invited a few assimilated "natives" to join the club of the "elite." *Shaft* (1971) simply inserts Black heroes into the actantial slot formerly filled by White ones to flatter the fantasies of a certain sector (largely male) of the Black audience. Even the South African film industry under apartheid could entertain with Black Rambos and Superspades.⁴⁴ Other films, such as *In the Heat of the Night* (1967), *Pressure Point*, the *Beverly Hills Cop* series with Eddie Murphy (1984, 1987), and, more complexly, *Deep Cover* (1992), place Black characters in highly ambiguous roles as law-enforcers. The television series *Roots*, finally, used positive images as part of a cooptive version of Afro-American history. The series' subtitle – "The Saga of an American Family" – signals an emphasis on the European-style nuclear family (retrospectively projected on to Kunta's life in Africa) in a film which casts Blacks as just another immigrant group making its way toward freedom and prosperity in democratic America. As Riggs' *Color Adjustment* points out, *Roots* paved the way for *The Cosby Show* by placing an upscale Black family in the preexisting "slot" of the idealized white family sitcom, with Cliff Huxtable as benevolent paterfamilias; a liberal move in some respects but one still tied to a conservative valorization of family. John Downing, in contrast, finds *The Cosby Show* more ideologically ambiguous, on the one hand offering an easy pride in African-American culture, and on the other celebrating the virtues of middle class existence in order to obscure structural injustice and racial discrimination.⁴⁵

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Cosby Show
Roots

easy for
whom

Positive Image Approach

STEREOTYPE, REALISM

PERSPECTIVE, ADDRESS, FOCALIZATION

* A "positive image" approach also ignores the question of perspective and the social positioning both of the filmmakers and the audience. We cannot equate the stereotyping performed "from above" with stereotyping "from below," where the stereotype is used as it were "in quotes," recognized as a stereotype and used to new ends. The theater group Culture Clash for example, invokes stereotypes about Chicanos, but always within a sympathetic Chicano perspective. The notion of positive images disallows this kind of "insider satire," the affectionate self-mockery by which an ethnic group makes fun of itself. Spike Lee's School Daze (1988) also applies stereotypes for its own purposes, subverting the segregationist connotations of the all-Black musical in order to explore intraracial tensions within the African-American community. School Daze comically stages the ideological and class tensions between White-identified and Black-identified African-Americans. Instead of resorting to the usual community-delegate status of African-Americans, the film liberates narrative space to play out the contradictions of a heterogeneous community, demonstrating the confidence of a director who, whatever his notorious blindspots (especially in terms of gender and sexuality), is ready to give voice to a polyphony of conflicting voices. Indeed, questions of address are as crucial as questions of representation. Who is speaking through a film? Who is imagined as listening? Who is actually listening? Who is looking? And what social desires are mobilized by the film?

A "positive image" approach also elides issues of point-of-view and what Gerard Genette calls "focalization." Genette's reformulation of the classic literary question of "point-of-view" reaches beyond character perspective to the structuring of information within the story world through the cognitive-perceptual grid of its "inhabitants."⁴⁶ The concept is illuminating when applied to liberal films which furnish the "other" with a "positive" image, appealing dialog, and sporadic point-of-view shots, yet in which European or Euro-American characters remain radiating "centers of consciousness" and "filters" for information, the vehicles for dominant racial/ethnic discourses. Many liberal Hollywood films about the Third World or about minoritarian cultures in the First World deploy a European or Euro-American character as a mediating "bridge" to other cultures portrayed more or less sympathetically. The First World journalists in *Under Fire* (1983), *Salvador* (1986), *Missing* (1982), *The Year of Living Dangerously* (1983), and *Circles of Deceit* (1982) inherit the "in-between" role traditionally assigned to the colonial traveler and later to the anthropologist: the role of the one who "reports back." The mediating character initiates the spectator into otherized communities; Third World and minoritarian people, it is implied, are incapable of speaking for themselves. Unworthy of stardom either in the movies or in political life, they need a go-between in the struggle for emancipation.

The character whose point-of-view predominates need not be the "carrier" of the "norms of the text." Oswaldo Censoni's *João Negrinho* (1954), for example, is entirely structured around the perspective of its focal character, an elderly

What is the question of perspective?

P.O.V. & focalization

Blind Side - Nice White Lady

Brazilian ex-slave. But while the film seems to present all its events from João's point of view, apparently to elicit total sympathy with him, what it in fact elicits sympathy for is a paternalistic vision of "good" Blacks leaving their destiny in the hands of well-intentioned White abolitionists. One finds a related ambiguity in liberal films that privilege European mediators over their Third World (object) of sympathy – the Palestinians in *Hanna K.* (1983); the Indians in *Passage to India* (1984), the African-Americans in *Mississippi Burning*, the Nicaraguans in *Under Fire*, the Indians in *City of Joy* (1990). A recent episode of the TV show *Travel* (April 26, 1992), similarly, glorifies an elderly British woman who helps children in Peru. The *mise-en-scène* foregrounds her as she leads the group singing of "My Bonnie Lies over the Ocean." Throughout she is focalized as a kind of haloed White savior of the oppressed, within an ideology that posits individual altruism as the sole legitimate force for social change. The Third World characters have a subsidiary function in such films and reports, even though their plight is the thematic focus. Media liberalism, in sum, does not allow subaltern communities to play prominent self-determining roles, a refusal homologous to liberal distaste for non-mediated self-assertion in the political realm. In *City of Joy*, what is portrayed as the unrelieved misery of Calcutta – "an inexhaustible object of Christian charity" in the words of Chidananda das Gupta – becomes the scene of Patrick Swayze's *bildungsroman*.⁴⁷ The "other" becomes a trampolin for personal sacrifice and redemption.

To make its didactic thrust palatable to a Western audience, *Hanna K.*, like other recent Middle East thrillers such as *Circles of Deceit* and *The Little Drummer Girl* (1984), has its First World protagonist (Jill Clayburgh) explain Third World oppression. Particularly in the courtroom sequences, Hanna not only speaks for the Palestinian Selim but is positioned by the *mise-en-scène* as physically (and ideologically) closer to the spectator. Dialog and *mise-en-scène* construct her narrative dominance, aligning the spectator with her apolitical humanism. At the same time, the narrative structure allows the spectator to know only as much as she knows, an equation of knowledge between spectator and protagonist that makes possible the film's pedagogical strategy. In the *Bildungsroman* chronicling Hanna's journey from ignorance to awareness of political and sexual inequalities, the spectator's consciousness gradually becomes inseparable from hers.⁴⁸ In films like this, all the ideological points-of-view are integrated into the authoritative liberal perspective of the narrator-focalizer, who, godlike, oversees and evaluates all the positions.

Some liberal films practice a slightly more critical twist on this *bildungsroman* technique. The Dutch film *Max Havelaar* (1978), directed by Fons Rademakers, adapts a popular Dutch novel by Eduard Douwes Dekker (pen name Multatuli), an exposé of colonialism by a civil servant who experienced it first hand. Although the film simplifies the novel's complex system of multiple narrations, it does retain two central elements: the story of Havelaar, a well-intentioned colonial administrator, and the story of the novelist's search for a publisher. After some success as a minor government official on the island of Celebes in

Indonesia, Havelaar is given an Assistant Residency in Lebak, a remote outpost on Java. There he sails into what turns out to be a nest of vipers: his predecessor, we learn, has been poisoned and the murder has been covered up by a falsified medical report. Havelaar confronts the native Regent, a man of duplicitous charm whose enigmatic smile masks despotic greed and who treats the people of Lebak as virtual slaves. Hoping to persuade the Regent to mend his ways, Havelaar offers him money from his own pocket to pay the natives for their work. The Regent smiles benignly, accepts the money, and goes on exploiting. Enraged, and naively assuming that the colonial administration shares his revulsion at the Regent's misdeeds, Havelaar brings his campaign to the Dutch bureaucracy, where he discovers that Dutch colonial officials are accomplices in the Regent's crimes. The corruption stretches all the way from his colonial outpost to the Dutch King. Shorn of both his position and his illusions, Havelaar returns to Holland. His heroic reformism is portrayed as a kind of quixotic madness. About to dive into shark-infested waters, he speaks grandly of his "mission." "Yes," someone replies, "but do the sharks know about that?" Humanitarian do-gooders, the film implies, are apt to be devoured by colonialist sharks. While Havelaar irritates the sharks, he is also unable to join the colonized fishes. His predicament is that of the "colonialist who refuses" (in Memmi's words); social contradiction permeates his every word and gesture. The film's innovation, however, lies in having a bridge character mediate not so much between audience and subject as between the contradictions of colonialism itself.

Thunderheart (1991), a fictionalized version of the struggle of the Oglala-



Plate 34 Compromise focalization: Val Kilmer in *Thunderheart*

Sioux against FBI repression in the 1970s, meanwhile, is focalized through a hybrid character whose sense of identity is radically transformed during the course of the film. The FBI agent (Val Kilmer), on the reservation to investigate a murder, at first denies the Native American side of his identity – he has a Sioux grandfather – then evolves into a fighter on behalf of Native Americans. Parallel to his discovery of the identity of the murderers goes a discovery of his own suppressed identity. The spectator accustomed to liberal point-of-view conventions is surprised to find that the “norms of the text” evolve dramatically during the course of the film. Whereas Hanna in *Hanna K.* merely learns more about the world, without fundamentally altering her structure of thought, the FBI agent in *Thunderheart* presumably undergoes a fundamental change in orientation. Affected by what he learns on the reservation, illuminated by visions, he switches cultural/political allegiance, bringing the spectator with him.⁴⁹

CINEMATIC AND CULTURAL MEDIATIONS

A privileging of social portrayal, plot and character often leads to a slighting of the specifically cinematic dimensions of the films; often the analyses might as easily have been of novels or plays. A throughgoing analysis has to pay attention to “mediations”: narrative structure, genre conventions, cinematic style. Eurocentric discourse in film may be relayed not by characters or plot but by lighting, framing, mise-en-scène, music. Some basic issues of mediation have to do with the rappports de force, the balance of power as it were, between foreground and background. In the visual arts, space has traditionally been deployed to express the dynamics of authority and prestige. In pre-perspectival medieval painting, for example, size was correlated with social status: nobles were large, peasants small. The cinema translates such correlations of social power into registers of foreground and background, on screen and off screen; speech and silence. To speak of the “image” of a social group, we have to ask precise questions about images. How much space do they occupy in the shot? Are they seen in close-ups or only in distant long shots? How often do they appear compared with the Euro-American characters and for how long? Are they active, desiring characters or decorative props? Do the eyeline matches identify us with one gaze rather than another? Whose looks are reciprocated, whose ignored? How do character positionings communicate social distance or differences in status? Who is front and center? How do body language, posture, and facial expression communicate social hierarchies, arrogance, servility, resentment, pride? Which community is sentimentalized? Is there an esthetic segregation whereby one group is haloed and the other villainized? Are subtle hierarchies conveyed by temporality and subjectivization? What homologies inform artistic and ethnic/political representation?

T. An.
Textual
analysis

CHICANO IMAGES

REFIGURING ETHNICITY
IN MAINSTREAM FILM

CHRISTINE LIST

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II

DESTABILIZING ETHNIC STEREOTYPES: THE EARLY COMEDIES OF CHEECH MARIN

The formulation of the concept of stereotyping has been credited to journalist Walter Lippman.¹ He defined stereotypes as mental pictures created by people to interpret the world outside their reach. He stressed that the contents of an interpretation are factually wrong, products of faulty reasoning and that they tend to persist even in the face of knowledge and education. Since Lippman coined the term, extensive research into the prevalence and nature of stereotyping has been undertaken by sociologists.² After reviewing these studies, anthropologist Mahadev Apte states that four conclusions can be drawn concerning the nature of stereotypes. First, stereotypes seem to be present in all societies. Second, stereotypes can be positive or negative. Third, they can be directed towards others or self-oriented, and, fourth, stereotypes can involve a single trait or a configuration of many traits.³

Charles Ramírez Berg points out that ethnocentric prejudice is what differentiates stereotyping from a common category-making process:

The fact that the ingroup creates simplified symbols of the outgroup by selecting a few traits of the Other . . . pointedly accentuates differences. These negatively valued differences form the basis for making the Other inferior and excluding them from the ingroup.⁴

Along these same lines, Linda Williams suggests that the ethnocentric make up of stereotypes also serves the historical imperatives of the stereotyping group.⁵ Thus, stereotypes are a key ingredient in the

hegemony of a society which maintains ethnocentric structures of power.

But the fact that stereotypes are used to maintain ethnic based controls in societies does not imply that stereotyping goes on without resistance. In the U.S., Chicanos and other ethnic groups deploy a variety of defensive proactive strategies to deflect and reshape negative stereotypes. By looking at how ethnic artists have manipulated negative stereotypes to their advantage, it becomes apparent that ethnic filmmakers can also position their work in a similar dialectical relationship to the phenomenon of stereotyping. In the case of the early Cheech and Chong comedies by Cheech Marin and Tommy Chong, one finds a highly skilled reworking of negative stereotypes. Through the use of humor, Marin creates a subversive subtext which undermines the power of caricatures and lays bare the falseness and the prejudicial nature of each stereotype.

ANTI-MEXICAN STEREOTYPES IN THE U.S.

The roots of anti-Mexican sentiment in North America can be traced back to the earliest days of its settlement. English colonization commenced at a time when hatred of Catholicism and Spain was at its worst. Mention of Spain conjured up the brutality of the Inquisition and atrocities of the conquistadors in the minds of Anglo settlers.⁶ Radical Puritans who came from England were one of the most anti-Catholic and pro-nationalist groups to come to the New World. The Puritans ventured here with the goals of undermining Spanish commercial control and spreading the Gospel to American "savages." The hispanophobia propagated by the Puritans was a central element in their cultural teachings and served as a justification for their material domination of the indigenous population.

During the colonial period in U.S. history, English law was used to suppress the Spanish. Early exclusionary statutes banned priests and Jesuits. In New York, Catholics were forbidden to bear weapons and were required to pay a bond as security of good behavior.⁷ Hostilities grew even more intense in the southeastern colonies where small wars were waged by the English against the Spanish, leading to Anglo control of the South.

By the first part of the nineteenth century, the United States had its eye on the Mexican territories in the Southwest. The established anti-Catholic and hispanophobic sentiments which fueled earlier expansionism also influenced the Anglo perception of Mexico. This hatred was combined with a distorted view of indigenous people whom Anglos regarded as "void of all goodness." Englishmen repeatedly accused the Mexicans of indolence, claiming that they did little to exploit their land: "If Christians had the inhabitation thereof, it would be put to a further benefit."⁸ The negative stereotyping provided Anglos with a pseudo-moral argument for a second Mexican conquest.

Negative images of Mexico underwent a period of revitalization after the mid-18th century. North Americans read of indigenous rites of human sacrifice, devil worship and witchcraft.⁹ Many Anglo-American histories relied heavily on the accounts of the Spanish conquerors Cortés and Gómara who were, of course, among the first Europeans to popularize disparaging depictions of the Mexican indigenous population to justify exploitation of them. The derogatory stereotypes were bolstered by "scientific" race theories circulating at the time. One of the more widely accepted theories which contrasted Northern peoples with those of Mexico and the southern hemisphere was called environmentalism. Environmentalists believed that all the great peoples and cultures of the world were found in the temperate zones of the planet. Accordingly, the closer a society lived to the equator, the less likely the possibility for human development.¹⁰ Environmentalist writings characterized Mexican society as barbarous and savage.

Another racial theory used to justify stereotypes of the "inferior" Mexican was miscegenation. Miscegenation was a notion which held that the descendants of racially different parents inherited the worst qualities of each. The Mexican, being *mestizo* (of Spanish and Indian blood) was considered not only indolent, depraved and treacherous, but also unstable and prone to insanity or fits of rage because of his or her mixed blood heritage. A third theory common at the time was called manifest destiny. Its proponents used social darwinism to provide a convenient and seemingly invincible argument for imperialist wars. Darwin, himself, after having studied the westward invasions of Anglos into Mexico wrote:

There is apparently much truth in the belief that the wonderful progress of the United States as well as the

character of the people are the results of natural selection. The US was superior because its population was comprised of the more energetic, restless and courageous men from all parts of Europe.¹¹

Although the propaganda of the period often represented its tainted view of Mexican culture, actually, Anglo-Americans had little significant contact with Mexicans until 1821 when Mexico gained her independence from Spain and granted permission for US citizens to enter the borderlands. Prior to 1821, fewer than 2500 persons of European descent lived in Texas. This figure jumped drastically to over 20,000 during the next decade as adventurers, debtors and ambitious Anglo farmers streamed in. As the number of Anglo-Texans grew, so did their dissatisfaction with the Mexican government. Two key events—the abolition of slavery in Mexico in 1829 and the prohibition of further immigration from the US in 1830 led to open support for secession from Mexico by the Anglos. Their actions culminated in the Mexican American War. Proponents of the invasion argued that three major advantages could be gained: potential mineral wealth, potential black slave territory and potential brown peonage. Any guilty consciences could be assuaged by the common belief that the Mexican was an inferior race unable to take full advantage of his or her country's magnificent resources. The U.S. won the war in 1848 and embarked on a swift takeover of Mexican family lands by Anglo ranchers and businessmen.

In essence, environmentalism and miscegenation and manifest destiny provided European and U.S. aggressors with a biological rationale for the Mexican American War. The various race theories reinforced ethnic hatred as an ugly tradition in U.S. culture. This tradition has yet to be broken. These racial theories have spawned a series of negative Chicano stereotypes which have been deeply imbedded in the national consciousness. Today stereotypes are reinforced by the Hollywood film industry which uses negative Chicano images for cheap laughs and cardboard villains. Anglo directed movies have replaced the race theories of the past with equally damaging propaganda by replaying negative stereotypes for millions of viewers who otherwise have little or no significant contact with the Chicano community.

OVERVIEW OF CHICANO STEREOTYPES IN FILM

Mexican men in early conquest/western novels were termed "greasers." They were characterized as lazy, dirty, stupid; victims of centuries of political chaos, priestly corruption and poverty. According to Arthur Pettit, "the final message of conquest fiction is that the only way the male Mexicans can survive is to accept a permanent inferior position to the conquerors."¹² The racist stereotypes which circulated in U.S. literature easily fed a host of ready-made characters into Hollywood which produced more than 300 "Mexican" themed movies during its first decade.¹³ The most frequently used Mexican stereotypes in the early films were the bandido, the buffoon and the Latin lover. In the twenties, two more roles were added; the caballero and the gangster.

The Mexican Revolution served as a backdrop for many of the bandido films. An excerpt from a silent film shows the stereotyped dialogue spoken by one of the villains/buffoons in *The Bad Man* (1915):

I keel ze man sis morning
Hem call me dirty crook.
I keel some more zis noontime
And steal es pocketbook.¹⁴

Gary Keller suggests that the negative portrayal of rebels from the Mexican Revolution betrays a nervousness that Americans were feeling towards the socialist revolutionary activities across the border. U.S. corporations had heavy investments in Mexico, and the anti-imperialist rhetoric of the revolutionaries threatened to nationalize many of these U.S. held industries. In any case, by 1920, the revolutionary government of Mexico made its first public statement of disapproval of the distorted view of Mexico which had been promoted by Hollywood. The protest continued for many years, peaking during the Cárdenas administration which passed restrictions against importing offensive greaser movies. Mexican Americans also issued public statements of resistance against racist stereotyping. Many Spanish language newspapers energetically protested derogatory depictions of Mexican Americans in early film and fiction.¹⁵

Nevertheless, the stereotyping went on unabated. Gary Keller notes that some of the most popular early silent films which stereotyped

Mexican Americans were the caballero films. The genre was established in 1914 with *The Caballeros Way* and carried on for several decades through the personages of Zorro, Don Arturo Bodega and the Cisco Kid. The heroes in these stories were of pure Castilian blood. By stressing the European lineage of the protagonist the storylines in the caballero films created an ambiguity as to the Mexicanness of the characters. Indigenous Mexican features conveyed negative traits while European attributes signaled acceptance. Often the plots of these serials revolved around the hero vanquishing evil greasers who were in hot pursuit of an Anglo maiden. The Castilian hero saved her "virtue," but he seldom succeeded in marrying her. Thus, the story skirted the issue of miscegenation which the romance plot frequently implied.¹⁶

There also existed a subgenre of caballero films in the early 1930s which Gary Keller calls the gangster-greaser film. Leo Carillo played the stereotype of the gambling, murdering, extorting, pimping border bandido in more than twenty-five of these genre films. Compared to other gangster characters on the screen during that era, Carillo's character was more vile. Despite this stereotyping, Carillo was well respected by the Chicano Community and has a state park named after him in California.¹⁷

The bandido character was central to the depiction of Chicanos in the western film genre and a bloodthirsty symbol which still fuels the Anglo imagination of the region. In many western films the Rio Grande represents crossing over to a place where both the guilty and the wrongly accused can escape the Law (e.g. *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*). Most often the border crosser in westerns merely passes from one violent space to another. This is because it is not the side of the border that is important to the western, but rather, in the western genre the entire border region is delineated as a space where men who can't or won't fit into civilization go to act out their lowest desires. Clint Eastwood's "spaghetti" westerns and Sam Peckinpah's *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* and *The Wild Bunch* are strong examples of films which portray Mexico as a land which sanctions brutality.

Later westerns transformed the bandido into what Gary Keller terms a "brown avenger."¹⁸ Following the lead of the blaxploitation films, characters like Mr. Majestyk were played by Charles Bronson as a half-Mexican and half-Slavic Vietnam vet who can single-handedly rid a town of gangsters and racists. Another example of a Mexican

American superstud character is Jorge Rivero in *Rio Lobo* who brings Arizona land grabbers to justice through retribution. In the nineties, one finds evidence of this bronze warrior stereotype in the film *Clear and Present Danger* in which a Mexican American military recruit is shown to have animal prowess as a mercenary fighter. While these warrior/avenger characters are portrayed as heroes in the narratives, they still falter by their emphasis on violence as an integral aspect of the Chicano personality.

With the decline of the western, Chicanos were relegated to token parts in the background of Hollywood films until in the late seventies and early eighties when certain Chicano characters became the focus of gang movies. *Assault on Precinct 13* (1976), *Boulevard Nights* (1979), *Fort Apache the Bronx* (1980) and *Colors* (1985) are films which showed Chicanos as drug runners and murderous delinquents. Charles Ramírez Berg has pointed out that these Latino gang member/drug runner characters are the modern incarnation of the greaser/bandido types. Still driven by animalistic cravings, the gang member is particularly savage and brutal. Like the bandido, his nature dooms him to come to a tragic end. Reminiscent of the border region of the western, the urban settings for these gang films are mapped as sites where lawlessness and violence prevail.

On occasion Hollywood has deviated from the gangster/bandido stereotype, channeling perceptions of the Mexican as obsessive and passionate into the caricature of the Latin lover. Most often played in earlier films by Mexican actors Ramon Novarro, Ricardo Montalban, Gilbert Roland and Cesar Romero, the sexual appeal of these stars was attributed to their Latinness. Borrowing from the legacy of Valentino, Latin lover characters were suave, tender yet sexually dangerous. This stereotype can still be found today in Jimmy Smit's character in *The Old Gringo* which is typical of the Latin lover. Smit is exceedingly exoticized in the role. His passion is so great that Jane Fonda (an old maid with no interest or sympathies for the Mexican Revolution) follows him across Mexico, risking her own death in the midst of battle. It is interesting to note that *The Old Gringo* was scripted by Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes and directed by Luis Puenzo who is from Argentina. The film provides an example of the way stereotypes are sometimes adapted by Latinos as a perceived positive characteristic of their own culture.

Other exceptions in the Hollywood pattern of negative male stereotyping occurred in a number of social problem films made during the 1930s and 1940s. In films of this genre, Chicanos are portrayed as sympathetic characters. However, while the scripts call for Chicano themed stories, the lead roles flounder from the lack of a Chicano point of view. Bringing an historical reading to the social problem genre and its use of stereotypes, Chon Noriega points out that many of the films of this genre were produced during the era of the Good Neighbor Policy. The effect of the political climate was to cause the Production Code Administration in its overseeing capacity to bifurcate issues pertaining to the Chicano experience in film into two components, Mexican and American. This meant that Hollywood would consider plot elements and character types against a yardstick of what impact they might have on a Mexican international market, not on the Chicano community.¹⁹ Issues pertaining to racism were, thus, never interpreted from a Chicano perspective, leading to scripts which situated the Chicano characters as accepting of their lot in a larger Anglo world.

One case in point is the film *Bordertown* (1935). Actor Paul Muni plays Johnny Ramírez, a young Chicano who stoically forsakes success and all its corruption to return to the *barrio* where more practical ambitions can be realized. The end of the film insinuates that ambition is not part of Mexican identity. In *Right Cross*, Ricardo Montalban is a neurotic boxer whose unfounded bitterness towards Anglos is cured by the kindness of his manager's blond daughter (played by June Allyson). She convinces him that he can fit into white America, and, as a result of her speech, he then learns to adjust. More often than not, troubled Chicanos in the social problem films were unable to help themselves, and required intervention by a white good samaritan.

Unlike what occurred with male roles, the majority of female roles in Hollywood films were played by U.S. actresses of European descent. There were, however, several exceptions to this casting practice, most notably, the Hollywood careers of two Mexican actresses, Dolores del Rio and Lupe Velez.²⁰ Both actresses achieved a high degree of popularity with American audiences. Del Rio was one of Hollywood's top ten money makers of the 1920s.²¹ But the financial success of these two actresses was largely based on the generic personas they portrayed. Del Rio was often cast as the "dark lady." While a stereotype, this image did not necessarily convey a negative type. Charles Ramírez Berg points out that because the dark lady character

possesses sexual powers superior to her Anglo counterparts, she is positioned as more desirable in her films. But while the dark lady figure was shown to be superior to the Anglo, she, nevertheless, remained an oversimplification of the Chicana persona.

Another common Chicana stereotype is the half breed harlot. Ramírez Berg argues that in many films, the harlot is not actually of mixed blood but rather marked as different by her lower social status. Chihuahua (Linda Darnell) in *My Darling Clementine* is a classic example of this type. The harlot is usually played as a slave to her passions, unable to survive without a real man in her life. This stereotype differs greatly from a third Chicana type, the female buffoon.

The films of Mexican actress Lupe Velez supply typical example of the buffoon character. Her movies negate the Latin female's eroticism by making Velez an object of comic derision. Ramírez Berg explains how her role as female clown functioned in *Palooka* (1934):

She is a big city vamp, a Latin golddigger who lures the rural prizefighting champ, Joe Palooka (Stu Erwin) into a life of fast-lane dissipation. Once again, her emotionalism and her inability to restrain her baser instincts—but instead to be controlled by them—conform with the common elements of Hollywood's stereotypical profile of Hispanic women.²²

Commenting from a different perspective on the screen career of Velez, Ana López argues that Velez was:

... outrageous, but her sexual excessiveness, although clearly identified as specifically ethnic, was subsumable. On and off screen, she, like Del Rio was mated with and married North American men.²³

López mentions that the ethnic problematic displayed in Velez' early work—intermarriage, miscegenation and integration—could no longer be directly addressed in the films she made in the forties. The Good Neighbor Policy²⁴ (a U.S. government effort to improve relations with Latin America) dictated that Hollywood dump the more complicated, yet stereotyped sexual character played by Velez (and Del Rio) in favor of Portuguese/Brazilian actress, Carmen Miranda, whom López says

functioned as a "surreal fetish" whose self-conscious artificiality drew attention to its own artificial otherness.²⁵ López gives much credit to Miranda for skillfully exacting numerous musical performances which draw attention to a ridiculous accent in such a way that she is able to call attention to the falseness of the Latin ethnicity coded into the stereotype she plays. In this way, Miranda undermined the buffoon stereotype which Velez had established earlier.

In discussing these female stereotypes it is important to mention the ambiguous nature of the ethnic characterizations. Often films with ethnic characterizations communicate a vague "latin" identity that erases distinct national identities. It is seldom possible to discern whether or not a character is Chicana or of other Latin American decent. This indifference on the part of Hollywood towards ethnic specificity can still be seen in films and television today. Take, for instance, the characters that appeared on the popular television program *Miami Vice* who were marked as non-specific Latino and Latina through stereotyping. The practice carries over to other ethnic groups as well in films which blur the culturally specific traits of various Asian and African peoples.²⁶

I have omitted examples from films by non-Chicanos that portray Chicanos in a nonstereotypical fashion. There have been sporadic attempts at positive and genuine Chicano characters, such as in the films *Salt of the Earth* (1953), *High Noon* (1952), *Stand and Deliver* (1988), *Ballad of Gregorio Cortez* (1982) and *Milagro Beanfield War* (1988). Obviously these positive examples have not made inroads significant enough to battle the ignorance and opportunism of the producers of mainstream media. Unfortunately, the negative stereotypes of Chicanos remain, posing a formidable obstacle for Chicano filmmakers to reckon with.

As Chicano and Chicana filmmakers embark on the difficult task of constructing their own cinematic identity they necessarily inherit the baggage of Hollywood stereotypes. Some directors confront the Hollywood legacy by creating positive Chicano hero figures. Other Chicano directors have opted to construct complex characters using techniques of psychological realism. Cheech Marin has taken the unusual route of using the very same Chicano stereotypes entrenched in Hollywood and turning them on their head through subversive comic techniques. His strategy of deploying negative images to undermine false codes of ethnicity which have structured Anglo perceptions over

centuries poses an innovative solution to the problem of ethnic self-representation in the Hollywood mainstream.

STEREOTYPES AND ETHNIC HUMOR

Ethnic humor is usually understood as a mechanism through which a member of a certain cultural group refers to persons of a different cultural group in a disparaging light by playing upon traits or behavior stereotypically associated with the targeted group.²⁷ Studies have shown that outwardly directed ethnic jokes are made in all cultures and typically refer to the other as stupid, ignorant or unclean.²⁸ When ethnic humor is used by a more powerful group in society to make fun of a minority sector the function of that humor is usually to rationalize various discriminatory practices by the privileged group. For example, derogatory jokes told by Anglos about Blacks and Mexicans in the U.S. often serve to justify racism.²⁹

The general psychological framework that has been applied to derogatory ethnic humor is the concept of ethnocentrism. A useful explanation of the term is provided by Madadev Apte:

. . . attitudes of ingroup adulation and outgroup hate, stereotyping and prejudice must all be considered to be concomitants of ethnocentrism. Treating or thinking of other cultures and people as inferior, for example, is one way of strengthening self-image. Prejudice reinforces ethnocentrism, just as negation of the cultural values of other people nurtures self-esteem and feelings of superiority.³⁰

Apte also mentions that intergroup conflict and control is exacted when ethnics are ridiculed if they do not conform to existing cultural norms. Ethnic humor, he says, exerts its oppressive powers by stressing that ethnicity is permanent and cannot voluntarily be discarded. Because of this, ethnocentric humor has been presumed to be an expression of a human need to vent hostility and aggression. But several social psychologists have taken issue with this position challenging the notion that one can automatically assign malicious intent to the joke teller. Edward Oring asserts that individuals and groups who narrate ethnic jokes do not necessarily accept the negative or pejorative stereotypes of

the target group.³¹ From a similar perspective, R. Middleton expresses his view: "even if a person does not accept the validity of a stereotype, he may be willing to suspend his disbelief temporarily in order to enjoy the humor of the joke."³² This supposition, that ethnic humor directed from outside towards a minority does not always imply racial hatred on the part of the speaker, may have some validity. But, in the final instance, it ignores the central ethical question of how the derogatory ethnic joke harms the targeted ethnic community or individual.

A further context for ethnic humor is when it is used by the ethnic community from its position as the outgroup as a cultural weapon against the majority culture. Freud's theory of how the hostile joke functions as a challenge to authority provides a useful form of reference to understand this type of ingroup ethnic joking. According to Freud, stereotyping (what he refers to as caricature) in hostile jokes is often funny because the stereotypes represent a "rebellion against authority, a liberation from its pressure . . . we laugh at them . . . because we count rebellion as a merit."³³ For Freud, caricature is the act of taking one or a limited number of traits and exaggerating them. Often the degree of incongruity between the reality and the stereotype is very high. In Chicano culture the following joke provides an effective example of humor being used to undermine the dominant Anglo culture and its presumption of superiority over Chicano culture:

An Anglo is left in charge of a Chicano crew assigned to go down into a cesspool and pass buckets of sewage up to him. Instead, when the boss returns, he finds the Anglo in the cesspool passing the buckets up to the Chicanos. Asked to explain, the Anglo replies, "I ain't takin' no shit from no Meskins!"³⁴

Several classic examples of ethnic humor used by an oppressed minority to wound their tormentors can be found in African American culture. Lawrence Levine has put together an excellent study of Black laughter as an oppositional tool. He shows how Blacks have manipulated stereotypes of "the man" in order to confront his hatred.³⁵ Levine recounts how South Carolina Blacks in the 1940's were still telling the story of a supposed exchange between the racist politician Ben Tillman and a Black delegate during the state Constitutional Convention of 1890:

Tillman had delivered a speech in which he disparaged South Carolina's Black population. The Negro delegate arose and denounced Tillman, who the next day responded in an even stronger speech during which he roared "Why you dirty black rascal, I'll swallow you alive." "If you do," his black antagonist shouted back, "You'll have more brains in your belly than you've got in your head."³⁶

Levine also narrates an a joke told inside the African American community which skillfully reverses stereotypes about a Black maid and her white employer who have both given birth to their babies on the same day:

One day the white woman runs into the kitchen crying out in delight, "Oh, my baby said his first word today!" The Black baby in the basket on the kitchen floor looks up and asks, "He did, what'd he say?"³⁷

While ethnic humor is most often associated with jokes that poke fun at ethnicities outside the humorist's own group, ethnic humor can also be directed inwardly as well. This occurs most frequently for the purpose of cultural maintenance by poking fun at members of the group who seek to assimilate into the majority culture. In the Chicano community such humor takes the form of *agringado* joking.³⁸ These jokes ridicule Chicanos who have become too "gringoized" (or too North American) in their attitudes and actions. Self-derogatory ethnic jokes seem to flourish in cultures that have been marginalized. Especially well researched are the uses of self-critical ethnic jokes in Jewish and African American communities. A significant number of these studies of self-directed humor have tended to interpret such behavior in a negative light. Relying on a reductionist theoretical approach by which all ethnic humor is seen as socially aggressive, researchers concluded that self-derogatory humor was masochistic, a sign of self-hatred and revulsion. Edward Oring has challenged this view by noting that such approaches failed to distinguish a simple communicative act from artistic expression. He added, ethnic jokes are primarily structures of ideas to be perceived intellectually. They are based on the creation and perception of an appropriate incongruity.³⁹

Along these same lines, cultural theorist Sandy Cohen argues that ethnic stereotypes can be cultivated by the ingroup as a means of group identification and moral support:

Such jokes reflect the social conditions of the minority: they show conflicts within the group, reinforce acceptable behavior and ridicule deviance from the group norm. The large amount of hostile jokes seems to indicate an American need for ethnic origins and stereotypes, serving not mere revenge for humiliation but also the examination of one's own value system by comparing it to the values of the majority.⁴⁰

Cohen points to the frequent use of irony in ethnic jokes by ethnic sectors who choose to replicate negative stereotypes of themselves in their jokes. Trickster stories brought to the U.S. in the Old World folklore of immigrants exemplify this. Thus, we have the Jewish schlemazel waiter who because he is "inept," "accidentally" spills hot soup on the patronizing customer. In Black culture, the joke is told of the slave who, because he is "incompetent," burns down his master's new barn. By employing the stereotypes used against him or her, the ethnic minority can confront the fact that the majority will never see him or her as they truly are. Cohen adds that Jewish jokes allow the group "not to say we as a group are like that, but rather, we as a group are perceived as being like that and we know it."⁴¹

In using self-directed stereotypes the ingroup can also comment on the pressures it feels to assimilate into the majority culture. Américo Paredes has done a fascinating study of jokes told by Chicanos about Mexican folk medicine.⁴² The jokes center around the character of the *curandero* or folk healer. The *curandero* is the butt of most of these jokes. His medicinal treatments are often portrayed as absurd and lewd. (Many of the folk cures call for the use of violent purgatives.) But at the same time the *curandero* figure is ridiculed for his outdated reliance on indigenous beliefs (to the point where sometimes the treatment is more harmful to the patient than the illness), the joke also exposes the gringo health care system as just as bad, if not worse. In the *curandero* jests, the patient is often forced to seek the free help of the folk healer after being turned away by a U.S. hospital or threatened with a needless operation by a greedy Yankee doctor. Paredes remarks on the double nature of these jokes:

In satirizing of folk medicine and *curandero* belief tales, they express a mocking rejection of Mexican folk culture; in their expression of resentment towards American culture, they show a strong sense of identification with Mexican folk traditions.⁴³

COMIC USES OF THE *PACHUCO* STEREOTYPE

Chicano artists have always used humorous stereotypes in a critical and self-reflexive way. One of the first groups to do this was the Teatro Campesino. Founded in 1965 by Luis Valdez, the son of Mexican migrant workers, Teatro Campesino became the cultural extension of the United Farm Worker's Movement.⁴⁴ Many of Valdez's actors were non-professionals. They worked through improvisation to create short agit-prop skits he called *actos*. Each *acto* relied heavily on comedy and satire for its effect,⁴⁵ and contained a political message exposing a specific problem of the farmworkers.

Valdez described his style of humor and his dependence on comic types in the early *actos* as somewhere between Brecht and Cantinflas. Brecht, he felt, motivated him to deal with history and politics through distancing devices that forced the audience to think. But in a careful analysis of the construction of characters in the *actos*, Juan Castañón García points out that Brechtian characters were much different than those of the Teatro Campesino.⁴⁶ According to Castañón García, Brecht hoped to disguise his characters, whereas the characters in Teatro Campesino were group archetypes. In Valdez's plays the characters even hung signs around their necks to make sure the audience could identify them. What worked as an alienating technique for Brecht, served as a method of group identification and unity for the strikers. Castañón García sees the origin of the *actos* more rooted in the slapstick and burlesque style of the Mexican comic Cantinflas who played a trickster type character in dozens of low budget Mexican films of the forties and fifties. Much of Cantinflas' humor evolved from his inability to speak the standard Castilian Spanish of the elite. In attempting to do so, he would accidentally cast insult on anyone of higher social standing. Cantinflas was also a very physical comic whose techniques greatly influenced the comic style of many Mexican films which are readily available for viewing in the United States.⁴⁷

Los Vendidos (The Sellouts) was one of the earlier *actos* to be performed by Teatro Campesino. It was eventually filmed for television in 1973. It is set on a simple bare stage dressed with only a single sign in the corner reading "Honest Sancho's used Mexican Lot and Mexican Curio Shop." As the *acto* opens we see Honest Sancho dusting off his human mannequins, each with a sign around his neck. There is the revolutionary, dressed in a Pancho Villa era costume, the *pachuco* wearing typical street clothing and the farmer (*campesino*) in modest working clothes. The first shopper to enter the store is Miss Jimenez. She pronounces her name Jim-enes, emphasizing the Anglo accented pronunciation. The audience recognizes her as an assimilationist. She has come to buy a Mexican because she works for Governor Reagan's office and they need a token brown face for a luncheon. Honest Sancho offers her the *campesino*, "the volkswagen of Mexicans" but she wants something more sophisticated so he shows her Johnny Pachuco. Johnny is a *vato loco* (crazy dude). Sancho tells us Johnny does everything he needs to do to survive in the city—including stealing and using a knife. He can resist arrest and makes a wonderful scapegoat. When brought to life, Johnny struts downstage and lets out a "Fuck You" to the audience. Further traits of this *pachuco* are his inferiority complex and his love of marijuana. When Johnny shows Miss Jimenez how good he is at stealing by snatching her purse, she remarks, "We can't have any more thieves in the State Administration."⁴⁸

The play ends with a twist. Miss Jimenez finally pays \$15,000 for a character who plays the revolutionary. He suddenly goes crazy yelling slogans in Spanish and turning on the other mannequins who chase Jimenez out of the store. Sancho then, himself, turns into a puppet. We discover that Sancho has been the real mannequin all along used by the others to "rip off the man" by selling phony Mexicans. The *pachuco*, revolutionary and *campesino* divide up the money and go out to a party. The audience sees that stereotypes were self-imposed in order to make gains over the dominant culture.

Los Vendidos is an example of one of the earliest uses of the *pachuco* character in Chicano theatre. The representation of the street smart youth continued to fascinate Valdez and Teatro Campesino for many years, culminating in the theme of their hit musical *Zoot Suit*. *Pachuquismo* was invented by the urban Mexican American youth of the forties as a means of self-expression. They developed their own

slang called *caló* and took on the zoot suit fashion popularized by Black and Filipino Americans. According to Valdez, the *pachuco* was rough and often dangerous, but was still admired by most Mexican American youth because he was a rebel who made a statement against racial injustice by calling attention to himself.

SELF-DEROGATORY STEREOTYPING IN THE CHEECH AND CHONG FILMS

Richard "Cheech" Marin, a third generation Mexican American from Los Angeles, is perhaps the most experienced Chicano feature film director to have ever worked in Hollywood.⁴⁹ He and his former partner, Thomas Chong, who is of Canadian and Asian heritage, starred in and directed over a half dozen popular comedies in which Marin plays a streetwise Chicano dooper.⁵⁰ In 1987, Marin went solo to write, direct and star in *Born in East LA*, a film in which he changed his character to an average working class Chicano played with a more naturalistic acting style.

Marin's rendition of the *pachuco* in the Cheech and Chong films is quite different from the character in Valdez's plays. Cheech's streetwise dooper might be more accurately described as a *cholo*. It is a contemporary term which, like *pachuco*, was adopted by Chicano youth from the *barrios*. *Cholos*, like their antecedents, the *pachucos* or zoot suiters, are associated with *la vida loca* (the crazy life) and call each other *vatos locos*. According to Luis Plascencia, life in the fast lane for the *vatos* can range from innocuous acts of adolescent rebellion to more serious activities involving drugs, alcohol or crime. Cheech's character is often dressed in the garb of the *cholo*—khaki pants, a long sleeved plaid shirt buttoned to the neck over a sleeveless muscle shirt, and a bandanna or stocking cap pulled down to the eyebrows. Cheech's body language imitates the cool swagger of the *vatos* and his dialogue echoes their *caló*.

Luis Plascencia provides an interesting social history of how the categories of *pachuco* and *cholos* became popularized among Chicanos in the seventies.⁵¹ Plascencia stresses that the true identity of the *pachuco* was formed during the forties as a response to many factors affecting the Mexican community including growing urbanization, the development of juvenile delinquency and the existence of Chicano youth

clubs formed to block attempts at forced assimilation. Plascencia says that the historical specificity of this identity has been lost over the decades as Chicano artists, playwrights and poets have romanticized the *pachuco* into a potentially revolutionary figure. He points out that one of the major promoters of the *pachuco* as a transhistorical icon was *Low Rider* magazine which ran articles that distorted the actual role of the *pachucos* in history.⁵² By writing most of its articles in *caló* and by using the terms *pachuco* and lowriding interchangeably, *Low Rider* popularized the *pachuco* image on a mass scale for youth in the seventies causing many readers to refer to themselves as *pachucos*.

The term *cholo*, according to Plascencia, had been used in the Southwest since the early 1800's to refer the Mexican of *mestizo* heritage. It was an offensive term denoting an individual as quarrelsome and vicious. Later it was used to refer to Mexicans who had recently immigrated to the US and had assimilated very little. In the seventies, certain low riders who belonged to formal car clubs used the term *cholos* in a derogatory manner to refer to deviant low riders who "gave good respectable low riders a bad name."⁵³ The *cholos*, in turn, had a negative view of the formal car club members. *Low Rider*, says Plascencia, chose to limit references to the term *cholo*, preferring to project a homogenous image of the Chicano as *pachuco*. In effect, it absorbed the *cholo* identity into a broader cultural symbols of the *pachuco* and *pachuca*.

Ironically, it appears that from Plascencia's study that the glorification of the *pachuco* in the seventies in low rider culture lead to the elevation of the mythical *vato loco*, "*el pachuco*" above the contemporary *vato loco*, *el cholo*. The zoot suit was embraced as the emblem of Chicano expression in many of *Low Rider's* stories while *cholo* dress received lesser attention. Plascencia criticizes *Low Rider's* appropriation of positive cultural symbols because he says their intentions and uses of these symbols were contrary to the needs of *El Movimiento* (the Chicano Movement). *Low Rider's* ownership transformed the *pachuco* image into a commodity for the purpose of selling more magazines and more advertisements. They published ads from ultra conservative beer companies which displayed models posing in zoot suits. The point of Plascencia's article is to show that *pachuquismo* and the *cholo* style were genuine symbols of Chicano working class culture that, nevertheless, were appropriated by corporations and divested of their socio-historical context.

When Cheech Marin plugs into the low rider character in *cholo* dress it appears at first glance that he is stereotyping *pachuquismo* (the culture of the *pachucos*). But there are ambiguities in Cheech's character that differ from the mythical image of the *pachuco* adopted by the low riders and Luis Valdez. Unlike the heroic *pachuco*, Cheech's character does not hang out with other Chicanos or low riders in the *barrio*. He is that piece of the Movement that got into drugs not politics. And while he does not consciously resist Anglo culture, he still manages to foreground his Chicano identity. In the end, the humor in these films arises from his street smarts and his "otherness" in such a way that he effectively dismantles the stereotype he so cleverly portrays.

Marin's Cheech and Chong films have always been aimed at a general audience and have been very successful at the box office. *Up in Smoke* was the highest-grossing comedy of 1978. Marin claims that his films are popular because of his style of comedy that makes a positive moral statement by bringing up important social issues beneath the mask of humor:

I've always said that my method is to slip the message into your coffee. You don't taste it. It goes down smooth, but later you feel the effect.⁵⁴

The Chicano that Marin plays is a doper who has some street smarts. The opening sequence in *Up in Smoke* sets up the character type he will portray in all his early comedies. He awakens on his living room couch surrounded by a hoard of kids watching cartoons. Still drowsy, he stumbles to a filthy bathroom. Toilet paper is hanging out of the toilet. Dirty clothes litter the floor. He finally opens his eyes to find that he has been urinating in the hamper. He then saunters out the front door of his dilapidated house. In the yard are several other Chicanos cutting their hair. Cheech crosses the street and admires his "ride." The opening music, "Low Rider" (by the group WAR) comes up as the film cuts between detail shots of the car, its fringe, its stenciled windows, its chain fashioned steering wheel and its crushed velvet interior. Cheech slides down in the front seat, starts the engine and eases his low rider down the street out of frame.

Cheech cruises down the California freeway. He sings "My baby's so fine, I do it to her nearly all of the time." He then comes upon two blond "chicks" sunbathing by the side of the road. Seeing them, he

responds by immediately crossing into oncoming traffic, but the blonds refuse his offer of a good time. Undaunted, he soon spies two giant breasts down the road. Cheech exclaims, "Hey honey bend over, I'll drive you home," and heads across traffic again. The breasts, it turns out, belong to Tommy Chong (Cheech Marin's side kick). In the film, Chong plays an Anglo dooper who is just as crude, dirty, unemployed and oversexed as Cheech's character. Even more degenerate than Cheech, Chong spends all of his time selling or smoking dope. Chong is the stereotype of the Anglo hippie. His character is rebelling against his parents who are wealthy suburbanites. In one scene, while sipping their afternoon cocktails, Chong's parents demand that Chong get a job. The father says he knows someone at United Fruit (one of the major exploiters of Central American labor, implicated in the CIA takeover in Guatemala and also one of the principal partners of RCA when it was founded) and threatens to put Chong to work in the fields as a banana picker. Chong, dressed in his dirty jeans, headband and wireframes, gives his dad the finger and heads for the beach.

Other ethnic characters in the Cheech and Chong films are similarly stereotyped. In *Up In Smoke* there is the character of Curtis, Cheech's African American neighbor. Curtis is a jive-talking con man, outrageously dressed like a Hollywood version of a black pimp. His character constantly tries to hustle Cheech. In one of Curtis' scenes he sells waiter's uniforms to Cheech's Chicano band members as their band costumes. Other stereotyped characters include the narcotics detective with Stacey Keach cast in the role. He is costumed with a burr haircut and a tightly cropped moustache which draws attention to his thin upper lip. Keach wears polyester pants that fit him too tightly, complementing his patronizing and abusive personality. Like Curtis, the Detective is a one-dimensional character. He has only a single desire—to make the big bust. Another ethnic stereotype in the mix is a Japanese American character named Toyota Kowasaki. In *Still Smokin'* there is a stereotyped nordic woman. She is beautiful but also intimidating because of her imposing size. Bigger than both Cheech and Chong, she plays a chamber maid with a sex drive that leaves the two men begging for mercy.

When every ethnic group is exposed to such equal ridicule, the negative effect of the stereotype in the film is altered. In the case of Cheech and Chong movies, the ethnocentric aggression that stereotypes typically imply is diffused. All ethnic groups are shown to be equally

vulnerable to being typed, equally susceptible to becoming the butt of an ethnic joke. This technique encourages the viewer who recognizes himself or herself as one of the caricatured ethnics in the film to read the Chicano stereotype in the same way he or she would most likely read a stereotype of his or her own ethnic group in the film—as an ethnic caricature with little basis in fact. This type of cinematic dismantling forces viewers to draw comparisons and promotes recognition of the existence of stereotypes across ethnic groups.

Another technique in the Cheech and Chong films which disarms the stereotype for the viewer is the attitude of playfulness maintained in their films. Their style of comedy is very cartoonish, and most of their humor relies on exaggerating to the point of absurdity. For instance, *Cheech and Chong's Next Movie* opens with the two dopers stealing a garbage can full of gasoline. They decide to pour it in their gas tank without a funnel. Gas and garbage spill all over the two of them. They act like no one can see them, but this is all going on at a busy intersection. Nonplussed, they start to drive away. Cheech jokes with Chong, "Oh shit man, I'm going to be late for work again, man. That's the fifth time I've been late this week and it's only Tuesday, man." Then Chong lights up a joint, and the interior of the car explodes. In the next shot, the two are covered with cinders, clothes are shredded and eyebrows are seared. The clownish "Wiley Coyote and the Road Runner" tone serves as a barometer for the rest of the film. The attitude conveyed by scenes such as this is silliness. The broadly drawn world which inhabits each of the films firmly establishes a make believe space for the viewer. The relationship of the viewer to the comic situation is, therefore, a qualified one, which works along the lines of Freud's description of audience positioning in joking situations. Freud posits that a feeling of superiority on the part of the joke listener does not arise if he or she knows that the joker has only been pretending to ridicule himself or herself.⁵⁵ Cheech and Chong leave little room for naturalism in their acting style, their mise-en-scene and their plot structures. They are constantly returning to the absurd so that any audience member would be hard pressed to deny fantasy aspects of the film.

Cheech's character in these movies is generally unfavorably stereotyped. Nevertheless, he does display a few redeeming qualities. First, he is usually smarter than Chong. Many jokes will be played out by having Chong say something totally ridiculous. The joke is then

followed by a reaction shot of Cheech whose face mirrors the audience's own "I can't believe this guy" response. This happens in *Cheech and Chong's Next Movie* when we find out that Chong thinks his dope dealing is going well because he says he sold a couple of joints yesterday; "to himself." Cheech's double-take response matches our own. Because of these double-takes the audience tends to identify more with Cheech, the Chicano, and his superiority over Chong, the non-specific Anglo.

A second redeeming feature of Cheech's *vato* stereotype is his disrespect for authority. For decades, this trait had been tied to the bandido, greaser or gangster Chicano stereotypes in mainstream Hollywood films. But the trait had been scripted into these movies as negative examples of incorrigible lawlessness. In Marin's films, he turns disrespect for the law into healthy rebellion, converting his Chicano character into a sort of trickster. In *Cheech and Chong's Next Movie* one finds a typical example of this. Cheech manages to steal his boss's van by pretending not to understand English spoken by the security guard. Another example of undermining authority appears in *Up In Smoke*. Cheech is in the men's room with the narcotics detective who does not recognize Cheech as the drug dealer he has been pursuing. Cheech maintains his cover by playing the clown, making silly references to his own penis. When Cheech leaves, we find out that during the bathroom performance, Cheech has been urinating on the detective's leg.

In a later scene, Cheech subverts the law as he is going through Customs. While waiting at the border check point, he makes a lewd comment to several nuns in the next car and receives their frigid stares in return. As the border agent approaches Cheech's car, Cheech panics because he's smoking a joint. He tosses it out the window without seeing that it lands on the lap of one of the nuns. The sisters are quickly apprehended by the border agent in place of Cheech. There is then a shot of the nuns smiling in excitement as they are being frisked. Ironically, Cheech's lascivious desires come to fruition at the hands of the border authorities.

In a previous section of this chapter, it was mentioned how the stereotype of the Mexican American emphasized his vulgarity and "uncivilized" nature. In an attempt to disarm the stereotype, Cheech and Chong make vulgarity one of the central comic tactics of their movies. Using many references to bodily functions in their films. *Up*

In Smoke contains a scene in which Cheech gets the runs after eating Mexican food. He frantically searches for a toilet. While holding his buttocks he mutters, "Come on cheeks, stay together." In *Cheech and Chong's Next Movie* there is a scene where Chong tricks Cheech into drinking from a jar of urine. When Cheech realizes what he is drinking, he goes crazy and spills the urine all over himself screaming, "Oh god, I'm gonna die" as his van swerves down the street.

Freud's theory of jokes provides a useful explanation of humor which relies on bodily degradation for comic effect. Such jokes, he says, work because the listeners recognize that all humanity is equally subject to the same bodily functions. He interprets grotesque humor in the same manner that he explained the obscene joke. Such jokes work by unmasking inhibitions imposed upon the listener. In the case of Cheech and Chong films, the precarious nature of white protestant civility is exposed and, in turn, the accusation by the "civilized" group that the "other" is barbaric and grotesque is disclosed as a contradiction. In this way the dirty Mexican stereotype is turned on its head. The vulgar stereotype is further confounded as Chong's baser side is also foregrounded. In *Cheech and Chong's Next Movie*, Chong urinates through the bathroom window on to the bald head of their Anglo neighbor. *Still Smokin'* includes a scene at the end of the film where Cheech and Chong are performing on stage. The scene is set around one dog's (Cheech) excitement at seeing the other dog (Chong) defecate.

Hollywood has traditionally shown Chicano sexuality in terms of the Latin lover stereotype or bandido/rapist so that Chicano eroticism is portrayed as either perverted or exotic. Marin plays with the stereotype of the oversexed latin. He constantly offers himself to women by making crude statements such as his comment to Chong in *Up In Smoke*, "I hope she hasn't eaten. I got something for her. Tube steak smothered in underwear." In an ironic twist, instead of being offended, most of the women characters in Marin's films take him up on his offers. To his surprise, the Cheech character finds out that these women are usually sexually freer and more insatiable than he. In *Nice Dreams*, Donna, an old girlfriend, invites both Cheech and Chong up to her apartment to have sex with her. In *Still Smokin'* the Dutch chamber maid uses both men for sex and then sends them crawling away from her bedroom exhausted. Any hint at a threat to these women characters is dispelled because the women are just as sexually

aggressive as Cheech is. They are untainted by false conceptions of Chicano sexual stereotypes and, therefore, force us to see the stereotype as a hollow image.

Another way that Marin's films manipulate stereotypes is by alluding directly to the Anglo media's portrayal of Chicanos. For example, in *Up In Smoke*, Cheech wanders on to the set of a Hollywood film called *Wamba's Revenge*, a typical Chicano gang film. This scene can be read as an indirect allusion to the film *Walk Proud*, a bronze exploitation film which drew public protest by Chicanos when it was released. On the set of the film there is a Chicano character dressed in a zoot suit who holds a knife to the neck of a terrified white girl. A racist director and his crew encourage the actors to exaggerate their lines. The scene finally ends when Cheech sends a lost actor to crash through the wall of the set. Thus, Cheech sabotages the racist movie production.

Cheech makes another direct critique of Hollywood in *Cheech and Chong's Next Movie* when he composes a ballad about Chicanos. Chong accompanies him on guitar with a Mexican folk melody as Cheech sings the first two verses:

Mexican Americans
Don't just like to get into gang fights
They like flowers and music
And white girls named Debbie too.

Mexican Americans
Are named Chata
And Chela and Chema
And have a son-in-law named Jeff.

And the last verse:

Mexican Americans
Don't like to go to movies
Where the dude has to wear contacts
to make his blue eyes brown,
And don't it make your brown eyes blue.

When Cheech is through singing, he tells Chong, "It's like a protest tune." The song highlights Hollywood's misrepresentation of Chicanos and foregrounds diversity in identity. The song also crystallizes a

dominant theme in the Cheech and Chong films. In these films, the Chicano is someone who knows he is stereotyped and always tries to resist by showing he is aware of the typing. At the same time, being Chicano means interacting with Anglo culture without giving up Chicano aspects of identity. This Chicano identity, though stereotyped in many negative ways, still confronts assimilation as Cheech consciously marks himself with his *cholo* dress, his *caló* and his low rider style. Thus, Marin's approach to ethnic humor parallels the self-aware style of humor that is found in Jewish and African American culture. He presents an effective analysis of derogatory stereotypes which destabilize ethnic categories and the ethnocentric power structures they maintain.

Other regressive elements of American culture are alluded to and questioned in Marin's comedies. In *Cheech and Chong's Nice Dreams* Cheech gets rich from selling dope out of a low riding ice cream truck. He has a mansion on a beach front populated by topless blond sunbathers. His character arrogantly jokes about becoming a sun king (allusion to the Aztec god central to the Movement's ideology) who throws joints to the natives. He dresses in the casual attire of a successful California capitalist. But immediately Cheech pokes fun at his character's cool pose, undercutting the glamour attached to achieving upper-class status. In the midst of American opulence, Cheech falls back on his underdog "Chicano" ways. From his mansion, he orders four bottles of "Fussy Pussy" wine as he cooks tortillas to make "Mexican pizza." Later he meets his old girlfriend, Donna, who invites Cheech and Chong back to her apartment for sex. As Cheech and Chong are on her bed, Donna's biker husband, "who is known to hate Mexicans," comes home and chases the nude Cheech throughout the building. Then, as Chong helps Cheech escape, it is discovered that Cheech has stupidly accepted a check from an Anglo in exchange for all the cash they've made dealing. In the final scene, Cheech and Chong are forced to take jobs as male exotic dancers. They call their act "The Sun Kings in Paradise." Thus, Cheech's desire to fit into the capitalist mold, to naively trust the Anglos with his aspirations, results in his downfall and humiliation. The humorous effect of this comic situation is somewhat similar to the way Paredes says the *curandero* jests work:

It releases a complicated set of conflicting emotions ranging from exasperation to affection in respect to the unacculturated Mexican American.⁵⁶

By drawing attention to his character's inability to "blend in" to the Anglo way of life, Marin makes ethnicity more than just throw away humor. Utilizing the Sun King references, Marin cleverly shows how the symbols of the Movement can easily be coopted and how the hegemony of capitalist society structures Chicano behavior by creating an horizon of accepted desires and aspirations.

Marin's critique of American social norms also encompasses the Chicano Movement. In *Cheech and Chong's Next Movie*, Cheech is waiting for his Chicana girlfriend to show up for a date when he falls asleep and has two dreams. In the first dream, Cheech is dressed in a zoot suit from the forties. He suavely enters an elegant boudoir where Donna is glamorously shown lounging on a bed. Cheech takes Donna in his arms but is awakened moments before they can make love. He soon has his second dream in which he is dressed as an Aztec priest. He approaches his girlfriend who appears as a dead Aztec maiden awaiting sacrifice on an Aztec temple monument. Cheech fondles her breasts and intends to rape her, but is soon awakened once again. In mocking the image of Aztec manhood which had become a frequently used icon in Chicano murals, Marin takes a bold step and calls into question the sexism embedded within neo-Aztec mythology. Marin's use of satire works in this scene as a double-edged sword. In this film and in the other Cheech and Chong comedies, self-derogatory ethnic stereotypes serve as an internal monitor for the community as well as an indictment of falsehoods imposed from the outside. If it is an instrument for attacking the enemy, satire is also an instrument for keeping the tribe in line.⁵⁷

CONCLUSION

Anti-Mexican stereotypes are deeply rooted in the consciousness of white America and have served to justify the economic and cultural domination of Aztlán. In U.S. film, the image of the inferior Mexican became entrenched in Hollywood movies as greaser, bandido, buffoon, peon, gangster, dark lady and rapist. Chicano community groups and

the State of Mexico published statements of protest and outrage against these slanderous and demeaning stereotypes. Later, with the emergence of the Chicano Art Movement, the negative stereotypes came under further scrutiny. The image of the *pachuco* which had been previously abused was embraced by Teatro Campesino and transformed into a heroic symbol of Chicano identity.

In mainstream film, the Chicano street youth stereotype surfaced in the movies of Cheech Marin. Cheech's character was not really a *pachuco* in the same sense that *pachuquismo* had been used by *Low Rider*, Teatro Campesino and the Chicano Art Movement. But by extending the lineage of *pachuquismo* to the low riding *cholos*, one can see Cheech's character fits within the *pachuco* identity framework. Yet, the subtle differences in Cheech's stereotyped character differentiates it from other representations of the type in Chicano culture. His *vato* is not heroic, and has little politicized consciousness. Nevertheless, his self-derogatory portrayal—though embodying many of the same negative traits which have been attributed to Mexicans by colonizers over the past five hundred years—does not project a masochistic or demeaning image of the Chicano. This is because the nature of the humor in his films contextualizes stereotypes. All ethnic groups, including Anglos, are typed in equally absurd ways. Marin's broadly drawn comic technique, similar to that used by Teatro Campesino, forces the audience to consider that ethnic stereotypes are ridiculous and not based in truth. His trickster-type antics appeal to the viewer as he challenges authority figures and institutions like the Hollywood movie industry that profit from such false images. In Cheech and Chong films, self-derogatory humor also provides a mirror for the Chicano community to look critically at itself by comparing traditional values with new problems.

Groups that have been targets of racial stereotyping have always been faced with the need to generate positive counterimages with their art. Sometimes this results in a kind of "image policing" by ethnic artists and critics who are quick to condemn any type of negative character depictions by ethnic artists.⁵⁸ But Plascencia's study of *Low Rider* magazine's promotion of the *pachuco* myth has shown that, even though an ethnic image is positively constructed, there is no guarantee it will be used for the good of that community. What Cheech Marin's early comedy films show is that an ethnic director can take a negative stereotype and, through humor, expose the stereotype as racist and

unfounded, thereby, initiating the process of undermining its significance for a general film audience.

NOTES

1. Mahadez Apte, *Humor and Laughter: An Anthropological Approach* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 113.
2. For an extensive bibliography of research on stereotyping see J.C. Bringham, "Ethnic Stereotypes," *Psychological Bulletin* 76 (Fall 1982): 15-38.
3. Apte, *Humor and Laughter*, p. 114.
4. Charles Ramírez Berg, "Images and Counterimages of the Hispanic in Hollywood," *Tonanzín* 6, (Nov. 1988): 12.
5. Linda Williams, "Type and Stereotype: Chicana Images in Film," in *Chicano Cinema: Research, Reviews and Resources*, ed. Gary Keller (Binghamton: Bilingual Review/Press, 1985), pp. 94-108.
6. Charles Gibson, ed, *The Black Legend: Anti-Spanish Attitudes in the Old and New World* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1971).
7. Paredes, "Origins of Anti-Mexican Sentiment," p. 143.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 149.
9. *The Traveller* (Woodbridge, N.J.: James Parder, 1758).
10. William Robertson, *The History of America* (New York: J. Harper, 1977 reprint of original 1832 addition).
11. *Ibid.*, p. 312.
12. Arthur Pettit, *Images of the Mexican American in Fiction and Film* (College Station, Texas: Texas A & M University Press, 1980).
13. Gary Keller, "The Image of the Mexican in Mexican, United States and Chicano Cinema: An Overview," in *Chicano Cinema*, p. 20. For further discussion see Allen Woll, *Images of the Mexican American in Fiction and Film* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977); Linda Williams, "Type and Stereotype: Chicana Images in Film," in *Chicano Cinema*, pp. 94-107; Blaine P. Lamb, "The Convenient Villain: The Early Cinema Views of the Mexican-American," *Journal of the West* 14 (October, 1975): 75-81; and Carlos Cortés, "Who is María? What is Juan? Dilemmas of Analyzing the Chicano Image in U.S. Feature Films," in *Chicanos and Film*, pp. 83-105.
14. George Roeder Jr., "Mexicans in the Movies: the Image of Mexicans in American Films, 1894-1947," unpublished manuscript, University of Wisconsin, 1971, p. 27.
15. See José E. Limón, "Stereotyping and Chicano Resistance," pp. 257-270.

16. Imperialist culture evinces a persistent obsession with the theme of the dark man raping the white woman. See Angela Davis, *Women, Race and Class* (New York: Random House, 1984).

17. The Chicano community has characteristically reacted sympathetically to the plight of Chicano actors who are cast in stereotypical roles. For instance, in 1979, after the release of *Boulevard Nights*, the Chicano Cinema Coalition published an article denouncing the racist stereotypes depicted in the film, while at the same time praising the "fine acting" of the Chicano and Latino actors in the film. "CCC Releases Statement on *Boulevard Nights*, Louis R. Torres, ed., *Chicano Cinema Newsletter* 1, no. 3 (May 1979): pp. 3-4.

18. Keller, "The Image of the Chicano," p. 27.

19. Chon Noriega, "The Trials and Titillations of Ethnicity in the American Cinema, 1935-1962," *Social Research* 58 (Summer 1991): 413-438.

20. Ana López, "Are All Latins from Manhattan: Hollywood, Ethnography and Cultural Colonialism," in *Unspeakable Images*, ed. Lester Freidman (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), pp. 404-424. For a reference guide of actresses who portrayed women of color in Hollywood film see Maryann Oshana, *Women of Color: A Filmography of Minority and Third World Women of Color* (New York: Garland, 1985).

21. George Hadley-García, *Hispanic Hollywood: The Latins in Motion Pictures* (New York: Citadel Press, 1990), p.39.

22. Charles Ramírez Berg, "Stereotyping in Films in General and of the Hispanic in Particular," *Howard Journal of Communications* 2 (Summer 1990), p. 12.

23. López, "Latins from Manhattan," p. 419.

24. At the urging of the State Department Office of Inter-American Affairs, Hollywood executives agreed to make movies which promoted good relations with Latin America. During the period from approximately 1939 to 1947 more than eighty films dealing with Latin America were produced.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 419.

26. See also "Who is María? What is Juan? Dilemmas of Analyzing the Chicano Image in U.S. Feature Films," in *Chicanos and Film*, ed. Chon Noriega (New York: Garland Publishing, 1992), pp. 74-94.

27. See Mahadev Apte, *Humor and Laughter*, p. 108.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

29. See George Myrdal, *An American Dream* (New York: Harper, 1944).

30. Apte, *Humor and Laughter*, p. 42.

31. Edward Oring, "Everything is a Shade of Elephant: An Alternative to a Psychoanalysis of Humor," *New York Folklore* 1 (Fall 1973): 149-159.

32. Russell Middleton, "Negro and White Reactions to Racial Humor," *Sociometry* 23 (Fall 1973): 76. An example where this theory might apply is in the Cheech and Chong video *Get Out of My Room* in which Chong is asked how he met Cheech. He responds, "Well, he was my gardener, see..." In the

context of the film, the audience clearly understands that Chong bears no hostility towards his long time friend.

33. Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* trans. James Strachey, (New York: Penguin, 1960), p. 148.

34. José Reyna, "Contemporary Myths in Chicano Joke Tradition," in *Renato Rosaldo Lecture Series 3: 1985-1986*, ed. Ignacio García (Tucson: Arizona Board of Regents, 1987), p. 27.

35. Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

36. J. Mason Brewer, *Humorous Folktales of the South Carolina Negro* (Orangeburg, S.C., 1945) p. 7.

37. Levine, *Black Culture*, p. 67.

38. See Limón, "Stereotyping and Chicano Resistance: An Historical Dimension," pp. 257-270.

39. Oring, "Everything is a Shade of Elephant," p. 159.

40. Sandy Cohen, "Racial and Ethnic Humor in the United States," *Amerika Studien/American Studies* 30 (Fall 1985), p. 203.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 204.

42. Américo Paredes, "Folk Medicine and Intercultural Jest," in *Introduction to Chicano Studies*, eds. L.I. Duran and H.R. Bernard (New York: MacMillan, 1973), pp. 104-119.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 271.

44. The United Farm Worker's Union was started by César Chávez in 1965 to protect the rights of Mexican American and Filipino American migrant farm laborers. The leadership was very effective in organizing a national consumer boycott of grapes and lettuce which drew international attention to their organization. For a detailed history of the Farm Workers Movement see Ronald B. Taylor, *Chavez and the Farm Workers* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975).

45. For a close analysis of satire in the work of Valdez and other Chicano writers see Guillermo Hernandez, *Chicano Satire: A Study in Literary Culture* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991).

46. Juan Castañón García, "Bertolt Brecht and Luis Valdez: The Relation Between the Self and the Techniques in their Theatre," *De Colores: Journal of Chicano Expression and Thought* 5, (1980): 98.

47. Another famous Mexican comic was Tin Tan whose style was quite similar to Cantinflas. Tin Tan actually started in Mexican films playing the character of a *pachuco*.

48. Jorge A. Huerta, *Chicano Theatre: Themes and Forms*, (Ypsilanti: Bilingual Press, 1982), p. 64.

49. In an interview, Marin revealed that he had co-directed the films he made with Tommy Chong. Marin never received credit as director for those films. But when one considers that Cheech and Chong worked by

improvisation, the conclusion that Marin exerted a significant directorial influence over his films is reasonable. Dennis West and Gary Crowdus, "Cheech Cleans Up His Act," *Cineaste* 16 (July 1988), p. 37.

50. *Up in Smoke* (1978), *Cheech and Chong's Next Movie* (1980), *Cheech and Chong's Nice Dreams* (1981), *Cheech and Chong Still Smokin'* (1983). They also starred in and wrote *Things are Tough All Over* (1982) and *The Corsican Brothers* (1984).

51. Luis F.B. Plascencia, "Lowriding in the Southwest," in *History Culture and Society: Chicano Studies in the '80's*, eds. National Association for Chicano Studies (Ypsilanti: Bilingual Press, 1983), pp. 137-159.

52. Plascencia gives evidence that such was not really the case. *Ibid.*, p. 148.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 153.

54. West and Crowdus, "Cheech Cleans Up His Act," p. 37.

55. Freud, *Jokes*, p. 260.

56. Paredes, "Folk Medicine," p. 272.

57. William W. Cook, "Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke," *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 6 (Spring 1978): 113.

58. See Salim Muwakkil, "Spike Lee and the Image Police," *Cineaste* 17 (April 1990): 35, for an explanation of how this problem relates to African American filmmaking.

**The Possessive
Investment
in Whiteness**

Revised and Expanded Edition

George Lipsitz

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CHAPTER 3

Immigrant Labor and Identity Politics

That victim who is able to articulate the situation of the victim has ceased to be a victim; he, or she, has become a threat.

—JAMES BALDWIN

On election day in 1994, nearly 60 percent of the California electorate voted in favor of Proposition 187, a measure designed to deny medical treatment and education to undocumented workers and their children, to deliver excruciating pain and punishment to the state's most powerless and defenseless residents. The initiative mandated the expulsion from school of close to 500,000 students, required denial of prenatal care to pregnant women, deprived deaf children of sign language instruction, and demanded that doctors refuse to provide their patients with immunization shots and refuse tests and treatment for victims of AIDS, tuberculosis, alcoholism, and all other diseases. Phrased in especially punitive language and fueled by a demagogic and hate-filled public relations campaign blaming "illegal" immigrants from Mexico for the many problems confronting California's economy, the statute created chilling new categories of public obligation and citizenship. It required private citizens to become government informants, ordering doctors, nurses, teachers, social workers, and other state employees to report to immigration authorities all persons "suspected" of living in the United States without proper documentation.

Although surveys showed that many Canadian, Italian, Israeli, and Irish citizens lived and worked in California without proper credentials from the

Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), the popular campaign on behalf of Proposition 187 expressly targeted immigrants from Mexico and Central America (and to a lesser extent those from Asia) as the focal point of concern about the alleged "costs" of providing medical care and education to undocumented immigrants. Reinforcing longstanding white supremacist practices of viewing all Latinos and Asians as eternally "foreign" while celebrating assimilation as the unique achievement of European immigrants and their descendants, Proposition 187 effectively criminalized Latino and Asian American identity, creating a previously unheard of legal category—the "suspected" illegal immigrant—and then subjecting these "suspects" to vigilante surveillance, supervision, and invasion of privacy.

Federal jurists delayed the implementation of Proposition 187 as they were required to do by constitutional law. Its provisions improperly granted the power of regulating immigration to the State of California rather than to the federal government. Many of the provisions of the initiative eventually became law, however, through the welfare reform act of 1996 passed by Congress and signed by President Clinton. Although a few of its more dramatic and draconian provisions were thrown out by the federal courts, the passage of Proposition 187 marked an important event in the contemporary reinscription of the possessive investment in whiteness. It not only unleashed an inflammatory and hate-filled wave of nativist antiforeign scapegoating, but it also served as a key component in a campaign to insulate white voters and property owners from the ill effects of neoconservative economic policies. Blaming the state's fiscal woes on immigrants rather than taking responsibility for the ruinous effects of a decade and a half of irresponsible tax cuts for the wealthy coupled with disinvestment in education and infrastructure enabled the state's political leaders and wealthy citizens to divert attention away from their own failures. They knew full well that Proposition 187 and the many schemes that surfaced in its wake to deny social services, health care, and education to undocumented and even documented immigrants would have no effect on the numbers of migrants coming to the United States, most of whom migrate in order to escape even greater austerity in their home countries. They knew that the state would lose more money in federal aid (to education based on school enrollment, for example) than it would save by cutting off benefits to undocumented workers and their families, that denying medical treatment to people in need of care would cause more financial and social damage to the state through unchecked epidemics and untreated diseases than such measures would save in tax revenues.

Moreover, the wealthy white voters who provided the bulwark of support for Proposition 187 had no intention of giving up the benefits they derived from the unregulated, low-wage work performed for them by immigrant agricultural laborers, short order cooks, porters, bellhops, janitors, pool cleaners, domestic servants, gardeners, and construction workers. But these voters knew that creating a climate of terror among racialized immigrants and fostering a lynch-mob atmosphere among whites would constrain minority low-wage workers from organizing unions or demanding state enforcement of existing laws on minimum wages, safe and humane working conditions, and employer social security contributions. The process of demonizing undocumented workers as "illegal aliens" emanated not from a respect for the law, but rather to support efforts by executives from large corporations, small business owners, and individual home owners to break the law, to disregard statutes mandating safe working conditions, a living wage, and dignified relations between employers and employees.

Taking advantage of an already vulnerable population, the proponents of Proposition 187 used their ballot initiative as a device to terrorize the low-wage work force into accepting even worse working conditions and even lower wages. Perhaps more important, they relied on the campaign for Proposition 187 to solidify a countersubversive coalition held together by images that inverted actual power relations—presenting whites, the wealthy, and males as "victims" of the unfair advantages purportedly secured by racial minorities, the poor, and women. Part of a politics by moral panic that characterized the Reagan years and culminated in the capture of Congress by the Republican Party in the 1994 election, this manifestation of privilege masquerading as powerlessness does not really need to convince the electorate at large in order to succeed; its true aim is to build a sense of besieged solidarity within its own group. When a privileged group secures actual victories, as in the case of Proposition 187, doing so simply supplies an added fringe benefit for its adherents—the pleasures of recreational hate.

The proponents of Proposition 187 officially disavowed any racist intent behind their initiative, but their own words and actions indicated otherwise. Linda Hayes, the campaign's media director for southern California, exhibited her group's obsession with race in a letter to the *New York Times* published a few weeks before the election. She explained that illegal immigration stemmed from a secret plan by "Mexicans" to establish Spanish as California's official language, to drive English speakers from the state, and to then hold a plebiscite annexing California to Mexico.¹ Though preposterous as a basis for public policy, Hayes's

letter exemplified an important element in the debate over Proposition 187—its role in inviting whites to express openly and in public the racial resentments, prejudices, and paranoid fantasies that they previously entertained in private. In the aftermath of the election, a series of ugly incidents illustrated the success of this dimension of the campaign. A fifth grade teacher ordered her Latino pupils to write a paper detailing their citizenship status and that of their parents. A counter attendant at a fast-food restaurant refused to serve hamburgers and soft drinks to three English speaking Mexican American teenagers (all U.S. citizens, it turned out). A restaurant customer entered the establishment's kitchen and demanded proof of citizenship from the cooks. A school security guard told two Latinas, "We don't have to let Mexicans in here anymore." A receptionist at a public health clinic told all Spanish speaking women that they were no longer eligible for medical treatment. The registrar at a California State University campus submitted a proposal to notify all students with Spanish surnames that they needed proof of citizenship to remain enrolled.² At the same time, however, many courageous educators and health care professionals announced their firm intention to defy the new law by refusing to comply with its provisions requiring them to become informants for the INS.

Political opportunism accounted for much of the campaign on behalf of Proposition 187. During his first term in office, California governor Pete Wilson saw his approval ratings in public opinion polls drop below 20 percent as the state suffered from a devastating economic recession. Less than 20 percent approval represents a nadir for any incumbent, much less for Pete Wilson, a career politician lavishly subsidized throughout his career by contributions from wealthy attorneys, developers, and bankers in his successful previous races for mayor of San Diego, U.S. senator, and governor.³ To improve his chances for election, Wilson attempted to deflect anger away from himself and toward some of the most powerless and defenseless people in California. In a state where government allotments to single mothers raising two children already fell \$2,645 below the official poverty line, Wilson successfully advocated reducing payments so that these women and their children would be even poorer. He showed himself to be motivated more by spite and contempt than by fiscal restraint when he explained that the new payments should not produce hardships for welfare mothers and their children because the cuts simply meant "one less six pack per week."⁴

Unable to run for re-election on his own record, the only resource Wilson owned to advance his ambitions was his whiteness, which he used ruthlessly and effectively. In his 1994 reelection campaign, he deflected criticism away from his dismal performance as the state's chief executive by scapegoating immigrants

for California's problems. His commercials repeatedly broadcast a film showing a dozen Mexican nationals running past U.S. border guards as a voice-over narrative seething with racist contempt intoned, "*They just keep coming.*" Wilson's speeches and statements in support of his own campaign and on behalf of Proposition 187 made special and nearly obsessive mention of the relatively small number of Mexican immigrant women who give birth to children in California hospitals, taking advantage of stereotypes of Mexicans as sexually unrestrained—as if forming families is an illicit activity, as if childbirth is an unnatural and perverse practice of the poor, and as if anyone would be better off if expectant mothers and their children were denied prenatal care or childbirth under safe conditions.

Undocumented workers pay far more in taxes than they receive in services. In addition, they benefit the U.S. economy as productive low-wage laborers, ineligible for direct welfare assistance. They provide unearned profits to employers and help produce lower prices for customers because they are vulnerable as "illegal" immigrants to employers who pay them low wages—and in some cases run out on paying them any wages at all—secure in the knowledge that the workers' undocumented status makes it all but impossible for them to file complaints with the legally constituted authorities. To be sure, not all of the federal taxes paid by undocumented workers return to California, and it is true that city, county, and state agencies bear primary responsibility for some of the medical and educational expenses of immigrants. Yet local residents of areas with high immigrant populations also enjoy the overwhelming majority of the economic benefits that come from lower prices for goods and services created by the hard work and legal vulnerability of largely unregulated low-wage immigrant labor.⁵

Particular sectors of the California work force may well be hurt by the influx of undocumented workers, especially members of other minority groups competing for unskilled low-wage employment. One can see clearly that jobs cleaning and maintaining office buildings, hotels, and restaurants that used to go routinely to African Americans now seem increasingly to be the domain of Central Americans. Immigrants are sometimes favored by employers over blacks because those doing the hiring suffer from racist preconceptions about African American workers. Employers also generally prefer to hire workers who do not speak English, who are unfamiliar with U.S. labor laws, and whose noncitizen status makes them reluctant to become trade union activists, to file grievances on the job, or to complain to state and federal agencies about violations of labor laws or health and safety regulations. This change is part of a conscious strategy by employers nationwide to create a "union proof" work force, a strategy in evidence from the rise of prison labor in the United States

to the emergence of low-wage data-processing jobs in India, from the entry of Central Americans into jobs as janitors in Los Angeles office buildings to the recruitment of longshore dock workers in the Persian Gulf as replacements for unionized dock workers in Australia, from increases in part-time employment in the poultry industry in the Midwest and South to the development of computer-generated automation as a means of turning high-paying, high-skill jobs into low-skill, low-wage employment.⁶

After a long educational campaign by civil rights groups, African American voters opposed Proposition 187 by a slight majority, but the utility of dividing African American from Latino or Asian workers provided an unanticipated fringe benefit for the Republican Party, which put hundreds and thousands of dollars behind the campaign to pass Proposition 187. This turned out to be a rehearsal for the millions they would later spend in 1996 on a demagogic campaign against affirmative action. The party directed its efforts mainly at white voters, who comprise an overwhelming majority of the electorate in an off-year election. The strategy aimed at mobilizing anti-immigrant sentiment and using it to slip Pete Wilson past the voters once again despite his poor performance as governor. The Republicans received a major assist from Wilson's opponent, Kathleen Brown, the state treasurer and Democratic Party nominee for governor. Brown nominally opposed Proposition 187 but failed to challenge its basic premises. Unable to oppose the interests of the transnational corporations backing her expensive campaign efforts by calling for improvements in the wages and working conditions of all workers, Brown wound up agreeing with Wilson that illegal immigrants posed serious problems for California while claiming that Proposition 187 was an extreme and ineffective way to address the issue.

The leaders of the Democratic Party, of the trade unions, and of the state's civil rights organizations shied away from the fight over Proposition 187. They failed to expose the enormous economic benefits that come to Californians from the exploitation of immigrant workers. They failed to publicize the active role played by big corporations and wealthy individuals in promoting immigration and encouraging the rise of undocumented labor in the United States. They failed to offer proposals to seize the assets of businesses and individuals employing undocumented workers, or to campaign for laws making retailers accountable for selling products secured from illegal sweatshop labor. Offered a choice between the arguments proposed by Pete Wilson—that things are bad and that illegal immigrants were to blame—and the arguments offered by Kathleen Brown—that things are bad but that nothing in particular could be done about them—close to 60 percent of the voters predictably enough chose Wilson's position.

Proposition 187 and the plethora of anti-immigrant measures that have emerged in its wake draw on a long history of laws designed to ensure the unimpeded importation of low-wage labor in order to drive down wages for all workers while blaming the resulting social and economic catastrophes on the immigrants themselves. In this endeavor, the posture of protecting the property interests of "whiteness" plays an indispensable role. The proponents of Proposition 187 articulated their concerns in unambiguous language when the leader of the campaign to pass the measure described his group as the "posse" and Proposition 187 as "the rope." Key architects of Proposition 187 received financial backing from the well-known white supremacist Pioneer Fund, an organization dedicated to research in eugenics purporting to prove the superiority of the white race and the threat posed to it by interaction with people of color. In television and newspaper advertisements, in public pronouncements and privately circulated propaganda, supporters of Proposition 187 relied on racist and sexist stereotypes, on the "menace" posed by Mexican women coming to California to have babies at taxpayers' expense. This argument has little basis in fact; the amount of public funds spent on prenatal care and childbirth for undocumented immigrants is both minimal and cost effective. Yet by feminizing and infantilizing the enemy, by connecting the social transgression of nonwhite immigrants coming to California with the fear of unrestrained "Latin" sexuality and procreation, the advocates of Proposition 187 "played the race card, evoking powerful stereotypes that are especially well suited for concealing the real social relations between undocumented immigrants and California's white voters.

Asian American studies scholar and activist Lisa Lowe presented a brilliant and useful analysis of the stereotyping central to the Proposition 187 campaign in an address to the Modern Language Association national meetings in San Diego a little more than a month after the 1994 election. Lowe argued that successful racist stereotypes are not just picturesque untruths, but carefully constructed images designed to make lies more attractive than truth.⁷ The truth in California in 1994 was that the standard of living enjoyed by the state's middle and upper classes increasingly depended upon the desperation of immigrants, especially low-wage women workers from Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, China, the Philippines, and other sites in Latin America and Asia. These women's labor lowers the price of garments made in primitive sweatshops as well the price of computer chips vital to the profits of high-tech industries. The low-wage women workers demonized as parasites by Pete Wilson actually do much of the hard work on which middle-class prosperity relies. They clean offices, hotel rooms, and homes. They plant, harvest, prepare, and serve food. They sew clothes they

cannot afford to wear. For all their hard and under-rewarded work, they find themselves hated and defamed as lazy dependents living off the largesse of the very people whose lives they make easier and more remunerative.

The hypocrisy of Proposition 187's supporters did not need to be well hidden. During the election campaign reporters discovered that millionaire senatorial candidate and Proposition 187 supporter Michael Huffington had long benefited from the work done for him and his family by an undocumented immigrant housekeeper. Little more than a year after the election, the *Washington Post* reported that Pete Wilson himself employed as his housekeeper an "illegal alien" from Tijuana.⁸

Lowe's analysis uncovers the importance of white identity politics within the immigration issue. The possessive investment in whiteness seeks support for transnational capital by promising to confine its worst effects to communities of color while preserving and extending the benefits of present and past discrimination enjoyed by European Americans. At the same time, it works as a wedge against the welfare state in general, using the denial of benefits to "unworthy" recipients like illegal (and later even legal) immigrants as the prelude to future campaigns to "privatize" education and health services for everyone, effectively reserving them only for the rich. The portrayal of massive immigration to the United States from Mexico as a consequence of the desire of individual immigrants for welfare benefits completely disregards the neoliberal "reforms" imposed on Mexico by U.S. firms and transnational capitalist institutions that have made flight from that country a necessity for many formerly self-sufficient workers and farmers. The U.S. government insists on free trade and unlimited mobility for U.S. capital; works to lower wages, cut social spending, and disrupt traditional economies in poor nations; encourages the growth of low-wage jobs in North America; and then expresses shock and dismay when these decisions all lead to increased immigration to the United States.

Border Crossers and Double Crossers: Immigrant Labor and Transnational Capital

The rhetoric that demonizes low-wage workers for crossing international boundaries elides the existence of the most important border crossers in the Southwest, the U.S. firms that use special tax breaks and the provisions of international trade agreements to set up *maquiladora* plants on the U.S.-Mexico

border. Instigated and sustained by tax breaks that offer subsidies to U.S. firms to abandon workers in the United States by fleeing to locations of low-wage labor like Mexico, maquiladora zones provide opportunities for large profits for California businesses and investors. By moving across the border, such U.S. firms as Xerox, RCA, Chrysler, ITT, IBM, and Eastman Kodak have employed nearly a half million workers in their Mexican plants at a savings of \$16,000 to \$25,000 per worker per year. Low wages, low taxes, weak unions, high unemployment, and nonenforcement of environmental protection laws make maquiladora plants the locus of terrible exploitation and disruption in Mexico.⁹

Corporations gain state-subsidized advantages over workers in both the United States and Mexico by crossing the border. For example, in 1992, the Smith-Corona Company closed a typewriter plant in Cortland, New York, dismissing eight hundred workers from their jobs. The company then relocated its operations to Tijuana, Mexico. Management abuses motivated the Mexican workers to go on strike in October 1994. When the employees announced their work stoppage, the Smith-Corona Company in Mexico "disappeared from the social security records as if it had been shut down," according to Mary Tong of the San Diego Support Committee for Maquiladora Workers. The workers still made the same products at the same plants, but they could not find out the identity of their employer in order to bargain with management. At least sixteen companies "disappeared" in Tijuana in this way in 1994, sometimes simply sneaking out of town, abandoning plants built with subsidies from the Mexican government, and avoiding all payroll and tax obligations including the severance pay required in such situations by Mexican law.¹⁰

Unconstrained by Mexican environmental laws that are strong but not enforced, companies in one Tijuana industrial park release unlawful and dangerous concentrations of lead, copper, cadmium, chromium, zinc, and arsenic into drainage ditches, polluting sources of drinking water for some two thousand people who live in the *colonia* nestled beneath the industrial park. One study showed that more than 40 percent of the people in this neighborhood suffered from pollution-related illnesses and learning disabilities. Between 1993 and 1995 alone, nine women in this colonia gave birth to anencephalic babies (babies born without brains). Corporate and government officials denied that pollution caused these birth defects, attributing the poor health of mothers and children to deficient amounts of folic acid in the diets of the workers and their families. Yet these workers subsist largely on corn and beans, two foods with high levels of folic acid.¹¹

The passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1993 compounded already depressed conditions in Mexico's agricultural sector, promoting massive migration to cities like Tijuana. Transnational companies seek out young women workers for their border assembly operations because they believe them to be more obedient and less militant than men or older women. They believe they can work these employees hard for a brief period, and then replace with other willing recruits fleeing the devastated economic conditions in the agricultural regions of central and southern Mexico. Because Mexican law requires companies to be responsible for the prenatal care and childbirth expenses of women workers, the firms try to force pregnant women to quit their jobs. In one plant owned by a Japanese firm, management put a pregnant worker in a fume-filled soldering room with no ventilation in hopes of making her quit her job. She remained at work because she needed the money. Her baby was born anencephalic.¹²

Maquiladora plants offer great advantages to investors, owners, and their families in the United States, especially California. They make products that can be sold for less because of their lower labor costs, while the practice or even the possibility of runaway shops constrains the demands of U.S. workers. Economic chaos in Mexico ensures a steady flow of desperate immigrant workers across the border; the undocumented status of some of them ensures greater exploitation, forcing wages and working conditions for all workers even lower.

Immigration, Ideology, and Ethnic Studies

A desire for short-term political advantage propelled Pete Wilson and his allies into politics designed to secure the benefits of past and present discrimination in perpetuity for affluent white voters, at the same time deflecting the anger of downwardly mobile whites against the exploited immigrant workers upon whom the life-styles of the rich depend. Right-wing attacks on affirmative action and on ethnic studies programs in schools support this strategy: they aim at suppressing any institutional site capable of generating a critique of racism's role in winning political consent for an emerging economic order that harms the interests of the majority. These attacks, however, also underscore the importance of ethnic studies: when connected to activist efforts to establish cross-border solidarity and to organize low-wage workers into militant collectives, ethnic studies can help shape a popular rejection of politics based on the possessive investment in whiteness.

Most of the best work in ethnic studies—work often derided as identity politics—in fact addresses the ways in which new social relations have given rise to new coalitions and conflicts that change that meaning of ethnic and racial identity. Rather than seeking to separate society into discrete warring camps, ethnic studies scholars assume that we can be unified eventually only if we examine honestly and critically the things that divide us in the present. They presume that very few social problems can be solved by knowing *less* about them. They argue that the same processes that exacerbate old divisions while generating new ones may open the way to unexpected affiliations and alliances based on the pursuit of social justice and on resistance to unjust hierarchies and exploitative practices.

Lowe's original and generative book, *Immigrant Acts*, explains how the Asian American experience with racialization, economic exploitation, immigrant exclusion, and barriers to citizenship is not the property of Asian Americans alone but the legacy of all Americans. These practices have shaped the meaning of what it means to be a citizen, a low-wage worker, a gendered subject, or an aggrieved racialized "minority." Similarly, in a singularly impressive study, Yen Le Espiritu underscores the importance of normative gender categories in branding all subordinate groups as alternatively "deviant, inferior, or overachieving," while leaving each group with a fundamentally distinct race-gender-sex economy.¹³ All racialized populations suffer from the possessive investment in whiteness in some ways, but the historical and social circumstances confronting each group differ. Consequently, alliances *and* antagonisms, conflicts *and* coalitions, characterize the complex dynamics of white supremacy within and across group lines.

Lowe identifies hybridity, heterogeneity, and multiplicity as component parts of ethnic identity. In her formulation, people develop ethnic identities through hybridity, a growing together of more than one element—for example, through relations across ethnic lines or through the ways in which one's gender, sexual identification, or class intersects with one's race or ethnicity. Lowe defines ethnic groups as always heterogeneous, as coalitions made up of people with different interests, aims, ages, genders, sexual preferences, religions, languages, and so on. Identities are also multiple in Lowe's formulation; no one lives a life entirely as an ethnic subject. At any given moment, ethnicity might be more important than, say, gender, but under other circumstances gender might become more important. People play different roles under different conditions; their identities emerge through complex interactions with others as well as through constant internal dialogue and negotiation.¹⁴

The generative insights in Lowe's work emerge in the context of a rich dialogue among scholars in ethnic studies about the dynamism of all social identities, including but not limited to ethnic identities. Juan Flores defines an important component of Puerto Rican identity in New York as "branching out"—"the selective connection to and interaction with the surrounding North American society." Flores notes that the social location of Puerto Rican migrants encourages them to branch out first to black Americans and other migrants from Latin America and the Caribbean, but later to groups with a similar history of social disadvantage, including Chinese, Arabs, and, "more cautiously," Irish, Italians, and Jews. Consequently, Puerto Rican "assimilation" is not into the dominant culture and does not entail the disappearance of distinct national backgrounds, but rather involves a fusion of diverse working-class cultures shaped by marginalization and exclusion in order to create "a healthy interfertilization of cultures." Jack D. Forbes explores the long history of coalition and conflict that makes Native American and African American identities mutually constitutive as well as mutually exclusive, while Gary Y. Okihiro examines the complex connections and points of convergence between Asian Americans and African Americans. Peter Narvaez's research on the influence of Hispanic music cultures on African American blues musicians reminds us that the proximity of Mexico as a destination for escaped slaves undermined the growth of the slave system in Texas while activists of Mexican origin on both sides of the border provided moral and material assistance to slaves seeking freedom. Kevin Gaines notes that African Americans chafing at the white practice of addressing them by their first names rather than as Mister or Miss or Mrs. subverted the practice by naming their children after anti-imperialist black heroes from Latin America like Antonio Maceo, a general in the Cuban struggle for independence. James Howard delineates how the Shawnee tribe came to align itself with the antislavery Union forces during the Civil War and how, thirty years later, a band of antiacculturationist Shawnees emigrated to Mexico in hopes of constructing a pan-Indian nation.¹⁵

Creative scholars from all backgrounds have carried out important work in ethnic studies, but the situated experiences of scholars from aggrieved minority groups has often proven a source of special insights and analyses. A. Philip Randolph told the 1963 March on Washington that it has often fallen to "the Negro" to remind other Americans about the importance of giving human rights priority over property rights, because "our ancestors were transformed from human persons into property." In similar fashion, gays and lesbians have often been the most perceptive critics and analysts of heterosexuality as a social

force because their situated experiences compel them to recognize, analyze, and understand existing sexual hierarchies and to theorize alternatives to them.¹⁶ It should not be surprising then, that outstanding research on social identities emanates from scholars of color and from the institutional sites of ethnic studies designed to ask and answer questions that are both particular and universal, that see ethnicity and race both from close up and from far away.

Scholarship in Chicano studies has been especially rich in exploring the theoretical and practical causes and consequences of racism in recent years. The crises confronting Chicano communities as a result of the white identity politics put in play by people like Pete Wilson and the complex realities of Chicano existence have long called into question the simplistic binary oppositions that produce the possessive investment in whiteness. Chicano communities are connected to the national histories of the United States, Mexico, and Spain, to the immigrant groups from many lands that populate those nations, to indigenous nations and tribal groups, to cultures that include diverse languages, religions, and social practices. Issues of national culture, ethnic identity, and language emerge as parts of complex contradictions in Chicano history. Consequently, scholars studying Chicanos need to develop fully theorized definitions of social roles that go beyond the parochial experiences of any one group. The best scholarship in Chicano studies does not simply tack on some new information about Chicanos onto what we already know from the study of other groups, but like all good work in ethnic studies, it uses the situated knowledge and experiences of Chicanos to ask and answer important new questions about the general dynamics of social identities.

Ramon Gutierrez has fashioned a brilliant narrative about the Spanish and Anglo conquest of indigenous people in New Mexico between 1600 and 1850 in his book, *When Jesus Came, the Corn Mothers Went Away*. Using Inquisition records and anthropological sources to construct a record of how successive conquests changed the character of both everyday activities and political allegiances, Gutierrez stresses the syncretic and relational nature of ethnic identities, refuting the romantic and essentialist assumptions of previous scholars about Anglos, Indians, and Chicanos. Gutierrez's ability to represent competing and conflicting points of view offers an important alternative to the kind of monologic history that presents only one story told from one point of view. In the process, he demonstrates definitively how ethnic and racial identities always intersect, how they emerge in concert with identities of gender, sexual preference, class, religion, and nationality.¹⁷ Gutierrez demonstrates the interconnections between macrosocial structures of power and the experiences of everyday life

by showing how all three societies in his study structure inequality through categories of marriage and kinship, but do so in distinctly different ways.

George Sanchez brings a similar dynamism to his history of the East Side of Los Angeles between 1900 and 1945 in *Becoming Mexican American*. He shows how a specific confluence of residential segregation, class and generational homogeneity, political alliances, and cultural practices coalesced to produce a distinctive Mexican American identity in that city. Like Gutierrez, Sanchez tells a significant story about one community, but in the process he illuminates general principles about the ways in which ethnic and racial identities are constructed dynamically through practical activity. Sanchez shows, for instance, how Mexican migration helped fill the shortage of low-wage labor created by laws mandating the exclusion of Asians, how restrictive covenants and racial zoning by whites helped create a Mexican American community with fixed spatial boundaries, and how discrimination against other minority groups occasionally encouraged interethnic alliances based on physical proximity and shared experiences.¹⁸

One important feature of the scholarship of Gutierrez and Sanchez is their view of ethnicity as relational rather than as atomized and discrete. Group identities form through interaction with other groups. As a result, Spaniards, Mexicans, Pueblo Indians, and Anglos in New Mexico changed each other as well as themselves through complicated experiences of conflict and cooperation. Mexican American identity in Los Angeles in Sanchez's account emerged out of complex interactions with Asian Americans, blacks, and Native Americans to be sure, but also with Molokans, Jews, and Anglo Protestants. Vicki Ruiz argued along similar lines in *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives*, her excellent study about Chicana working women in Los Angeles during the 1930s and 1940s. Ruiz's research revealed the ways in which physical proximity in neighborhoods enabled Chicana workers to unite with women of other backgrounds to fight for trade union representation to address their common grievances on the job, including problems they faced specifically as women, such as sexual harassment. Similar research on Chicanos in Texas by David Montejano exposes the importance of Anglo-Mexican relations, while Neil Foley's study of cotton economy in that state demonstrates the mutually constitutive as well as competitive nature of relations among Anglos, Mexicans, and blacks. In a brilliant and generative study of *testimonios* by nineteenth-century Californios, Rosaura Sanchez draws upon a stunning repertoire of theories from literary criticism, cultural geography, sociology, and social history to delineate the ways in which the displaced Californio elite both resisted and paradoxically reinforced the racist hierarchies

of their Anglo conquerors, establishing themselves as an aggrieved and racialized U.S. ethnic group while simultaneously participating in and endorsing the exclusion and subordination of Native Americans.¹⁹

As a dynamic, fluid, and relational category, ethnic identity emerges as contested within Chicano studies scholarship. In *Walls and Mirrors*, a vitally important study of Mexican immigration to the United States, David Gutierrez shows how the value of "whiteness" and its concomitant imperatives of racialized exclusion have divided Mexican American communities between those who favor citizenship and cultural incorporation in the United States and those oriented more toward maximizing group resources by maintaining solidarity with all people of Mexican origin on both sides of the border. Gutierrez shows how settled descendants of previous immigrants develop interests and political positions different from those of new immigrants. In an important twist, however, he also identifies the significance of a core contradiction among Anglos who demand low-wage Mexican labor to benefit the U.S. economy while maintaining a racialized view of Mexicans as unwelcome and unfit for cultural or political inclusion.²⁰ For Gutierrez, the power of the possessive investment in whiteness means that ethnic identity among Chicanos changes its boundaries over time: internal politics and the external opportunity structure help shape Chicanos as assimilationist or separatist, united in defense of immigrants or divided into inclusive and exclusive factions, eager to identify themselves as "white" or determined to ally with other aggrieved communities of color.

This excellent body of historical work helps explain the subtlety and supple nature of contemporary Chicano cultural criticism. Jose Saldivar's brilliant *Border Matters* ranges over diverse forms of cultural expression to explore the ways in which the existence of the U.S.-Mexico border shapes Chicano imagination and expression. In an innovative and persuasive study, Carl Gutierrez-Jones shows how police surveillance, brutality, and incarceration shape the subtexts of a broad range of Chicano fiction and film representations. Ramón Saldivar explains how oral and written traditions among Chicanos contain a consistent aesthetic and challenge prevailing power relations by "opting for open over closed forms, for conflict over resolution and synthesis."²¹

One of the main generative achievements of Chicano studies scholarship has been to illuminate the ways in which complex cultural meanings become encoded in unlikely sites, unassuming artifacts, and ordinary practices of everyday life. Rosa Linda Fregoso's *The Bronze Screen*, for example, presents a scintillating study of the ways in which collective memory, popular culture products, religious rituals, and decidedly gendered images and ideas serve as impetus for

a feminist politics of "differential consciousness." Similarly, Gloria Anzaldua reads the Virgin of Guadalupe as a complex "religious, political, and cultural image" symbolizing "the mestizo true to his or her Indian values" as well as "rebellion against the rich, upper and middle class; against their subjugation of the poor and the *indio*." Jose Limon blends cultural critique, ethnography, social history, and folklore in his richly textured and insightful studies of social interactions among Tejanos at barbecues, dance halls, and the myriad other sites where everyday life activities shape and reflect social identities.²²

Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano shows how the poisonous legacy of sexism in popular Chicano narratives, songs, and theatrical traditions suppresses the experiences and criticisms of women while constituting the community along masculinist lines. Norma Alarcon analyzes the layers of sexism sedimented in the Malintzin legends, as well as the problems they pose for Chicana writers and critics. While Chicano critics have been insightful about the ways in which a shared group identity can hide serious divisions within the group, they have also been brilliant in detailing the ways in which widely divergent interests and practices might emerge from common roots. Steven Loza offers an example of the latter in his pathbreaking and carefully researched examination of the plurality and diversity of Chicano music from Los Angeles, *Barrio Rhythm*. James Diego Vigil shows how the aesthetics of the *ranflas* (low riders) driven by Chicano car customizers mimic the methodical, slow, and smooth kinesics manifested in the stylized dress and body language of Chicano street gangs, while Brenda Bright explores the ways in which low-riding practices in three cities in Texas, New Mexico, and California reveal both unity and division within and across Chicano communities.²³

These extraordinary works illustrate the importance of ethnic studies scholarship in providing perspective, understanding, and analysis of the problems we face in the present as a result of the cultural transformations transnational capital engenders. Yet, Chicano studies draws its determinate shape not just from the imperatives of the present, but from the practices of the past. Anxieties about identity that may appear new and daunting to relatively privileged people raised in monolingual environments in metropolitan countries have a long history among aggrieved groups for whom cultural complexity and creative code switching constitute the baseline realities of life. Consequently, some of the most sophisticated vocabularies and grammars of cultural criticism and cultural practice come from groups with comparatively little political and economic power. In the case of Chicano studies, the brilliant innovations of the present draw upon collective resources shaped and honed through the struggles

of the past, as exemplified in the enduring relevance of a Chicano studies work from the 1950s—Americo Paredes's *With His Pistol in His Hand*.

Paredes's book explores the ballad of Gregorio Cortez, a popular *corrido* from South Texas based (as corridos are) on an actual incident that took place in 1901. According to Paredes, the popularity of many versions of the song celebrating the struggles of Gregorio Cortez stemmed from its utility as an allegory about all Tejano people. Relating the story of a peaceful and hardworking man minding his own business who was unjustly attacked and forced to flee in order to avoid being charged for a crime that he did not commit, the ballad's verses systematically unmask the falsity of prevailing Anglo slurs against Mexicans.

The incident starts when the Anglo, monolingual sheriff of a Texas county learns that a stolen horse might be in his vicinity. Discovering that Gregorio Cortez recently traded for a mare, the sheriff travels to the Tejano's ranch, accompanied by an Anglo deputy known for his bilingual skills. The deputy does not know Spanish as well as he thinks he does, however. He informs Reynaldo Cortez that the sheriff wishes to speak with Gregorio, and when Reynaldo tells his brother in Spanish "someone wants you" (as in someone wants to speak with you), the deputy translates the words back to the sheriff as "you are a wanted man." Furthermore, when the deputy asks Cortez if he recently traded for a horse, he uses the word equivalent to the generic English term for a horse (*caballo*) rather than the more precise gender-specific Spanish term for a mare (*yegua*). When Cortez replies that he has not traded for a caballo, the deputy tells the sheriff that the rancher is lying. The sheriff pulls out his gun and shoots at but misses Cortez's brother. Cortez returns the fire in self-defense and kills the sheriff.²⁴ Cortez's skill as a rider enables him to escape the posses chasing him. He becomes a folk hero among Tejanos and even earns the respect of Anglos who recognize that he has been falsely accused of murder for acts committed in self-defense. Cortez is never captured, but in order to save his family and his community from reprisals, he turns himself in to the law, walking in proudly "with his pistol in his hand."

The key elements in the Gregorio Cortez narrative inverted prevailing Anglo stereotypes about Mexicans. In a society where racist slurs depicting Mexicans as dishonest, stupid, and cowardly served to legitimate Anglo conquest and fraudulent expropriation of land legally held by Tejanos, the ballad of Gregorio Cortez offered an eloquent alternative. Paredes notes that just as white slave owners raped black women and then portrayed black males as sex fiends, Anglo Texans stole land from Mexicans and then defamed their victims as people prone to steal. To initiate and legitimate the expropriation of Chicano land

and labor, they developed stories about Mexicans as unintelligent, lazy, and cowardly. In the ballad of Gregorio Cortez, the charge of thievery turns out to be inaccurate, simply a product of Anglo ignorance and linguistic incompetence. Gregorio Cortez is hardworking, highly skilled, intelligent, and courageous. One particularly important verse inverts one of the most sacred legends of the Anglo Texans. For years, admirers of the state law enforcement agency, the Texas Rangers, celebrated the courage of their heroes through a story about a riot in a border town. When local authorities ask the Texas Rangers for help in subduing hundreds and maybe thousands of Mexican insurgents, the state agency sends only one ranger, arguing that there is only one riot. The "humor" of this anecdote relies upon knowledge of a common racist slur that holds the courage of whites to be so great that it takes only one white man to subdue an entire group of Mexicans. In the ballad of Gregorio Cortez, however, these odds are reversed, as just one elusive Mexican frustrates the combined efforts of the Texas Rangers, local sheriffs, and posses. A powerful couplet in the song demonstrates this inversion: "Decia Gregorio Cortez, con su pistola en la mano,/ Ah, cuanto rinche montado para un solo mexicano!" (Then said Gregorio Cortez, with his pistol in his hand,/ Ah, so many mounted Rangers, against one lone Mexican!)²⁵

The ballad of Gregorio Cortez and the practices of topical songwriting and singing from which it emerged testify to the presence among Chicanos of what art historian Robert Farris Thompson calls "alternative academies."²⁶ These sites provide opportunities for personal and collective artistic expression. They offer education in the guise of entertainment, and they serve as conduits for the moral economy that oppressed people need in order to deal with the ideological, political, economic, and police power of their enemies. Paredes's book shows how it fell to one popular song to keep alive historical memory of an incident of injustice, to invert dominant stereotypes, celebrate individual heroism, identify group loyalty as the ultimate moral obligation, and call a community into being through performance.

Of course, changes in historical conditions can give new meaning to old cultural expressions. The rise of Chicana feminism in the 1970s and 1980s created a consciousness sensitive to the masculinist biases built into the ballad of Gregorio Cortez, what Renato Rosaldo calls its "primordial patriarchy." A song that served emancipatory purposes at one moment may become reactionary in another era, just as a group identity forged in struggle under one set of circumstances may become an obstacle to emancipation at a later moment. Chicana feminists as well as gay and lesbian Chicano and Chicana writers have been particularly active in rereading and reevaluating the traditions of their own

communities in order to fuse the traditional antiracism of Chicanos with the necessity for projecting "a heterogeneous, changing heritage into the future."²⁷

Yet for all of its grounding in a previous era, Paredes's study of the ballad of Gregorio Cortez remains relevant to understanding, analyzing, and acting upon the oppressive power of racial hierarchies in our lives. While adding important and historically specific knowledge to what we already know about Chicanos, *With His Pistol in His Hand* speaks to the experiences of other groups as well. It demonstrates how popular culture and indigenous voices offer evidence about social history, and it challenges us to explore the relationship between all cultural texts and their social and historical contexts. It shows how people act in the arenas that are open to them with the tools they have available.

Most important, Paredes's book reminds us that in any moment of danger, people from aggrieved communities can be a source of enormous insight and empowering analysis. Ethnic studies scholarship is no substitute for systematic and coordinated political action, but action without understanding is always doomed to fail. Scholars from aggrieved communities can play a particularly important role in solving our present problems, not primarily because of who they are, but rather because of what they and their communities have been forced to learn from the hands dealt them by history. Especially when many of the wealthiest and best-educated people in positions of leadership are attempting to escape responsibility for the consequences of their own policies by scapegoating immigrants, non-English speakers, and low-wage workers, ethnic studies and Chicano studies scholars have a key role to play in determining what kind of future we will have, or more ominously, whether we will have any future at all.

Unity and Division

We live in an age of painful contradictions. Mass communication and mass migration bring the people of the world closer together in unprecedented ways, uniting diverse populations through common participation in global markets, investments, and mass media. Yet the practices and processes that affect everyone do not affect everyone equally. At the very moment that we find the people of the world becoming more united, we also find that economic inequality, cultural insecurity, and ethnic, religious, and racial rivalries renew old antagonisms and engender new conflicts, leaving us paradoxically more divided than even before.

Ethnic divisions and racial conflicts have a particularly poisonous presence at the present moment. From Bosnia to Belfast, from Rwanda to Russia, from

East Timor to Tel Aviv, we see the destructive consequences of ethnic antagonisms everywhere. It is understandable that under these circumstances people might be wary of any kind of "identity politics" in which racial, religious, and ethnic identities become the basis for political solidarity and cultural practice. Writers arguing from a variety of political perspectives have critiqued identity politics as encouraging allegiance to group interests rather than a sense of civic responsibility extending across racial and ethnic lines, as an assault on the traditions and values most responsible for human progress, and as a diversion from real social problems that have nothing to do with social identities. Alarmist articles in major news magazines bemoan the erosion of a "common" culture in the United States, while neoconservatives sneer about the emergence of "victim studies" in academia. Critics attack minority artists and intellectuals as guilt-mongering whiners demanding special privileges and seeking to elevate inferior works in order to elevate their own self-esteem. On a broader front, ambitious politicians demagogically dismantle the antidiscrimination mechanisms established as a result of the civil rights movement, mislabeling antiracist remedies as instruments of "reverse racism." All around us, we see evidence of a fundamentally new era for the possessive investment in whiteness, fueled by ferment over identity politics.

Yet once we remember that whiteness is also an identity, one with a long political history, contemporary attacks on "identity" politics come into clear relief as a defense of the traditional privileges and priorities of whiteness in the face of critical and political projects that successfully disclose who actually holds power in this society and what has been done with it. Contrary to the claims of neoconservatives that they stand for universal interests, the politics of whiteness as exemplified by attacks on immigrants and on affirmative action amount to little more than a self-interested strategy for preserving the possessive investment in whiteness, a politics based solely on identity. Conversely, the best ethnic studies scholarship, cultural production, and community organizing aims at opening up an understanding of ethnicity as hybrid, heterogeneous, and multiple (in the eloquent formulation of Lisa Lowe)—as a political project aimed at creating identities based on politics rather than politics based on identities. These projects rely on egalitarian politics and struggles for social justice to counter the identity politics of whiteness that generates identities based on the defense and perpetuation of inequality.²⁸ Different ethnic groups have different histories and experiences; as long as that is the case, organizing along ethnic lines will always make sense. Yet ethnic groups still must decide which things bring them together and which things divide them, which groups offer them useful

alliances and which do not. Mobilizing around a common group identity does not preclude forming strategic and philosophical alliances with other groups.

Under current conditions, defending immigrants requires solidarity among Asian, Latino, and Caribbean communities. Attacks on linguistic diversity create opportunities for coalitions between Latinos and Asians, while incidents of racially motivated police brutality bring together immigrants and citizens. Efforts to organize trade unions among low-wage workers require coalitions that include African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, Native Americans, and European Americans. The Committee against Anti-Asian Violence in New York defends Asian victims of vigilante violence and police brutality, but it also unites with the National Congress for Puerto Rican Rights to stage a Racial Justice Day rally and march, while publicizing the activities of Project REACH, a multicultural organization established to provide drop-in centers that offer safe havens to gay and lesbian youths, support HIV-positive youth, help women defend themselves against sexual assaults, and train youth leaders.²⁹ Asian Immigrant Women Advocates (AIWA) in Oakland, California, brings together second- and third-generation Asian American women united in their commitment to help empower Asian immigrant women working in the electronics, hotel, and garment industries. AIWA's members come from different national backgrounds, speak different languages, and belong to different classes, yet their shared concern about the lives of low-wage women workers from Asia leads them to political actions that address the class problems that women face as workers, the gender problems they confront as women, the legal problems they experience as immigrants, and the racial problems they encounter as members of racialized groups.³⁰ Organizing efforts among Latino workers at the New Otani Hotel in Los Angeles have drawn upon ethnic solidarity in Mexican and Salvadoran communities, but they have also fused a strategic alliance with Korean veterans of Japanese slave labor camps with longstanding grievances against the hotel's Japanese owner, the Kajima Corporation, for its role in Japanese imperialism during World War II.³¹

The Bus Riders Union in Los Angeles originated in problems with public transportation in the city that affect all ethnic groups. Yet the group's analysis showed that the transportation routes favored by inner-city residents generated funds for the transit system that subsidized the commuter trains used by suburban residents. Arguing that neighborhood race effects accounted for the disproportionate resources made available to commuters from mostly white suburbs, the union brought suit against the transit authority on civil rights grounds. In this case, the 10 to 20 percent of white bus riders in the inner city

experienced violations of their civil rights because they relied on services utilized disproportionately by minorities. The Bus Riders Union reached an impressive settlement with the transit authority. Their strategy demonstrated the centrality of race in determining access to public services, yet they mobilized a struggle that did not revolve around racial identities, but rather one that united members of all races in a common struggle for social justice.³²

Action within and across ethnic groups in these struggles is made possible by what the participants know, not who they are. Their situated knowledges, historical experiences, and current struggles with power give their ethnic identities their determinant meanings. Like scholars in Chicano studies and other ethnic studies fields, their knowledge comes from their experiences, their strategic insights from the ways in which having less power than your enemies makes it important to know the truth and dangerous to deny reality. Political struggle, social analysis, and social theory are mutually constitutive; each is better when linked to the other. As James Baldwin pointed out years ago, "People who cling to their delusions find it difficult, if not impossible, to learn anything worth learning: a people under the necessity of creating themselves must examine everything, and soak up learning the way the roots of a tree soak up water. A people still held in bondage must believe that *Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make ye free.*"³³

ORIENTALS

ASIAN AMERICANS IN POPULAR CULTURE

Robert G. Lee



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Introduction

Yellowface

Marking the Oriental

In March 1997, the cover of *National Review* featured President William Jefferson Clinton, first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, and Vice President Al Gore, all in yellowface. The president, portrayed as a Chinese houseboy—buck-toothed, squinty-eyed and pigtailed, wearing a straw “coolie” hat—serves coffee. The first lady, similarly buck-toothed and squinty-eyed, outfitted as a Maoist Red Guard, brandishes a “Little Red Book,” while the vice president, robed as Buddhist priest, beatifically proffers a begging bowl already stuffed with money.

In using the yellowface cartoon to illustrate a story about alleged political corruption, the editors of *National Review* simultaneously emphasized their racial point and revived a tradition of racial grotesques that had illustrated broadsides, editorials, and diatribes against Asians in America since the mid-nineteenth century. The cover story summarized allegations that the Clinton administration had solicited campaign donations from Asian contributors in exchange for policy favors. These allegations virtually ignored the much larger illegal campaign contributions of non-Asians and focused almost exclusively on Asian and Asian American contributors.¹ Like most of the mainstream media, *National Review* was silent on the broader questions: the impact of multinational corporations on American politics and the baleful influence of big money on big politics. *National Review* instead played the race

card. Focusing only on the Asian and Asian American campaign contributions, *National Review* made it clear that it was not corporate money, or even foreign money generally, but specifically Asian money that polluted the American political process. In the eyes of the *National Review* editors, the nation's first family (with Al Gore as potential heir) had been so polluted by Asian money that they had literally turned yellow.

Yellowface marks the Asian body as unmistakably Oriental; it sharply defines the Oriental in a racial opposition to whiteness. Yellowface exaggerates "racial" features that have been designated "Oriental," such as "slanted" eyes, overbite, and mustard-yellow skin color. Only the racialized Oriental is yellow; Asians are not. Asia is not a biological fact but a geographic designation. Asians come in the broadest range of skin color and hue.

Because the organizing principle behind the idea of race is "common ancestry," it is concerned with the physical, the biological, and the reproductive. But race is not a category of nature; it is an ideology through which unequal distributions of wealth and power are naturalized—justified in the language of biology and genealogy. Physiognomy is relevant to race only insofar as certain physical characteristics, such as skin color or hue, eye color or shape, shape of the nose, color or texture of the hair, over- or underbite, etc., are *socially defined* as markers of racial difference.

The designation of yellow as the racial color of the Oriental is a prime example of this social constructedness of race. In 1922, the U.S. Supreme Court denied Takao Ozawa, an immigrant from Japan, the right to become a naturalized citizen. In its ruling, the court recognized the fact that some Asians, including Ozawa, were of a paler hue than many European immigrants already accepted into the nation as "white." Race, the court concluded, was not a matter of actual color but of "blood" or ancestry, and Ozawa, being of Japanese "blood," could not claim to be white, no matter how white his skin.²

What does Yellowface signify? Race is a mode of placing cultural meaning on the body. Yellowface marks the Oriental as indelibly alien. Constructed as a race of aliens, Orientals represent a present danger of pollution. An analysis of the Oriental as a racial category must begin with the concept of the alien as a polluting body.

The cultural anthropologist Mary Douglas argues that fears of pollution arise when things are out of place. Soil, she observes, is fertile earth when on the ground with tomatoes growing in it; it is polluting dirt when on the kitchen table. Pollutants are objects, or persons, perceived to be out of place. They create a sense of disorder and anomaly in the symbolic structure of society. Douglas observes that pollution is not a conscious

act. Mere presence in the wrong place, the inadvertent crossing of a boundary, may constitute pollution.³ Aliens, outsiders who are inside, disrupt the internal structure of a cultural formation as it defines itself vis-à-vis the Other; their presence constitutes a boundary crisis. Aliens are always a source of pollution.

Not all foreign objects, however, are aliens—only objects or persons whose presence disrupts the narrative structure of the community. It is useful here to distinguish between the alien and the merely foreign. Although the two terms are sometimes used interchangeably, they carry different connotations. “Foreign” refers to that which is outside or distant, while “alien” describes things that are immediate and present yet have a foreign nature or allegiance. The difference is political. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, as early as the sixteenth century “alien” referred to things whose allegiance lay outside the realm in which they resided, as in “alien priories”—monasteries in England whose loyalty was to Rome. This early definition of “alien” emphasized the unalterable nature of the foreign object and its threatening presence.

Only when the foreign is present does it become alien. The alien is always out of place, therefore disturbing and dangerous. The difference between the alien and the merely foreign is exemplified by the difference between the immigrant and the tourist. Outsiders who declare their intention of leaving may be accorded the status of guest, visitor, tourist, traveler, or foreign student. Such foreigners, whose presence is defined as temporary, are seen as innocuous and even desirable. On the other hand, if the arriving outsiders declare no intention to leave (or if such a declared intention is suspect), they are accorded the status of alien, with considerably different and sometimes dire consequences. Only when aliens exit or are “naturalized” (cleansed of their foreignness and remade) can they shed their status as pollutants.

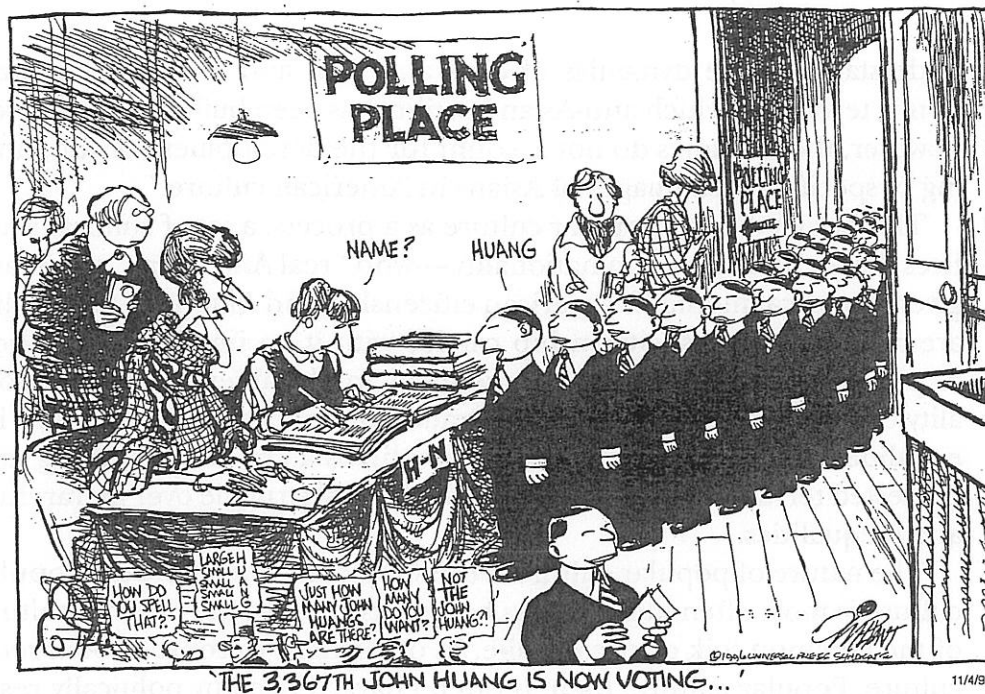
Alienness is both a formal political or legal status and an informal, but by no means less powerful, cultural status. The two states are hardly synonymous or congruent. Alien legal status and the procedures by which it can be shed often depend on the cultural definitions of difference. In 1923, a year after it denied Takao Ozawa the right to naturalize, the Supreme Court stripped Bhagat Singh Thind, an Indian immigrant who was already an American through naturalization, of his U.S. citizenship.⁴ In *Ozawa v. United States*, the court had ruled that no matter what the actual color of his skin, nor how much he could prove himself culturally assimilated, Ozawa’s Japanese “blood” made him “unamalgamable” by marriage into the American national family. In *United States v. Thind*, despite the ethnological evidence presented by Thind that he, a high-caste Hindu, was a descendent of Aryans and hence white by “blood,” the

court ruled that he was not, holding that race was not a scientific category but a social one, and upheld the revocation of Thind's citizenship.

In both *Ozawa* and *Thind*, the Supreme Court tacitly recognized race to be a product of popular ideology. In both cases, Chief Justice Sutherland, writing for the court, cited the existence of a "common understanding" of racial difference which color, culture, and science could not surmount. The important thing about race, the Supreme Court held, was not what social or physical scientists at the time may have had to say about it, but rather how it was "popularly" defined.

Not until 1952, after more than a century of settlement in the United States, were Asian immigrants finally granted the right to become naturalized citizens. Even so, long after the legal status of "alien" has been shed, the "common understanding" that Asians are an alien presence in America, no matter how long they may have resided in the United States nor how assimilated they are, is still prevalent in American culture. In 1996, the immediate response of the Democratic National Committee to allegations that it had accepted illegal campaign donations from foreigners was to call Asian American contributors to the party's coffers and demand that they verify their status as citizens or permanent residents. One such donor, Suzanne Ahn, a prominent Houston physician and civic leader, reported to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights that DNC auditors threatened to turn her name over to the news media as "uncooperative" if she did not release personal financial information to them. Ahn concluded that she had been investigated by the DNC, the FBI, and the news media simply because she had contributed to the DNC and was Asian American. Even public figures do not escape the assumption that Asian Americans are really foreigners in disguise. When Matthew Fong, a fourth-generation Californian, ran as a Republican candidate for Secretary of State in California—a position his mother March Fong Yu had held for the better part of two decades—he was asked by news reporters whether his loyalties were divided between the U.S. and China.⁵

In the run-up to the 1996 presidential elections, a cartoon by syndicated cartoonist Pat Oliphant played on the persistent "common understanding" of Asian Americans as permanent aliens in America. It showed a befuddled poll watcher confronted with a long line of identically short Oriental men with identical black hair, slit eyes behind glasses, and buck teeth, all wearing identical suits and waving ballots. Referring to the Asian American DNC official who was made the poster boy of the fundraising scandal, the caption reads, "The 3,367th John Huang is now voting." Echoing the public comment of presidential candidate Ross Perot that none of the Asian names brought out in the campaign finance scandal thus far sounded like they belonged to "real" Americans, one of



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Oliphant's signature nebbishes asks from the margin, "Just how many John Huangs are there? How many you want?"⁶ The cartoon plays on the "common understanding" that Orientals are indistinguishable as individuals and thus ultimately fail as "real" Americans. How could Oliphant's poll watcher, the yeoman guardian of the American political process and embodiment of "common understanding," possibly hope to distinguish among all the Orientals flooding into the nation's body politic?

Popular Culture and Race

The Oriental as a racial category is never isolated from struggles over race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, and national identity. The Supreme Court's "common understanding" is a legal fiction. It gives popular convention, the common sense of "real" Americans, the power to define race. The "common understanding" of the Oriental as racialized alien therefore originates in the realm of popular culture, where struggles over who is or who can become a "real American" take place and where the categories, representations, distinctions, and markers of race are defined. Some studies attribute hostility toward Asian immigrants directly to economic competition and the creation of an ethnically defined segmented labor market. They provide us with an economic framework for

understanding the dynamics of class and race and a map of the economic terrain on which anti-Asian hostility has been built. By themselves, however, those studies do not account for the development or functioning of specific racial images of Asians in American culture.⁷

This book takes up popular culture as a process, a set of cultural practices that define American nationality—who “real Americans” are in any given historical moment. American citizenship and American nationality are not synonymous; citizenship carries with it an implicit assumption or promise of equality, at least in political and legal terms, while nationality contains and manages the contradictions of the hierarchies and inequalities of a social formation. Nationality is a constantly shifting and contested terrain that organizes the ideological struggle over hierarchies and inequalities.

The nature of popular culture is the subject of much debate.⁸ Popular culture is most often identified as having its roots in the organic culture of the common folk or peasant life, in opposition to court or bourgeois culture. Popular culture, then, is often characterized by politically resistant, if often nostalgic, qualities. Ever since the rise of industrial capitalism in the early nineteenth century, popular culture has been in reality complex, increasingly shaped by the capitalist processes of its production and circulation. Nevertheless, popular culture, albeit sometimes reconstituted as co-opted or deracinated mass culture, continues to be identified with subordinated groups, as opposed to the dominant ruling class.

The mobilization of national identity under the sign “American” has never been a simple matter of imposing elite interests and values on the social formation, but is always a matter of negotiation between the dominant and the dominated. Subordinated groups offer resistance to the hegemony of elite culture; they create subaltern popular cultures and contest for a voice in the dominant public sphere.⁹ The saloon vies with the salon, the boardwalk with the cafe; and the minstrel theater with the opera house as an arena for public debate and political ideas.¹⁰

Although it mobilizes legitimacy, the cultural hegemony of dominant groups is never complete; it can render fundamental social contradictions invisible, explain them away, or ameliorate them, but it cannot resolve them.¹¹ However deracinated, whether co-opted, utopian, nostalgic, or nihilist, popular culture is always contested terrain. The practices that make up popular culture are negotiations, in the public sphere, between and among dominant and subaltern groups around the questions of national identity: What constitutes America? Who gets to participate and on what grounds? Who are “real Americans?”

Since popular culture is a significant arena in which the struggle over defining American nationality occurs, it also plays a critical role in defining race. Race is a principal signifier of social differences in America. It

is deployed in assigning differential political rights and capital and social privilege, in distinguishing between citizens presumed to have equal rights and privileges and inherently unequal, subordinated subjects.¹² Although race is often camouflaged or rendered invisible, once produced as a category of social difference it is present everywhere in the social formation and deeply imbedded in the popular culture. The Oriental as a racial category is produced, not only in popular discourse about race *per se* but also in discourses having to do with class, gender and sexuality, family, and nation. Once produced in those discourses, the Oriental becomes a participant in the production and reproduction of those social identities.¹³

The Stereotype and the Family

The racist humor of portraying Bill and Hillary Clinton and Al Gore in yellowface works only because the first family is always presumptively white—an enduring, if anachronistic, symbol of America as a white nation in the popular imagination. Yellowface transforms the first family, historically and symbolically white, into the Oriental family: Bill, Hillary and Al have, through the pollution of Asian money, become alien, yellow, and Oriental.

The family is the primary metaphor of the nation. The idea of Americans as a family is the discursive basis for an imagined nationhood. The family as a symbol of nationhood structures nationality as fictive kinship, a common ancestry. One need only recall that the most common terms in which the nation is invoked (“brotherhood,” “mother tongue,” “fatherland”) all reference terms of kinship. These are terms also shared by race. The fiction of common ancestry (both biological and cultural) has been made central to the construction of both race and nation. Indeed, historically, the two categories have been interchangeable. For example, it was common in the early decades of this century to speak of national groups—the American, French, or Japanese—as “races.”

The family is also the primary ideological apparatus, the central system of symbols, through which the state contains and manages contradictions in the social structure. It is the principal social unit through which the individual can become a national subject, a member of the community through birth, adoption, marriage. The family is a primary site in which labor power and class relations, gender and sexual relations, ethnic and racial identities are produced and reproduced. It is also the symbolic system that gives meaning to and organizes the closest psychological, economic, and sexual relationships among people and within a community.¹⁴

Although the family has often been considered a private sphere, even

a haven from the marketplace and from public life, in fact the family unit has been a key entry point for state intervention in every area of daily life.¹⁵ In the realm of economics, the state enters the family via taxes and estate laws. The state regulates gender relations in the family via marriage and divorce laws. It regulates sexual relations through family laws regarding age of consent, sanctioned and prohibited sexual behaviors, pornography and marriage. It regulates the familial relationship between parents and children via custodial, child welfare, and adoption law. It regulates race relations through laws prohibiting interracial marriage and addressing housing, education and public accommodations.

In the "crisis of the family" and the struggle to "restore family values" that has been trumpeted for the past two decades, the Asian American family, portrayed as "intact," "disciplined," and patriarchal, has been presented as the model for economic success in a period of economic decline.¹⁶ This representation is quite recent; Asians have been cast as an economic, social, and sexual threat to the American national family throughout their history in the United States.

The pollution of the nation's first family did not only come about through a suspected exchange of money for policy. The Clinton administration's hands-off policies toward human rights violations by the Indonesian government in East Timor, or the superexploitation of workers by Nike in Vietnam in the interest of free trade, to name only two instances, has barely scandalized the American press or public. What the press seems to have been most interested in is the number of times Asian contributors and fundraisers came for coffee at the White House. Although the White House logs of overnight guests show no Asian or Asian American guests save the governor of Hawaii, press reports that big contributors to the Clinton re-election campaign might be invited for overnight stays at the White House were usually printed next to, and often illustrated with, pictures of Asian American fundraisers. The idea that the Lincoln bedroom might now be slept in by (wealthy) Orientals seems to most offend the "common understanding." The alien body present in the national bedroom can now be imagined as the deeper source of pollution.

The Six Faces of the Oriental

Six images—the pollutant, the coolie, the deviant, the yellow peril, the model minority, and the gook—portray the Oriental as an alien body and a threat to the American national family. From each of these racial paradigms emerges a wide array of specific images. Each of these representations was constructed in a specific historical moment, marked by

a shift in class relations accompanied by cultural crisis. At such times American nationality—who the “real Americans” are—is redefined in terms of class, gender, race, and sexuality.

The representation of the Asian as pollutant originated in mid-nineteenth-century California. For white settlers from the East, Chinese settlers from the West disrupted the mythic narrative of westward expansion. The Chinese constituted an alien presence and a threat of pollution which earlier fantasies of exotic but distant Asia could not contain. In the popular imagination, California was a free-soil Eden, a place where small producers, artisans, farmers, and craftsmen might have a second chance to build a white republic, unstained by chattel slavery or proletarian labor.¹⁷ In this prelapsarian imagery, the Chinese were both identified with the moral chaos of the Gold Rush and portrayed as the harbingers of industrial wage slavery. As the national debate over slavery, abolition, and statehood came to a boiling point in the late 1860s, the ideal of establishing California as both free and racially pure demanded the removal, or at least the exclusion, of both Chinese and African Americans.

The representation of the Chinese immigrant worker as a coolie came about as the U.S. working class was formed in the 1870s and 1880s. Although they had come to America as free (albeit highly proletarianized) workers, Chinese immigrants found themselves segregated into a racially defined state of subordination as “coolie labor.” The Chinese “coolie” was portrayed as unfree and servile, a threat to the white working man’s family, which in turn was the principal symbol of an emergent working-class identity that fused class consciousness with gendered national and racial identity. The coolie representation not only allowed the nascent labor movement, dominated by its skilled trades, to exclude Chinese from the working class; it also enabled the skilled trades to ignore the needs of common labor, which it racialized as “coolie labor” or “nigger work.”¹⁸ Irish immigrants who were in the process of consolidating their own claim to Americanness and a white racial identity led the popular anti-Chinese movement.

The Oriental as deviant, in the person of the Chinese household servant, is a figure of forbidden desire. The deviant represents the possibility of alternative desire in a period during which middle-class gender roles and sexual behavior were being codified and naturalized into a rigid heterosexual cult of domesticity. In the West, the Chinese immigrant played a central role in the transition from a male-dominated, frontier culture shaped by the rituals of male bonding to a rigidly codified heterosexual Victorian culture. In the 1860s and early 1870s, hundreds of Chinese women were brought to San Francisco and forced into

prostitution. By the end of the decade, thousands of Chinese immigrant men were driven out of the mines and off farms and ranches and were hired into middle-class households as domestic servants. Both of these situations opened up possibilities of interracial sex and intimacy. Middle-class whites regarded the Chinese with ambivalence. On the one hand, the Chinese were indispensable as domestic labor; on the other, they represented a threat of racial pollution within the household. A representation of the Oriental as both seductively childlike and threateningly sexual allowed for both sympathy and repulsion. The representation of the Oriental as deviant justified a taboo against intimacy through which racial and class stability could be preserved.

By the turn of the century, Asian immigrants were represented as the yellow peril, a threat to nation, race, and family. The acquisition of territories and colonies brought with it a renewed threat of "Asiatic" immigration, an invasion of "yellow men" and "little brown brothers." At the moment when the United States prepared to pick up "the white man's burden" in the Caribbean and the Pacific, "Asiatic immigration" was said to pose "the greatest threat to Western civilization and the White Race."¹⁹ Domestically, the triumph of corporatism, the homogenization or de-skilling of industrial labor, urbanization, and immigration had all contributed to massive changes in both middle- and working-class families. These changes contributed to the construction of a culture of consumption, reflected in new gender roles as well as new sexual attitudes and behavior among men and women of both classes. In the aftermath of the First World War and the Bolshevik Revolution, these domestic social and cultural transformations were accompanied by deep anxieties about racial suicide and class struggle.²⁰ Through its supposed subversion of the family, the yellow peril threatened to undermine what Lothrop Stoddard, a popular advocate of eugenics and racial geopolitics, called the "inner dikes" of the white race.

The representation of Asian Americans as a model minority, although popularly identified with the late 1960s and 1970s, originated in the racial logic of Cold War liberalism of the 1950s. The image of Asian Americans as a successful case of "ethnic" assimilation helped to contain three spectres that haunted Cold War America: the red menace of communism, the black menace of racial integration, and the white menace of homosexuality. In place of a radical critique calling for structural changes in American political economy, the model minority mythology substituted a narrative of national modernization and ethnic assimilation through heterosexuality, familialism, and consumption. By the late 1960s, an image of "successful" Asian American assimilation could be held up to African Americans and Latinos as a model for nonmilitant, nonpolitical upward mobility.

Since the 1970s, the model minority image has coexisted with and reinforced a representation of the Asian American as the gook. The shift in the U.S. economy from large-scale industrial production to flexible accumulation and the global realignment of capital and labor have brought about new crises of class, race, and national identity. In the context of these contemporary crises, the "intact" and "traditional" Asian American family is promoted as a model of productivity, savings, and mobility, not just for African America or Latino families but now for all American families, including those of the white middle class. Simultaneously, however, in post-Vietnam and post-liberal American popular culture, the Asian American is represented as the invisible enemy and the embodiment of inauthentic racial and national identities—the gook. The Vietnam War is replayed in popular culture as the narrative of American decline in the post-industrial era. The received wisdom of the Vietnam War narrative is that America's defeat in Southeast Asia was brought about by a faceless and invisible Asian enemy, aided and abetted by an American counterculture. The rapid growth of the Asian American population and its apparent success render the model minority, like the now-mythic Viet Cong, everywhere invisible and powerful. In the narrative of American decline, Asian Americans are represented as the agents of foreign or multinational capital. In this narrative of national decline, Asian American success is seen as camouflage for subversion. The model minority is revealed to be a simulacrum, a copy for which no original exists, and thus a false model of the American family. In the dystopic narrative of American national decline, the model minority resembles the replicants in the science fiction book and film *Blade Runner*—a cyborg, perfectly efficient but inauthentically human, the perfect gook.

The cultural crises in American society that give rise to these representations of the Oriental come in the wake of economic change, particularly in what economic historians Gordon and Reich call transformations of the structure of accumulation.²¹ The transformation of the social relations of production and the organization of work and segmentation of the labor market have profound effects on the structures, relations, and meaning of families, gender, and race. At each stage of capitalist development, new "emergent" public spheres are constituted and new demands arise for participation in the dominant public sphere.²² The popular discourse of race in which these constructions of the Oriental were produced and deployed is not a transparent or unmediated reflection of the economy; but rather an expression of social contradictions drawing on images of the present, visions of the future, and memories of the past.

As a historical analysis of the construction of representations of the Oriental and a study of racial ideology, this book asks how these

representations were constructed and what ideological tasks they performed. Racial images and stereotypes are ideologically active, and thus contradictory and unstable. The Oriental appears in various guises throughout American popular culture, in pictures, songs, paraphernalia, books, and movies, and no single image represents the totality of the representation. Therefore, rather than focus on any single genre or medium, or the technology of a genre, or its reception, this book looks at popular songs of the nineteenth century, magazine fiction and illustrations, silent movies and pulp fiction, and Hollywood musicals and dramas. The principle criterion for selecting these "texts" has been the extent to which each helps to illuminate the social contradictions of its production, the internal complexities of the Oriental representation, and the way in which the Oriental is imbedded in the discourses of race, gender, class, and sexuality in America.

Yellowface: Stereotype and Discourse

The reappearance of the yellowface grotesque on the front pages of a national magazine was deeply unsettling, particularly to those Asian Americans who had bought into the myth of the model minority. Since the mid-1960s, the national media had popularized an image of Asian Americans as the perfectly assimilated and presumptively accepted ethnic minority in the United States. Among many Asian Americans, the emergence of the model minority image led to a popular preoccupation with "good" stereotypes vs. "bad" stereotypes.

This preoccupation with "positive" and "negative" stereotypes reifies and inadvertently legitimates the racial discourse of the Oriental that produces both the coolie and the minority. It shifts attention from a critical analysis of race toward a narrow utilitarian calculus in which specific images are measured in terms of their usefulness to strategies of upward mobility.²³ Discussions of "good" and "bad" stereotypes have, more often than not, focused on the distance between image and reality. However, stereotypes of Asian Americans are not simply distorted versions of Asian lives in America. The Yellowface coolie and model minority, despite their apparent contradiction, not only coexist but, in fact, can become mutually reinforcing at critical junctures because neither is created by the actual lives of Asians in America. What produces these stereotypes is not just individual acts of representation, but a historical discourse of race that is embedded in the history of American social crises.

On the other hand, a concern with these images as the product of and agent in a complex racial ideology can lead us to an understanding of

racial representation as a social practice. The Oriental is a complex racial representation, made up of contradictory images and stereotypes. This complexity and ambiguity gives the Oriental its ideological power, its connection with the broadest web of social concerns. In turn, this connectedness reinforces the representation and gives the racial stereotype its power to survive, mutate, and reproduce.

Resisting the Oriental

Asian Americans have not been passive in the face of the production and reproduction of the Oriental stereotype which has barred them from immigration, citizenship, and participation in American society and culture. A century before John Huang became a celebrity in the annals of American political scandal, Asian Americans challenged their exclusion from America both through the legal system and in the realm of culture.

The historical struggle of Asian Americans to achieve full citizenship in the United States has challenged and revived every aspect of citizenship in a liberal democracy, including the right of entry and naturalization, equal protection and economic rights, and the right to participate fully in the public culture.²⁴ Asian names dot the landscape of constitutional jurisprudence: Yick Wo (equal protection), Fong Yue-Ting (immigration), Wong Ark Kim (citizenship through birth), Toyota (land ownership), and Fred Korematsu (internment) are only a few of the most widely cited. Historian Sucheng Chan has identified almost 200 cases that Asian Americans have brought before the U.S. Supreme Court and more than a thousand cases that have come before lower federal courts and whose written decisions have warranted inclusion in the *Federal Reporters*.²⁵ Chan estimates that this number represents only about 10 percent of the cases actually brought before Federal courts.

One need only recall such books as Younghill Kang's *East Goes West*, Carlos Bulosan's *America Is in the Heart*, or John Okada's *No-No Boy* to be reminded that culture has also been an arena where Asian Americans have contested their exclusion as Orientals, critiqued the unfulfilled promises of democracy, and mapped alternative visions of American identity. Cultural critic Lisa Lowe observes,

Asian American culture is the site of more than critical negation of the U.S. nation: It is a site that shifts and marks alternatives to the national terrain by occupying other spaces, imagining different narratives and critical historiographies, and enacting practices that give rise to new forms of subjectivity and new ways of questioning the government of human life by the national state.²⁶

The film *Mississippi Masala* is a contemporary example of Asian Americans' resistance to their racial subordination as Orientals in popular culture. Directed by Mira Nair, the film is ostensibly about an interracial love affair between an Indian American woman and an African American man, but maps a critique of the contemporary racial landscape in America shaped by class, gender and immigration. *Mississippi Masala* simultaneously calls our attention to the transnational character of contemporary Asian American immigration and to the multiple statuses of Asian Americans, as both bourgeoisie and working class and as a "middleman minority" within local racial and class hierarchies. The film rejects both the evasion of liberal multiculturalism and the essentialism of ethnonationalism in favor of a political consciousness shaped by an understanding of contradictory histories and the complexity of power. Only the full consciousness of these global histories and local positions make possible class alliances and trans-racial coalitions. In its utopian vision of a racial democracy, *Mississippi Masala* stands with Carlos Bulosan's *America Is in the Heart* in the Asian American tradition of resisting the Oriental.

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LING WOO IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The New Face of Asian American Stereotypes on Television

◆ Chyng Feng Sun

In contemporary mass media, representations of Asian Americans are still rare. Although they comprise 3.6% of the U.S. population (Census 2000), only 0.8% of TV characters in the period 1991-1992 and 1.3% of TV characters in 1994-1997 were Asian Americans, and the majority of the roles were minor (Gerbner, 1998). According to *Fall Colors 2000-2001*, Asian Pacific American characters comprise 3% of the prime-time characters; however, if one focuses on primary recurring characters, the percentage drops to 2%. (Children Now, 2001, p. 15). Although the presentation of Asian American characters has increased in recent years, the underrepresentation and stereotyping of Asian Americans persists. One Asian American high school student stated, "[When you watch TV] you want to think I could do that. I could be there. That could be me in five or six years. But you don't see anything of yourself" (Children Now, 2001, p. 21).

It is against this historical backdrop of invisibility that Lucy Liu seized public attention and became the most visible Asian American female star

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on TV with her role as Chinese American lawyer Ling Woo on the hit show *Ally McBeal*. Her presence also spreads out onto the big screen, and her latest role as one of the lead characters in *Charlie's Angels* was a step up to her stardom. If we examine Lucy Liu's representations in movies such as *Payback* and *Charlie's Angels*, we can trace the origins of her characterization of Ling Woo. Ling Woo is strong, outspoken, secure in her opinions, and open about her sexuality. Unlike the more common fresh-off-the-boat refugee Asian American character who speaks little or no English, Ling is an articulate, high-powered, and acculturated attorney. Very importantly, she breaks the "China doll" stereotype of Asian American women as submissive, frail, and quiet. Being an Asian beauty, Ling Woo also counters the blond-haired, blue-eyed white beauty standard. (Not only do men lust over her, but even *Ally McBeal* says that Ling has a "perfect, perfect" face.) As the most visible Asian American role on TV, Ling Woo's character raises the question: Is she breaking the stereotypes or actually reinforcing them? To answer this question, Elaine Kim has emphasized, "You have to place Ling in the context of at least a 100-year history of sexualization of Asian women (Lee, 1999, para. 10).

◆ Asian American "Controlled Images" in the Media

Ideological constructs very often reflect material conditions, and therefore it is important to understand the historical circumstances that led to the development of stereotypical perceptions. From the 1840s to the 1930s, a million men immigrated from China, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, and India to the United States and Hawaii to work as cheap laborers; U.S. immigration law treated those workers as temporary, disposable, and exploitable labor and

prohibited the entry of their families and Asian American women, fearing the permanent presence and growth of Asian Americans (Espiritu, 2000). During the late 19th century, the economic recession stirred up the Nativist movement against Asian immigrants. Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, and eventually in 1924 barred all Asians from immigrating to the United States (Mansfield-Richardson, 1996).

This immigration history helps explain why Asian American males are seen to this day as sexually deviant, paradoxically either asexual or as a rape threat to white women. In the pre-World War II era, Asian American males were forced to establish "bachelor societies" because of the unavailability of the women of their race. Anti-miscegenation laws prohibiting them from marrying white women. Chinese were posted as rape threats to the white woman and considered to have an "undisciplined and dangerous libido"; for example, in 1912, Saskatchewan law prohibited white women from being employed by Chinese-owned business (Fung, 1996, p. 82). At the same time, they were excluded from working at higher paying jobs in the growing metallurgical, chemical, and electrical industries, and were confined instead to low-paid, dead-end jobs as laborers, or doing "women's work" as laundrymen, cooks, and domestic servants (Ling, 1990, p. 145).

Because media are important "ideological state apparatuses" that reinforce hegemony (Althusser, 1971), the dissemination and perpetuation of the desexualized Asian American male stereotype obscure the history that prevented many Asian Americans from establishing conjugal families in pre-World War II United States (Espiritu, 2000, p. 91). Alfred Wang observed that between 1868 and 1952, "No other racial groups have been subjected to worse legalized . . . sexual deprivation than the Chinese male immigrants (Wang, 1988, p. 18, quoted in Espiritu, 2000, p. 19). In presenting Asian American males as "eunuchs," the media

have helped render the social and cultural oppression invisible. These emasculated stereotypes are embodied by Charlie Chan and Fu Manchu, the most far-reaching symbols for almost a half century.

The detective character Charlie Chan, developed by novelist Earl Derr Biggers in 1925 to 1932 and used in movies and television as recently as 1981, is a yellow-faced "house nigger" (Xing, 1998, p. 61) who walks with "the light dainty step of a woman" (Chin, Chan, Inada, & Wong, 1974, p. xvi) and speaks in fortune-cookie English (Cao & Novas, 1996). He represents "the helpless heathens to be saved by Anglo heroes or the loyal and lovable allies, sidekicks, and servants" (Kim, 1982, p. 4) and is "in essence an effeminate, wimpy, nerdy, inscrutable Asian male" (Cao & Novas, 1996, p. 60).

In contrast to Charlie's passivity, Dr. Fu Manchu is a cruel, cunning, diabolical representative of the "yellow peril" (Xing, 1998, p. 57) who threatens to destroy Western civilization. Although Fu Manchu is powerful, he still lacks "masculine heterosexual prowess" and is an emasculated character

wearing a long dress, batting his eyelashes, surrounded by muscular black servants in loin cloths, and with his habit of caressingly touching white men on the leg, wrist, and face with his long fingernails is not so much a threat as he is a frivolous offense to white manhood. (Chin & Chan, 1972, p. 60, quoted in Espiritu, 2000, p. 91)

The emasculatation of Asian American males continues today in the form of "nerdy Asian American adolescent math geniuses and brainy Asian American scientists who speak fortune-cookie English" (Cao & Novas, 1996, p. xvi.) Kung Fu masters, mostly played by Chinese actors but not Chinese Americans such as Jet Lee and Jackie Chan, can kick butt, but almost never play romantic and loving roles.

The hypersexualization of Asian American women stands in contrast to this portrayal of Asian American men as asexual, but this stereotype also has its root in immigration practice. When Asian American men were not allowed to establish conjugal families, they sought sexual outlets in prostitution. It was estimated that in 1870, 61% of the 3,536 Chinese women in California were prostitutes. In 1875, the Page Law prohibited the importation of Chinese prostitutes, but all Chinese women nevertheless continued to be suspected of being prostitutes, and regardless of their social status, were subject to harassment (Cao & Novas, 1996, p. 29; Chan, 1991, p. 132; Espiritu, 2000, p. 18).

The hypersexualization of Asian women in popular culture was also reinforced by U.S. military involvement in Asian in the 20th century when troops fought battles or were stationed in Korea, the Philippines, Taiwan, Japan, and the counties of Southeast Asia. These soldiers "often developed strong perceptions of Asian women as prostitutes, bargirls and geishas"; these images are also prevalent in Asian war movies of this period (Villapando, 1989, p. 324). Thus, Asian American male asexuality and Asian American female hypersexuality serve to "confirm the white man's virility and superiority" (Espiritu, 2000, p. 13).

Although America's popular culture is generally male centered and male dominant, Asian American women are currently more visible than Asian American men, as Feng (1993) stresses:

Novelist Amy Tan is more widely read than novelist Shawn Wong; comedian/actor Margaret Cho got a shot at network television series, while Russell Wong had to settle for starring in the syndicated *Vanishing Son* and Asian American women anchor local news broadcasts across the country, while Asian American men occupy less visible positions as field reporters. (p. 27)

Though more visible, Asian American female actors still play very narrow roles. Tajima (1989) summarizes the Asian American female archetypes:

* There are two basic types: the Lotus Blossom Baby (a.k.a. China Doll, Geisha Girl, shy Polynesian beauty) and the Dragon Lady (Fu Manchu's various female relations, prostitutes, devious madams). . . . Asian women in film are, for the most part, passive figures who exist to serve men—as love interests for white men (Lotus Blossoms) or as partners in crime of men of their own kind (Dragon Ladies). (p. 309)

Lotus Blossom is “a sexual-romantic object”; characters of her vein are the “utterly feminine, delicate and welcome respites from their often loud, independent American counterparts” (p. 309). Dragon Lady is her opposite—cunning, manipulative and evil; Anna May Wong immortalized that role in *Thief of Baghdad* (1924) where her character uses treachery to help an evil Mongol prince attempt to win the Princess of Baghdad. Both Lotus Blossom and Dragon Lady are hypersexualized, but the former is passive and subservient while the latter is aggressive and “exudes exotic danger” (Chihara, 2000, p. 26).

Tajima (1989) also points out the two very different kinds of relationships that Asian American women characters in popular culture have with white men and with men of their own race. She further suggests that “noticeably lacking is the portrayal of love relationships between Asian women and Asian men, particularly as lead characters” (p. 312). On-screen romance between Asian American men and white women is even more scarce because it ruptures white male hegemony (Hamamoto, 1994, p. 39). When sexuality is involved, an Asian American male is more likely to be portrayed as a “yellow peril” who presents a rape threat to white women, as is well documented by Marchetti (1993). She states that “rape narratives pose the danger

that the ‘pure’ but hopelessly fragile and childlike white woman will be ‘ruined’ by contact with the dark villain” (p. 8) and mainly uses examples from movies in the early part of the 20th century to demonstrate her points, movies such as Cecil B. DeMille’s *The Cheat* (1915), D. W. Griffith’s *Broken Blossoms* (1919), and *The Bitter Tea of General Yen* (1933). In contemporary American popular culture, Xing (1998) observed that the yellow peril narrative may be less blatant but did not stop haunting the silver screen. He states that TV programs such as *Girls of the White Orchid* (1985) (a made-for-television program about white slavery in Tokyo), or movies such as the *Karate Kid* series (1980s) all have the subplots of “threat of rape” (p. 58).

On the other hand, the pairing of a white male and Oriental female is naturalized and has its colonialist root, manifested in the “rescue” narrative. Ella Shohat (1997) points out:

Not only has the Western imaginary metaphorically rendered the colonized land as a female to be saved from her environmental disorder, it has also projected rather more literal narratives of rescue, especially of Western and non-Western women—from African, Asian, Arab, or Native American men. (p. 39)

Buescher and Ono (1996), in their critique of Disney’s *Pocahontas*, state that “in the name of saving women, colonialism presented itself as a necessary and benevolent force” (p. 132). It is important to note that the rescue is not only physical but also psychological. *The World of Suzie Wong* (1960), *The Year of Dragon* (1985), *Good Morning, Vietnam* (1987), *Karate Kid II* (1986), and *The Red Corner* (1998) are just some obvious examples.

The West’s dominance is secured through narratives of romance and sexuality that justify white men’s possession of the bodies of the women of color (Marchetti, 1993, p. 6). The romantic relationship

between a white male and an Asian female is always unequal and demands her total devotion and submission, body and soul. *Madame Butterfly*, the ultimate symbol of Oriental femininity, was first written as a short story by John Luther Long in 1898. It was adapted by Giacomo Puccini as an opera, premiered in 1904 in Milan, and in a very short time became popular and was widely performed (Xing 1998, p. 59). It is a story about Pinkerton, a U.S. naval officer stationed in Nagasaki, who had a love affair with a local prostitute Cho-Cho-San. After Pinkerton goes back to United States, devoted Cho-Cho-San gives birth to his son and awaits his return. Betraying Cho-Cho-San's love, Pinkerton gets married and several years later, he comes back to Japan with his American wife to claim his son, indifferent to Cho-Cho-San's suffering. Heartbroken, she commits suicide. Cho-Cho-San is reincarnated again and again in the public imagination as a Japanese Takarazuka performer in *Sayonara* (1957), and a Vietnamese prostitute in *Miss Saigon* (1991). Wilkinson (1990) states:

In recent centuries the rich tradition of Oriental exoticism took a new form as colonial conquest and rule provided the opportunity in the form of readily available girls, and encouraged Europeans and Americans to think of the West as active and masculine and the East as passive and feminine. (p. 13)

Madame Butterfly symbolizes and justifies the Orient's submission to the West's patriarchal domination in that the creators naturalized her inferiority, selfless dedication, and ultimate self-sacrifice.

♦ Ally McBeal

Launched in the fall of 1998, within months, *Ally McBeal* won the Golden Globe award for best comedy, and Calista Flockhart, who plays the title character,

won the best actress award (Leafe, 1998). Both critically and commercially acclaimed, this show even placed Flockhart's face on a *Time* magazine cover as the poster child for postfeminism with the title: "Is Feminism Dead?" (Bellafante, 2000). The show is centered around Ally McBeal, a young female lawyer in a law firm where partners are lovers with their associates and colleagues discuss sex more than work.

In its first season, this show drew 12 million viewers, half of them men and half women, and in 1998, the audience reached 14.8 million (Cooper, 1999). This show is often described by critics as either loved or hated by its viewers. Bellafante (1998) states that Ally McBeal represents an "It's all about me" type of feminism. "If feminism of the '60s and '70s was steeped in research and obsessed with social change, feminism today is wed to the culture of celebrity and self-obsession" (para. 7). Shalit (1998) calls Ally McBeal a "do-me feminist" who is

plucky, confident, upwardly mobile, and extremely horny. She is alert to the wounds of race and class and gender, but she knows that feminism is safe for women who love men and bubble baths and kittenish outfits; that the right ideology and the best sex are not mutually exclusive. She knows that she is as smart and as ambitious as a guy, but she's proud to be a girl and girlish. (para. 6)

Shalit (1998) condemned the show as "a slap in the face of the real-life working girl, a weekly insult to the woman who wants sexual freedom and gender equality, who can date and litigate in the same week without collapsing in a Vagisil heap" (p. 27). But Chambers (1998) thinks the show

has clearly struck a nerve with twenty-something women who feel both excited and confused by the choices bestowed upon them by the feminist movement. They understand Ally's big question: "If I have it all, can I be happy?"... It

captures the sense of anxious expectation that people feel in their 20s, when most of life's important decisions still lie ahead. (para. 3)

And Chambers's interviewees seemed to confirm her observations with comments such as "Emotionally, I've been through a lot of similar feelings to Ally," and "This isn't exactly the way [putting long hours at the office] I saw my life playing out. If all this is being put off, then I want a great marriage. I want him to knock my socks off. I want him to blow me away." Cooper (1999) argues that the show constantly pokes fun of male chauvinism and asserts female sexuality and freedom. (p. 3). Cooper draws from Laura Mulvey's concept of the "male gaze" in film studies, which proposes that classic Hollywood films force the viewers to look at women characters from a masculine viewer's perspective, regardless of the real gender of the viewer, but applies Arbuthnot and Seneca's reading of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* to *Ally McBeal*, stating that the characters refuse to yield to the male gaze but become active; they gaze back and expose the gazer (p. 7). Lewis (1998), a dedicated male fan, fiercely defends the show and can't understand why feminist critics were unable to differentiate comedies from reality and believes "people who are aghast . . . should have their medication checked" (para. 4). Overall, the critics have been concerned about the gender issues in the show, but have largely overlooked its racial dimensions. Lucy Liu's character Ling Woo stands out among the mostly blond beauties, not only for her looks but also for the way she evokes a longstanding symbolic history of Orientalism in a new way.

◆ Ling Woo

Ling Woo is tough, rude, candid, aggressive, sharp-tongued, and manipulative. She certainly breaks the "China doll" stereotype,

and she is neither submissive nor selfless. However, she is suspiciously like a "dragon lady" when she growls like an animal, breathing fire at Ally, walking into the office with the music of Wicked Witch of the West in *The Wizard of Oz*. But what really makes Ling Woo stand out is how the producer David Kelley has built an ultra sexualized aura around her. In fact, Kelley created the character especially for Lucy Liu after she originally auditioned unsuccessfully for the role of Nell (Mendoza, 1999). When Ling was first introduced to the show, she was suing a Howard Stern-like disc jockey, Wick, because his programs contributed to sexual harassment in her workplace. He said that the reason why Ling brought suit was that she had a "slutty little Asian thing going." And Ling said, in a pretty twisted logic, that part of her wanted to sleep with him because if she did, she would kill him.

Ling also sexualizes and objectifies herself. In another show, Ling sued a nurse for pretending to have breast implants, a trick that led to Ling's sister's plastic surgery. Ling recalled that the nurse "unveils. She's full. Soft. Without a hint of a blemish. I almost signed up and my breasts are beyond reproach." Ling also has owned a mud-wrestling club as well as an escort service marketed to underage boys.

Although almost all the women in the show are sex-hungry, Ling still stands out for her kinky sexual preferences and techniques. Her talk on sex is explicit and graphic ("What I really want out of a relationship at the end of the day . . . is a penis." Or she has a polyp in her throat because her boyfriend "didn't want her to scream.") She used to tape hundred-dollar bills to her privates to "smell like money." She asks her boyfriend, Richard Fish (played by Greg Germann, a white man), not to call her by her name but to call her "fruit" or anything related to food. She performs "hair jobs" (brushing her long hair on his bare chest to arouse him), sucks his finger, and becomes a sex kitten when he caresses her knee-pit. At the beginning of

their relationship, she restrains herself from having sex with Richard and her reason is all the more tantalizing: once men have had sex with her, they cannot have enough. Later, when their relationship has a problem, the first thing she says is that she is faking her orgasm.

In an episode aired on November 1, 1999, during the sweeps period when ratings are used to set local station's advertising rates, Ling kisses Ally. Although it seems to be producer David Kelley's ratings-boosting technique to use tantalizing lesbian kissing scenes (all the while affirming those kissers' heterosexuality), Ling's role is particularly seductive when compared to the other heterosexual situations. Ally once kissed her office assistant Elaine and another time her co-worker Georgia, but both times are out of unpleasant necessity: getting rid of a man she is not interested in dating. But for her third lesbian-ish kiss, she is definitely seduced by Ling. Scott Seomin from the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation explained that the reason why Ling was chosen to be the seducer was because she is "the exotic, erotic experimenter of the group" (Lee, 1999, para. 3).

Consistent with a history of representation that scarcely ever shows Asian men as sexually desirable, Ling has romantic involvements with both white men (primarily with the law firm partner Richard Fish) and a black man (a lawyer Jackson Duper, played by Taye Diggs), but no "yellow" man. One episode that had visible Asian American men in the show included a waiter in a Chinese restaurant (played by Alex Shen) who barely spoke English, misunderstood the order, and cooked Ling's colleague's pet frog. Although frog leg is also a delicacy in French cuisine, Kelley may have had his conscious or unconscious reasons to set the storyline in a Chinese restaurant because it resonates with the common myth that Chinese "eat everything" including their pet dogs and cats. Thus, Hollywood's history of emasculating Asian American men and hypersexualizing Asian American women is alive and well in *Ally McBeal*.

Ling's character is controversial in Asian American communities. She is popular among Asian American female college students who cheer how that character breaks the stereotypes of submissive and quiet Asian American females. Their opinions can be summed up by the author who wrote "Lucy Liu . . . My Girl From *Ally McBeal*" in a college publication for Asian American students:

Strong Asian female role models are few and far between in the media today. Typically, Asian women are seen as "fresh off the boat," non-English speaking, small, naïve, sex objects, or in denial about their culture. . . . Ling is not the soft spoken, passive, quiet Asian woman that society has stereotyped us as. She is tough, aggressive, and worldly . . . she is . . . a beautiful, sexy woman with a mind that is both cunning and slick . . . she is not the typical Asian "geisha" girl. Let her be a model for us to be strong, smart, sexy, and aggressive. (Tolenino, 1999, p. 16)

At the same time, Darrell Hamamoto, whose *Monitored Peril* is so far the most comprehensive study of Asian American characters on TV, calls Ling "a neo-Orientalist masturbatory fantasy figure" who is "concocted by a white man whose job it is to satisfy the blocked needs of other white men who seek temporary escape from their banal and deadening lives by indulging themselves in a bit of visual cunnilingus while relaxing on the sofa" (Lee, 1999, para. 7). Helen Liu, a media consultant about Asian American issues, states that people are drawn to Ling not because she was central or powerful but because of her stereotypical qualities (Chihara, 2000, p. 26). Although Ling is problematic, there is a common sentiment that "it is better than nothing": as Chun (2000) said in *Asian Week*, "It is pretty cool that there's an all-American Asian Angel—that would never have happened in the 70s" (p. 31).

These different and opposed readings of Ling's character demonstrate the polysemic nature of the media text (Fiske, 1986) as well as how differing levels of knowledge about the historic context of Asian American representations affect the reading. It is also true that the message of the character "depends largely on what the viewer brings to the sofa" (Zahra, 1999, p. 20) and that audiences do make resistive or oppositional readings even if they are dedicated fans (Jenkins, 1995). Research that can bridge an examination of Asian American representations with an analysis of how those representations actually affect both Asian Americans and other racial groups is urgently needed. Ethnographic interviews and small groups would be particularly helpful in investigating the tension between media hegemony and the individual viewer's autonomy. We should also examine how the media's political economy affects Asian American's media representations and agitate for regulatory and systematic change.

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