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Texas Studies in Literature and Language, Volume 52, Number 1,
Spring 2010, pp. 70-101 (Article)

Published by University of Texas Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/tsl.0.0047>

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Three Lean Cats in a Hall of Mirrors: James Baldwin, Norman Mailer, and Eldridge Cleaver on Race and Masculinity

Douglas Taylor

During the 1950s and 1960s, James Baldwin, Norman Mailer, and Eldridge Cleaver initiated a literary discussion on race and masculinity that explored the undercurrents of conflict and power traversing the Beat, Civil Rights, and Black Power movements of the post-World War II era. This conversation was prescient, if sometimes also awkward and troubling, in its exploration of the intersection of race, gender, and sexuality in U.S. society. Baldwin's *Another Country* and "The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy," Mailer's "The White Negro," and Cleaver's *Soul on Ice* attempt to renegotiate homosocial relations between black men and white men during the post-World War II era in the hopes of moving closer to some form of racial reconciliation.

To my mind, Baldwin, rather than Mailer or Cleaver, emerges as the hero of this discussion. Mailer's "The White Negro" tells us more about the repressed fantasies of white men than it does about what it means to be black. Furthermore, while Mailer can envision white men benefiting from immersing themselves in black culture, he feels threatened by black men who trespass upon white cultural territory, particularly when such trespass involves the possibility of "miscegenation" with white women. In "The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy," Baldwin's efforts to do battle with Mailer's romantic racialism and his uncritical valorization of a pre-political "rebel without a cause" masculinity anticipate positions that now form the basis for gender studies and critical race theory. This is not to say that Baldwin is unambiguous in his articulation of these positions; often, on issues of race and masculinity, he fails to disentangle himself from the very positions he is attempting to critique. Rather, I would argue that in responding to Mailer's "The White Negro," Baldwin wavers between essentialist, anti-essentialist, and strategic-essentialist perspectives. Furthermore, in his exploration of the roles that fantasy and projection play in

white men's imagining of the racial other, Baldwin moves in the direction of a psychoanalytic exploration of racial dynamics that still remains to be adequately developed within critical race theory.

While Baldwin never formally responded to Eldridge Cleaver's homophobic attack in *Soul on Ice*, Baldwin's *Another Country*, the very text that Cleaver devotes the most critical attention to, can in fact be read as a response to Cleaver. While Eldridge Cleaver is known primarily as a Black Power activist, the vision of racial reconciliation he presents in *Soul on Ice* is naïvely teleological and predicated on cultural hybridity rather than social justice. Baldwin's *Another Country*, on the other hand, is far more skeptical of its white characters' attempts to seek social and cultural interaction with blacks without making any attempt to redress past and present injustices. To the extent that Baldwin entertains a vision of racial reconciliation in *Another Country*, it is reconciliation without guarantees. Additionally, while Cleaver accuses Baldwin of a lack of militancy, it is Eric, the character in *Another Country* who most closely resembles Baldwin professionally and sexually, who is portrayed wielding a machine gun in an attempt to start the revolution his fellow students merely talk about. While the machine gun-toting Eric is merely playing a role in a film, I would argue that this narrative within a narrative can be read as an allegory of the complex and troubled relationship that later emerged between Baldwin and the younger intellectual/activists of the Black Power movement.

As troubling a text as *Soul on Ice* is, I am not as dismissive of it in this essay as other scholars have been. *Soul on Ice* has been rightly criticized for its homophobia and misogyny. Unfortunately, these important and necessary criticisms have overshadowed the ways that this text too, in its attempt to map the racial and sexual dimensions of the U.S. social imaginary and the importance of the sex/gender system to the formation of racial identity anticipates contemporary developments in theoretical discourses on race and gender. This may seem like a dubious proposition to readers used to approaching this text from a purely oppositional standpoint, but it is one I will substantiate in the pages that follow.

The New White Masculinity of the 1950s

During the post-World War II era, there was a new investment in white masculinity. This took the form of the relocation of white women who had formerly been employed in wartime industry out of the factories and back into the home, and an attempt on the part of white workers to resubordinate black men who had taken the freedoms promised by wartime propaganda as an indication that the time was ripe for them to pursue and win social equality. The postwar investment in white masculinity was also propped up by an economic surplus that derived from the exploitation of black and brown

people in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, which enabled the U.S. corporate elite to create a new American middle class, a strata of white-collar employees, comprised of young white men from working class, sometimes ethnic (Jewish, Irish, Italian, and Eastern European) backgrounds, many of whom were veterans and now able to receive university educations as a result of the G.I. Bill. Social Theorist Herbert Marcuse referred to this phenomenon as the “bourgeoisification” of the U.S. working class.¹ The “bourgeoisification” of the white worker resulted in increased racism toward blacks, particularly black men, as white workers and white ethnics, as part of their rise toward the middle class, rejected those aspects of themselves that they believed indicated their low origins—dirt, physicality, sexuality, labor, enthusiasm, and spontaneity, for instance. These elements were repressed and projected onto the bodies of black men and women.

Contrary to the white ethnic worker’s desire to reject his “blackness,” and to subordinate black men, many northern corporate elites, for reasons other than what might be described as “humanitarian,” hoped to bring about a new racial equality within U.S. society. Racial equality, in their view, would help them to usher in a system of rationalized production and consumption in which every unit of labor was equivalent to every other unit of labor, and advertising could be geared toward a mass market with unitary desires and relatively consistent spending habits across demographic boundaries. Similarly, liberal policymakers, during the Cold War era, were increasingly concerned with cultivating an image of the U.S. as a land of freedom and opportunity, an image they would have great difficulty in maintaining so long as there was legalized segregation in the South.²

This contradictory desire to expel blacks from and incorporate blacks into the “mainstream” of U.S. society mirrored white men’s contradictory feelings about whiteness itself. On the one hand, the U.S. had just finished fighting a war in which militant whiteness in the form of Nazism had wreaked havoc on the national sovereignty of European nations and threw the entire world into military and political crisis. The wartime propaganda marshaled to combat Nazism along with the loss of human life involved in this conflict made militantly racist whiteness an object of national repulsion. At the same time, back home, whiteness as a means of erasing class and ethnic difference, achieving upward mobility in relation to a highly visible index of black social stagnation, and as a primary resource for individualization was an object of national desire.

Thus, almost from its inception, the new white masculinity of the post–World War II era was in crisis. Third World movements for national liberation threatened the economic surplus upon which this masculinity depended. African Americans in the U.S., who had always struggled against racial restrictions, entered into a formally organized movement for the desegregation of public accommodations and the extension of full

citizenship to blacks living in the South. And, white men themselves began to rebel against the overly repressive, technocratic ideals of masculinity upheld in postwar U.S. society by developing the alternative masculinities of the playboy and the beatnik.³ Prominent social theorists began to unmask white masculinity as authoritarian (Theodor Adorno, et al.), mimetic (David Riesman), performative (Erving Goffman), and one-dimensional (Herbert Marcuse).⁴

In their mania for a de-ethnicized, classless, hyperrational whiteness, white men began to feel as if they had cut themselves off from the pursuit and satisfaction of desires that lay outside of the utilitarian goals of family and nation. Marcuse referred to this phenomenon as "surplus repression": He might just as easily have called it "castration."⁵ Thus, while black men were generally rendered other and abject because of their association with sex and the body, for certain beatnik bohemians they now became objects of desire, as white men like Norman Mailer, Jack Kerouac, and Norman Podhoretz began to publicly fantasize about the salvific effects of blackness.⁶

Eldridge Cleaver's Dream of Racial Reconciliation

Eldridge Cleaver himself describes the progression of this crisis in white masculinity in the chapter of *Soul on Ice* titled, "The White Race and Its Heroes." According to Cleaver, by the time the 1960s rolled around, whites were becoming disillusioned with their heroes (90). The successes of national liberation movements in the Third World resulted not only in the formation of new subjectivities among people of color, it forced white men to reevaluate themselves and their identities (Cleaver 91). Young white men in particular were becoming more aware that men who had been held up to them as heroes, men whose masculinities they were supposed to emulate (cowboys, pioneers, founding fathers), were actually "slave-catchers, slaveowners, murderers, butchers, invaders, oppressors," deeply implicated in a system of white supremacy based upon foreign and domestic exploitation of people of color (Cleaver 90–92).

Instead of mimetically reproducing a white supremacist, patriarchal system through the performance of white masculinities, young whites began to rebel. According to Cleaver, this rebellion proceeded in several stages. The first stage was the Beat Movement, a movement that involved a refusal to participate in a system that failed to live up to the ideals it espoused. According to Cleaver, this refusal manifested itself in the form of young people "lay[ing] up in their cool beat pads, smoking pot and listening to jazz in a perpetual orgy of esoteric bliss" (93–95). The second stage involved white youth who, instead of dropping out of the system, hoped to change the system through direct action by allying themselves with the Civil Rights Movement (Cleaver 95). These young people were

uncomfortable with the Beat Movement's potential complicity with a system that "could not ask for anything more than to have its disaffected victims withdraw into safe, passive, apolitical little nonparticipatory islands" (Cleaver 95). According to Cleaver, because violence toward whites has a greater effect upon the national conscience than violence toward blacks, these young whites aided the Movement by allowing it to use tactics that it could never have successfully employed with blacks alone (95). Cleaver also, too generously, suggests that whites, through their participation in the Civil Rights Movement, began to transform it into something larger, into a movement with the potential for bringing about a radical transformation of U.S. society (97). The final stage Cleaver describes comes into being with the development of the Hippie counterculture and the New Left. According to Cleaver, this stage came about when white participants in the Civil Rights Movement began using the direct action techniques they learned in the South to protest political issues in the "general society" (as if state-sanctioned racial segregation did not affect the general society) such as the Vietnam War (97). Like Hippie counterculturalists and New Left Radicals themselves, Cleaver believed that the "long hair, the new dances . . . love for Negro music . . . use of marijuana . . . [and] mystical attitude toward sex" of 1960s white youth were tools by which they might resist a totalitarian U.S. society (*Ice* 97–98).

Cleaver both envisions and celebrates such a transformation in the chapter of *Soul on Ice* titled "Convalescence." It is in this chapter, that Cleaver attempts to reconcile the racial divisions between blacks and whites he describes in the earlier chapters of the text. In his thumbnail cultural history of post-World War II U.S. society, Cleaver argues that whites, as a result of their immersion in black music and dance, are getting back in touch with their bodies, and blacks, as a result of their Civil Rights activism, are getting back in touch with their minds (223). Because bodies and minds are what whites and blacks have been respectively denied under a raced and gendered division of labor, Cleaver claims that the new cultural hybridity of post-World War II U.S. society is bringing about a long-awaited racial healing that will reconcile American practice with American ideals (222–23).

Cleaver's cultural utopianism suffers from the same flaws that certain understandings of "hybridity" suffer from today: inattentiveness to the dynamics of power underlying cultural relations. That white youth were enamored of black culture did not indicate the arrival of the Promised Land. That black people, from 1954–1965, gained a national forum for voicing their grievances over racial segregation in the South did not herald a D'Souzian "end of racism."⁷ It was quite possible for white people to employ black music and dance as a means of getting in touch with their bodies (whatever that means) without feeling any need for closer contact

with the black bodies of those who produced these cultural forms. It was also possible that the national forum black people had attained for the airing of racial grievances would no longer be available to them once their interests diverged from those of liberal policymakers and the U.S. corporate elite.

That Cleaver's triumphalist cultural history tries to effect too easy a resolution of the contradictions underlying post-World War II U.S. society is clear from the way that he handles those aspects of that history that do not fit in with his schema. Cleaver reads *Brown vs. the Board of Education*, the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the 1963 March on Washington, and the 1965 Voting Rights Act as signs of reconciliation, but dismisses the murders of Emmett Till; Mack Charles Parker; Schwerner, Chaney, and Goodman; and the four little girls who died in the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, as insignificant to the broader movement of U.S. history toward racial harmony (222–23, 225, 227, 232–33). According to Cleaver, each of these tragedies occurred “too late” to interfere with the seemingly predestined reconciliation of U.S. society, since “not only had Luci Baines Johnson danced the Watusi in public with Killer Joe, but the Beatles were on the scene, injecting Negritude by the ton into whites, in this post-Elvis Presley-beatnik era of ferment” (233).⁸

The Lure and Peril of Blackness: Norman Mailer's “White Negro”

In “The White Negro,” Norman Mailer describes an earlier moment in white men's rebellion against white masculinity, a moment analogous to the Beat phase Cleaver discusses in “The White Race and Its Heroes.” Mailer suggests that this rebellion arises out of an existential crisis in U.S. society produced by the threat of massive, meaningless death by way of mutually assured nuclear destruction (276–77). The angst generated by this crisis, according to Mailer, is further exacerbated by the kinds of conclusions “man” is forced to draw about his “nature,” when confronted with the atrocities of the Jewish holocaust (277). Mailer further suggests that, while resistance to the inhumanity of what he views as a totalitarian U.S. society is possible, such resistance does not go unpunished; and the fear instilled in U.S. citizens by the McCarthy era witch-hunts has almost ensured that resistance will manifest itself in solitary and infrequent acts of courage (277). The result of this morbid state of affairs, according to Mailer, is a pervasive fear and depression throughout U.S. society (277).

Within this bleak scenario emerges the figure of the hipster, a kind of organic anti-intellectual (Mailer 277). While the bases of society derive from human beings' need for security, when society undermines the security that serves as its sole reason for existence, it opens up a new set of possibilities for the courageous and self-aware (Mailer 277). The hipster,

who realizes that he is always already imperiled by premature death via nuclear war, holocaust, or social conformity, comes to accept death, and thereby master it (Mailer 277). The same realization leads him to reject the social ties, which, now, instead of providing security against death, ensure its premature inevitability (Mailer 277–78). The hipster—a figure Mailer considers to be a hybrid of the bohemian, the juvenile delinquent, and the Negro—having abandoned society, finds a new set of values among Negroes (278). Living by what he believes to be Negro values, the hipster's code includes “a disbelief in the socially monolithic ideas of the single mate, the solid family, and the respectable love life” (Mailer 278). This new, post-World War II hipster had, according to Mailer, “absorbed the existentialist synapses of the Negro, and for practical purposes could be considered a white Negro” (278).

The essentialized “Negro” that serves as the model for this mimetic white masculinity is clearly a phantasm, the projection of those desires that cannot be encompassed within the boundaries of white-maleness, and therefore get repressed. Mailer romanticizes the manner in which black men supposedly organize their lives around “Saturday night kicks,” but neglects, for example, to mention black men who wake early Sunday mornings to go to church. Furthermore, it seems more than a little ironic that the danger by which Mailer's Negro is beset (a danger Mailer contends, forces him to adopt a more authentic form of masculinity) derives from the same white men for whom this Negro has now become an object of desire. As in Cleaver's more critical attempt to demystify the racial and sexual stereotypes underlying the formation of black and white subjectivities in *Soul on Ice*, Mailer's Negro is associated with the libidinal drives of the body and lives in and for the moment (279). Unlike the disciplined white male of the American middle class, black men put no store in delayed gratification (Mailer 279). Negro pleasure, as fantasized by Mailer, is immediate and instantaneous (279). This instantaneous gratification, according to Mailer, results in a wholesale revaluation of values (285). In a passage whose echo can be heard in *Soul on Ice*, Mailer claims that becoming a “sexual outlaw” or a “psychopath” (an illness he claims is more prevalent among “the Negro”) is a logical choice for that “cultureless and alienated bottom of exploitable human material” that is excluded from the “cultural nectar” of civilization (284).

While drawing on René Girard, Reid-Pharr describes “boundarylessness,” chaos, and “cultural eclipse” as attributes the dominant culture commonly associates with a horrifying blackness over and against which whiteness gets consolidated. For white hipsters, Mailer's “The White Negro” suggests, these same qualities become objects of desire, which they perceive as offering them the possibility of escaping the restrictive

confines of a repressive white masculinity. Mailer's admiration and desire for blackness is so all-encompassing that it even romanticizes a stereotypical black male illiteracy (something one would think would be anathema to a writer). As an example of the way the word "swing" functions within "hip" slang, Mailer relates the story of a "Negro friend" whom he observes engaging in an "intellectual discussion" with a white woman at a cocktail party (286). According to Mailer, although the black man was illiterate, he was not only able to hold his own in the conversation (the pun is appropriate considering the sexual meaning Mailer attributes to the scene), but to cause the woman to whom he is speaking to doubt her own beliefs by simply knowing how to "swing" with the cues he picks up from her facial expressions and vocal intonations (287).

While Mailer, throughout "The White Negro," attempts to demonstrate to white men the possibilities for psychic redemption that inhere in blackness, it is a redemption that is both unilateral and unidirectional. White men may partake of the perceived psychic, sexual, and emotional gratifications of a cultural immersion in blackness, but when, as in this discussion between a black man and a white woman, a black man impinges upon whiteness, it is a source of anxiety. Mailer's anonymous "Negro friend" encroaches upon the prerogatives of white males not only by engaging in discussion with a white woman, but doing so in a manner that, at least, gives the appearance of being "intellectual." Intellect, as Cleaver will point out later, is supposed to be the province of whites—sexuality and physicality, the domain of blacks. Accordingly, the discussion between the white woman and black man becomes a scene of peril that must be cognitively restructured within white supremacist frameworks of sense in order for Mailer to reconcile it with his advocacy of white assimilation of "Negro" values. Thus, even though the conversation requires no literacy on the part of either of the discussants, Mailer makes a point of highlighting the black man's illiteracy (something we, as readers, unfortunately, have to take his word for) (286). Mailer emphasizes that the black man "literally" cannot read or write, as if he is afraid that readers will confuse his "authentic" narrative of black male ignorance with the figurative stereotype, even as he reproduces that stereotype (286). According to Mailer, the illiteracy of his Negro friend does not prevent him from engaging in an "intellectual discussion" with a white woman, because only the woman is interested in ideas. The Negro is interested in "learning a great deal about a type of girl he had never met before" (Mailer 287). Although Mailer never states why his Negro friend desires this knowledge, considering his earlier endorsement of the supposed sexual outlawry of black men who have been excluded from the "cultural nectar" of civilization, the unspoken implication is clear. The deceptive "intellectuality" of the Negro, in Mailer's account, is

actually a simulation, an effect produced by the physical traits that make all blacks “natural” musicians and entertainers—“an extraordinary ear and a fine sense of mimicry” (286). The black man uses these “instinctual” abilities to gain entry within a social circle with which he is unfamiliar, to feign an intellectual interest and capacity he does not possess, and to create uncertainty within the woman whose increasing indecisiveness renders her vulnerable to the sexual machinations of Mailer’s Negro.

The fact that Mailer uses this narrative as an example of what it means to “swing” is appropriate, since this passage, more than any other in the essay, points to the anxieties that underlie Mailer’s proposed project of strategic integration when the movement toward cultural assimilation begins to “swing” in the opposite direction. The appeal of blackness is both lure and peril. On the one hand, it opens up white masculinity to a whole range of possibilities from which it had previously been excluded; on the other, it allows for the infiltration of blackness into previously white domains in ways that are both unexpected and unwanted.

Mailer comments on this possibility later in the essay when he argues that reactionaries have a clearer understanding of the implications of integration than liberals. Reactionaries, Mailer maintains, are correct in thinking that integration will result in miscegenation; white liberals are unconcerned with this possibility, because they have been falsely led to believe that blacks do not desire interracial relationships (291–92). In order to distinguish his position from that of racist organizations like the White Citizen’s Council, Mailer goes on to say that he, personally, believes “it is the absolute human right of the Negro to mate with the White,⁹ and matings there will undoubtedly be, for there will be Negro high school boys brave enough to chance their lives” (292). According to Mailer, this desire for “miscegenation” will come as a “terror” to liberals precisely because they do not expect it (292).

The only active figures in Mailer’s drama of miscegenation are “Negro high school boys,” whose desire for white girls is supposedly so overwhelming that they are willing to risk their lives to satisfy it (292). White men’s desire for black women, and white women’s desire for black men goes unmentioned. Furthermore, although Mailer supposedly supports interracial relationships, he frames them in uniquely legal and biological terms: Negroes have the “human right” to “mate” with whites, he asserts, as if desire can be reduced to legal sanction and amorous relationships to reproductive sex (291). This formulation, once again, also presupposes that interracial desire is unidirectional with blacks desiring whites, and never being desired by them. The terror of miscegenation, I submit, is Mailer’s. It is a terror that derives from the “boundarylessness” of whiteness, once whiteness is opened up by the white hipster’s strategic forays into black culture.

Situated Knowledge in the Time of the Universal Subject

In "The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy," Baldwin signifies on the unspoken homoerotic underpinnings of Mailer's desire for the black male body, calling his critique of Mailer a "love letter" (*Price* 289). While Mailer, in "The White Negro," tries to erase his ethnicity, often writing from the position of a racially pure, nonethnic white "we," Baldwin establishes at the outset the importance of race and ethnicity to his and Mailer's viewpoints by describing himself as "a black boy from the Harlem streets," and Mailer as "a middle-class Jew" (*Price* 289). In a time when only whiteness is read as universal, and the "contingencies" of race, class, ethnicity, and gender are considered to be of merely local or personal interest, Baldwin both apologizes for introducing these factors into his discussion even as he shrewdly insists on their significance (*Price* 289–90). Similarly, Baldwin ensures that readers do not interpret his race-consciousness as racism, by implying that only a simpleton would understand the mere mention of Mailer's ethnicity as a form of anti-Semitism (*Price* 290). Although the terms "Harlem streets" and "middle-class Jew" threaten to redouble the racial divisions that already exist between Baldwin and Mailer, by introducing the issue of class, it is clear that Baldwin, unlike Mailer, harbors no desire to fetishize these differences, but is instead interested in the ways that blackness, whiteness, and Jewishness, particularly in regard to masculinity, overlap.

While Mailer's gaze positions black men as both objects of desire and peril, Baldwin's gaze is instrumental, fixing itself upon whites in order to ensure his survival (*Price* 290). Alluding to his homosexuality, Baldwin suggests that his exteriority to an American masculinity that presupposes heterosexuality as the proper mode of desire allows him a unique vantage point from which to critique that masculinity (*Price* 290). Indeed, Baldwin is adamant that his readers understand knowledge as rooted in social and historical contingencies. His knowledge about Mailer is "from [the] black boy's point of view" (Baldwin, *Price* 290). His knowledge about whites derives from his need for survival (Baldwin, *Price* 290). His knowledge about American masculinity results from the way he has been menaced by it as a gay man (Baldwin, *Price* 290). And yet this insistence on situated knowledge is just as frequently undercut by what I would suggest is a kind of "strategic universality." One early example of this use of strategic universality occurs when Baldwin employs a "melting pot" narrative of upward mobility to suggest that he can understand Mailer because of the similarities of their journeys (presumably from ethnically marked unknowns to late modernist authors and literary personalities), but then puts this narrative under erasure by describing the difference that race makes. Baldwin goes

on to suggest that Mailer himself has taken advantage of this difference by stereotyping black men as “walking phallic symbol[s]” in order to shore up the sexual insecurity of middle-class white males (*Price* 290). Raced masculinity, for Baldwin, is not as simplistically Manichean as Mailer would have it; if anything, inasmuch as white masculinity is black masculinity’s inverted image, it is specular, and thereby, makes “the relationship . . . of a black boy to a white boy a very complex thing” (*Price* 290).

Shadowboxing with Mailer

As I will later argue in regard to Eldridge Cleaver’s *Soul on Ice*, Baldwin’s “The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy,” ultimately, fails to disentangle itself from the masculinist premises it attempts to critique. In the same way that Baldwin, in the passage referred to above, shuttles back and forth between a mimetic identification with Mailer based on their common status as ethnically marked writers, and a critique of Mailer for attempting to erase the mark of Jewishness by shoring up the sexual insecurities of white men, “The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy” shuttles back and forth between two contradictory tropes of masculinity: 1) masculinity as an endless hall of mirrors in which each man imitates the other because of his presumed superiority, but none possess the manhood all desire, and 2) masculinity as a boxing match in which the contenders square off against one another, each in an attempt to affirm his masculinities at the other’s expense. The second trope is the one more commonly associated with Mailer, the first is the one Baldwin truly wishes to defend.

It would be difficult to think of a more agonistic metaphor than the one Baldwin uses to describe his initial encounter with Mailer. Baldwin characterizes the meeting as “two lean cats, one white and one black. . . . circling around each other” (*Price* 290). Mailer possesses wealth, whiteness, and fame, but Baldwin has the black authenticity about which Mailer has claimed intimate knowledge, and can, thereby, challenge Mailer’s pretensions (*Price* 290). Mailer has the power to dominate and control; Baldwin, the power to unmask. While Baldwin, as protagonist of this auto/biographical essay,¹⁰ opts not to employ this power during this, his initial encounter with Mailer, Baldwin, the narrator, not only unmasks Mailer’s pretense of expertise in regard to blackness, but he unmasks the power dynamics of their encounter in ways that make the reader attentive to its performativity.

In his meta-level discussion of the scene enacted in his and Mailer’s encounter, Baldwin deconstructs the metaphysics of masculine presence their confrontation is designed to encourage. At first, it appears as though Baldwin has fallen under the spell of the agonistic masculinity for which Mailer is famous, as he, uncharacteristically, describes himself and Mailer as “the toughest kids on the block,” but no sooner has Baldwin assumed

this hypermasculine stance than he tires of it, characterizing it as a “grueling and thankless role” (Price 291). Indeed, Baldwin claims that he and Mailer are trapped in these roles, which are both survival strategies and desiring relations to manhood (Price 291). The problem with gender performativity, Baldwin submits, is that social expectations for repeat performances limit one’s freedom to play other roles (Price 291). Articulating a modernist lament over the limitations that roles place upon social actors, Baldwin complains, “it is always extremely hard—to maintain a kind of watchful, mocking distance between oneself as one appears to be and oneself as one actually is” (Price 291). Perhaps, as postmodern theorists of gender performativity would have it, this is because there is no distance, because the subject does not precede the performance, but is the performance’s effect. Certainly, there is an “individual” that precedes the performance, but, to a great extent, this “individual” is an ideological abstraction, artificially removed from exigencies of culture, performance, discourse, history—a blank slate, conceived of as part of an intellectual exercise that tells us very little about human actors who are constantly engaged in the performance of various overdetermined subjectivities. In keeping with Baldwin’s earlier insight, it is not the “pure,” culturally uncontaminated, subjectivity of “oneself as one is” that provides the kind of “watching, mockful distance” he rightly desires as a safeguard against performances that deny the agency of the performer, it is one’s ability to examine one subject position from the situated knowledge of another that produces this critical distance, intra- and intersubjectively.

Perhaps, it is because Baldwin continually reverts to the “pure” positionality of “oneself as one is” that he unwittingly reproduces the masculine tropes he is attempting to critique in this essay. For instance, without the slightest hint of irony, Baldwin describes a debate between Mailer and a French intellectual as “a running, good-natured but astringent argument between them, with Malaquais playing the role of the old lion and Norman playing the role of the powerful but clumsy cub” (Price 291). That Baldwin would fall back upon such trite, *Lion King*-like metaphors to describe a discussion between two men reveals the extent to which he himself has fallen under the sway of the cult of masculinity he is attempting to discredit. Admittedly, Baldwin does describe the contest between Mailer and the French intellectual as a “performance,” but this is related with a kind of “boys will be boys” attitude that hints at Baldwin’s desire to join in the fun (Price 291). The same kind of masculinist posturing occurs later in the essay when Baldwin describes his activities following a meeting with Mailer, and his wife, Adele: “I wandered through Paris, the underside of Paris, drinking, screwing, fighting—it’s a wonder I wasn’t killed” (Price 293–94). Apart from the European locale, such a sentence could just as easily have

come from a Mickey Spillane novel. Another example demonstrates the manner in which Baldwin as a black gay man is excluded from the very discourse he reproduces. Remarking upon Mailer's "stance," Baldwin describes Mailer as:

leaning on the table, shoulders hunched, seeming, really, to roll like a boxer's, and his hands moving as though he were dealing with a sparring partner. And we were talking of physical courage and the necessity of never letting another guy get the best of you (*Price* 300).

Boxing as a metaphor for male gender performativity presents itself once again, and though Baldwin laughs at Mailer's posture, and tells him "Norman, I can't go through the world the way you do because I haven't got your shoulders," it does not seem, to this reader, to be an ironic laughter from the "watching, mockful distance" Baldwin earlier aspires to, but an uneasy laughter deriving from the marginal space in which the white working-class masculinity Mailer affects positions him as an effeminate, gay black male. This issue comes up again, when Baldwin goes to visit Mailer at his home in Provincetown, and finds that Mailer rises at dawn to "go running or swimming or boxing," while Baldwin sleeps in, in "comparative decadence" (*Price* 301). Since Baldwin's assumption of the stereotype of homosexual decadence does not seem to serve any critical purpose, one can only assume it is a forced assumption, resulting from the manner in which decadence gets figured as the opposite of virility within hegemonic discourses of masculinity.

As mentioned earlier, Baldwin in "The Black Boy," shuttles back and forth between an identification with Mailer as a writer whose "journey" is similar to his own, and Mailer as the "lean cat" and "toughest kid on the block" in which he is engaged in an agonistic competition that unfortunately too often takes place on Mailer's terms. Baldwin makes no effort to conceal his admiration for Mailer, describing him as "confident, boastful, exuberant, and loving—striding through the soft Paris nights like a gladiator," and admitting that he "envied him: his success, and his youth, and his love" (*Price* 291). Indeed, from the very beginning of the essay, Baldwin remarks, "Also, I have no right to talk about Norman without risking a distinctly chilling self-exposure. I take him very seriously, he is very dear to me" (*Price* 290). But it is precisely this "seriousness," this inability to summon the "watching, mockful distance," that keeps Baldwin, at least at this point, from crafting an effective response to Mailer's "The White Negro." The white boy (Mailer) gazes on the black boy with a desire for lost wholeness, and the black boy (Baldwin) looks back with desires of his own. Baldwin reveals American masculinity to be an endless hall of

mirrors with white men desiring the masculinity of black men, and black men desiring the wealth, freedom, and culturally endorsed confidence that come with white masculinity.¹¹ That the masculine self-image these men are attempting to cultivate has no being outside of that which resides in the gaze of the other is apparent from Baldwin's sly observation that Mailer wanted to know him, because he, Baldwin, envied Mailer (*Price* 291). Mailer's masculinity, exemplified by "his success, and his youth, and his love," is dependent upon Baldwin's recognition of these qualities. Mailer does not so much "really want to know" Baldwin as he wants Baldwin to (un)really know him, to recognize and repeatedly affirm the phantasmatic masculinity about which Mailer is in doubt. Baldwin, who, oddly, suggests that he would not be averse to playing this role under normal circumstances, is during this, his initial encounter with Mailer, in the midst of a painful break-up, and does not have the emotional resources to do so (*Price* 292). Ironically, Baldwin, in fleeing the emotionally unrewarding role of the black sidekick, falls headlong into the arms of another racial stereotype. The mask that Baldwin dons to hide the pain from a failed relationship ("I hung back, held fire, danced, and lied") is read by Mailer as a kind of cool pose, a physical grace and poise that derive from black men's supposed greater proximity to nature and their uninhibited sexuality (*Price* 292). Mailer casts Baldwin as the noble savage (*Price* 292). Baldwin, in contrast to his earlier insistence upon situated knowledge, once again, employs a kind of strategic universality to undercut Mailer's fetishization of the black male body: "The sexual battleground, if I may call it that, is really the same for everyone; and I, at this point, was just about to be carried off the battleground on my shield, if anyone could find it; so how could I play in any way whatever, the noble savage?" (*Price* 292). Drawing on notions of sexuality as a kind of pre-rational, primordial enterprise in which all men are savages, all men warriors (a fantasy that particularly seemed to appeal to white male participants in the mythopoetic men's movement of the early 1990s), Baldwin deflates the myth of his presumed superiority in the game of sexual warfare by characterizing himself as a wounded, incompetent warrior. In contrast to the Jazz on which Mailer synecdochically grounds his arguments about the pure exuberance and unsublimated sexuality of black culture, Baldwin intersperses this auto/biographical essay with a blues refrain about lost love, designed to demonstrate that black culture, like the white male desire that romanticizes it, is also about lack and loss.

Apart from lost love, the blues Baldwin "sings" in this essay is also a weary blues, a blues about the ways of white folks and the seeming impossibility of their ever really understanding "the reality of the Negro experience" that they themselves helped to create:

I was weary, to tell the truth. I had tried, in the States, to convey something of what it felt like to be a Negro and no one had been able to listen: they wanted their romance. And, anyway, the really ghastly thing about trying to convey to a white man the reality of the Negro experience has nothing whatever to do with the fact of color, but it has to do with this man's relationship to his own life. He will face in your life only what he is willing to face in his. (*Price* 292)

In what is perhaps a creative misreading, I would suggest that the romance to which Baldwin alludes is the Freudian family romance which, in white supremacist societies, gets overlain with a narrative of miscegenation in such a way that the white man takes on the role of the father, the white woman the mother, and the black man, the impetuous child, threatening to transgress the boundaries of the symbolic order by consummating his desire for the white woman (Saint Aubin 1061–62). In such a situation, racial integration gets read as miscegenation, and whiteness, the racialized subjectivity made possible by segregation, is consolidated by the abjection of black bodies. Within such a cultural context, if the “Negro experience” is narrated to white men as alien and abject, as something totally unrelated to anything having to do with their lives, then they can listen, inasmuch as such a narrative works to support white supremacist frameworks of sense; but when “the reality of the Negro experience” is related in a way that demonstrates the interrelatedness of blackness and whiteness, as Baldwin always insisted upon doing, and the manner in which racism is only indirectly a “Negro problem” that has its origin in a far more serious white problem, such logic is then construed as perverse and falls outside the proper boundaries of the “listenable.” Without the distancing rituals by which race is instantiated and reproduced, blackness cannot be made to signify within white supremacist frameworks of sense without creating a crisis in white masculinity, and thereby throwing the whole system into crisis.

As if enraged by his observations about white men's insistence upon the U.S. racial romance, Baldwin situates Mailer among the black Jazz musicians he idolizes in “The White Negro,” to see how well he is able to embody his own code of trans-racial masculinity. Mailer's performance, according to Baldwin, is a flop. Instead of viewing Mailer as “hip,” the Jazz musicians consider him to be “real sweet” (effeminate), and “a little frantic” (hysterical) (*Price* 292). While such an *ad hominem* (to the man) attack upon Mailer would normally be out of place; in this case, it seems timely considering that the topic of discussion is masculinity.

In a similar attack upon Mailer's authenticity, Baldwin, at a later point in “The Black Boy,” accuses Mailer of being a wannabe Beat poet, a white man imitating white men imitating black men (*Price* 296). According to such a formulation, the darker half of Mailer's “White Negro,” is now two steps

removed from its source, and thereby, hopelessly diluted. Baldwin, who accuses Mailer of "slumming," an interesting term considering its racial connotations, plays the role of the "white" father cautioning his prodigal son to return to the fold, lest he forfeit the very privilege that causes him to view those on the bottom of society as primitive and exotic. Criticizing Mailer, indirectly, by way of those whom he is attempting to imitate, Baldwin cites the famous passage from Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, in which the narrator expresses his desire to be black.¹² Invoking the "authenticity" he alludes to earlier when he neglects to "pull rank" on Mailer, Baldwin remarks:

Now, this is absolute nonsense, of course, objectively considered, and offensive nonsense at that: I would hate to be in Kerouac's shoes if he should ever be mad enough to read this aloud from the stage of Harlem's Apollo Theater (*Price* 297–98).

Presumably, Baldwin is offended by Kerouac's association of blackness with "life, joy, kicks, darkness, music, [and] night," as if living under white supremacy were a night out on the town (180). Baldwin acknowledges that there is "real loss" in Kerouac's yearning for black joy, but that it cannot compare with the loss in the Blues, once more demonstrating that black culture is not a plenitude, but is, itself, based on lack (*Price* 298). Ironically, the singer of the blues tune Baldwin cites is fleeing the poverty and deprivation Kerouac romanticizes (*Price* 298). Once again, we are presented with masculinity as a hall of mirrors in which white men desire the imagined emotional wholeness of blacks, and black men yearn for the wealth and security that white men scorn. The problem, Baldwin suggests with Kerouac and Mailer's desire to be black, is that they imagine blackness to be an essence, the absolute embodiment of everything whiteness disallows, when "to become a Negro man . . . one had to make oneself up as one went along" (*Price* 298). Blackness is not a thing-in-itself, but a process, a performance enacted in the "not-at-all metaphorical teeth of the world's determination to destroy you" (Baldwin, *Price* 298). Blackness involves making a space out of no space, and valorizing one's abjection within white supremacist discourses with such finesse that whites begin to feel the privation is theirs. The reason white men cannot hope to be black is not due to any innate, biological difference, but because "This is not the way this truth presents itself to white men, who believe the world is theirs and who, albeit unconsciously, expect the world to help them in the achievement of their identity" (Baldwin, *Price* 298).

The Black Boy Defends the White Boy (from the Black Boy)

In his article, "Tearing the Goat's Flesh: Homosexuality, Abjection and the Production of a Late Twentieth-Century Black Masculinity" (1996),

Robert Reid-Pharr argues that *Soul on Ice* uses the specter of the homosexual to assist in the formation of meaningful, well-defined black subjectivities (masculinities), which, in turn, serve as the basis for communal identity (373–74). Because blackness, for the dominant culture, has been posited as the boundaryless space from which whites as rational, neatly delimited subjects acquire their sense of identical self-sameness, texts like Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice* attempt to escape the chaos and terror of a pre-subjectival blackness, by scapegoating "the homosexual," a subject believed to embody undifferentiation, chaos, and "boundarylessness" (373). According to Reid-Pharr, the homosexual is a symbolic intermediary between the well-defined black subject and chaos (373). The violence directed toward him or her is designed to ameliorate the prior violence of cultural "boundarylessness" that affects the entire black community (373).

In contrast to Reid-Pharr's argument, I want to argue that it is not Baldwin's homosexuality that makes him a target for Cleaver's attempt to extricate himself from the chaos and terror of black "boundarylessness." Cleaver violently excludes Baldwin from his utopian aspirations for racial reconciliation in *Soul on Ice* because Baldwin refuses to allow white men like Norman Mailer, as well as the white male characters of his novel, *Another Country*, any self-serving transgression of the rather rigid boundaries that white men themselves have erected to police blackness and maintain whiteness. Because Cleaver would later become so closely affiliated with the Black Panther Party (BPP), a group that has been frequently misrepresented as anti-white, many critics, even those who are aware of the BPP's willingness to enter into coalitional politics with whites, fail to see the integrationist aspects of Cleaver's *Soul on Ice*.¹³ By contrast, Baldwin, who is more closely associated with the Civil Rights Movement, actually demonstrates stronger reservations than Cleaver about the possibilities for racial reconciliation. Another reason Cleaver's attack on Baldwin has been insufficiently understood is because it is an *ad hominem* attack. Although Cleaver's argument is articulated in homophobic terms, homophobia is not its subject; homophobia is rather the cultural lexicon upon which Cleaver draws to craft an essay whose proper content is intended to be a defense of Norman Mailer's "The White Negro."

Eldridge Cleaver was a great admirer of Mailer, and took exception to what he refers to as Baldwin's "flippant and schoolmarmish dismissal" of "The White Negro" (123). Cleaver considered "The White Negro" to be "prophetic" in its insight into the psychoanalytic dimensions of racial conflict in the U.S. and describes Baldwin's criticism of Mailer as a "literary crime" (123). By focusing on the dissatisfaction of the subjects charged with reproducing whiteness, Mailer's "The White Negro," Cleaver claims, reveals significant weaknesses in the system of white supremacy (123). According to Cleaver, Mailer is one of the first to point out the manner in

which mid-twentieth century whites are engaged in their own struggle of liberation against whiteness (123–24). Cleaver then claims that, in defense of Mailer, he will “examine the reasoning that lies behind Baldwin’s attack on Mailer” (24). Instead, he embarks upon a long, rambling, tangential, and *ad hominem* attack upon Baldwin, which, if one is able to abstract any “reasoning” from it at all, seems to suggest that Baldwin’s disapproval of Mailer’s “The White Negro” results from his racial self-hatred and his hatred of masculinity, antipathies Cleaver attributes to Baldwin’s homosexuality (124, 135). Cleaver ridiculously reads Baldwin’s homosexuality as a symptom of a racial death wish, an unfulfillable desire to dilute the purity of the black race by having mixed-race children by white men (127–28). Baldwin’s homosexuality, according to Cleaver, leads him to create homosexual, bisexual, or sexually ambiguous black male characters who are, by definition, effeminate, submissive, and therefore, incapable of resisting white supremacy (131–33). Cleaver prefers Mailer’s romanticized and stereotypical representations of black masculinity as violent, sexual, spontaneous, and rebellious, and suggests that it is only Baldwin’s racial self-hatred and homosexual hatred of masculinity that keeps him from celebrating these qualities as well.

Cleaver’s homophobic attack on Baldwin and his confessing to having “practiced” rape on black women in order to prepare himself for raping white women has brought *Soul on Ice* under serious and well-deserved critique by contemporary scholars of African American literature. Responding to Cleaver’s attack upon Baldwin, Amy Ongiri, for instance, suggests that the broader narrative of Black Nationalism upon which *Soul on Ice* depends requires the “maintenance of a biologically determined and genetically maintained racial purity, inscribing the individual Black body with the investments of a nation” (282). Because homosexuality and “miscegenation” do not function to reproduce an essentialized national body, black gay men, in narratives like *Soul on Ice*, become loci of anxiety vis-à-vis black (hetero) sexuality and a black masculinity perceived to be in crisis (Ongiri 282, 284). Additionally, because Cleaver understands black male homosexuality as passive capitulation to white masculinity, he misreads the sexually ambivalent characters of Baldwin’s early novels as threats to the resistant black self (Ongiri 284). According to Ongiri, both homosexual and interracial desire in *Soul on Ice* “threaten the dissolution of the individual black body . . . [and] the bonds of the imagined nation. Individuals who exhibit such desires are . . . according to Cleaver . . . ‘sick’” (283).

While Ongiri raises an important question (“why Black masculinity most frequently figures within Black nationalist discourse as in crisis and why this crisis so frequently centers on and around homosexual desire and a desire for miscegenation?”), she, unfortunately, demonstrates an inadequate understanding of the very nationalism she hopes to interrogate

(281). Ongiri locates Cleaver's text within the broader context of what she refers to as "post-1950s black nationalism," when what she seems to be referring to is the nationalism of the Black Power Movement that began in the mid-1960s (281). Ongiri also conflates radically different strains of black nationalism in suggesting an unbroken tradition between Cleaver and Marcus Garvey, and by misidentifying *Soul on Ice* as a cultural nationalist text (282, 285). She seems unaware that Cleaver, and the Black Panther Party, of which Cleaver was later to become a part, were revolutionary nationalists and, as such, strongly opposed what they viewed as the fetishization of African culture and the anti-white racism of black cultural nationalists. Finally, Ongiri claims that interracial desire and homosexual desire get conflated in *Soul on Ice* inasmuch as both threaten to disrupt the boundaries of the essentialized black male body upon which black nationalism is grounded (283). While Ongiri's explanation of how Cleaver's association of interracial desire with the dismemberment of Emmett Till functions as a threat to the coherence of the black male subject is compelling, she says nothing of the love letters Cleaver exchanges with his white lawyer, Beverly Axelrod, letters that attempt to renegotiate the violence that so clearly underlies interracial desire in *Soul on Ice*'s early chapters. In these letters, Cleaver does not condemn or reject interracial desire, as Ongiri's formulation would predict, but attempts to transform it into something positive and self-affirming. That at least one critic has argued that Cleaver has failed to effect this transformation does not diminish the fact that Cleaver's representation of interracial desire differs significantly from the abject manner in which the text represents homosexuality.¹⁴

In contrast to Ongiri's reading of Cleaver's *Soul on Ice* as overdetermined by nationalist discourses of the black male body, Darieck Scott offers a psychoanalytic reading. According to Scott, Cleaver fears and hates the queer that lurks in the figure of the strong black male (221). This hatred and fear stem from an anxiety over the implications of the nationalist trope of black male emasculation/castration during slavery (227). Taken only one step further, Scott suggests, this notion of black male emasculation might be thought of as not only physical and psychological, but as having been enacted through the sexual subordination of black men via homosexual rape as well (227). Underlying nationalist narratives of black manhood, Scott claims that there is an anxiety (Scott uses the word "horror") surrounding the repressed memory of "homoerotic domination and desire" of "black men by white men, under the system of total control which whites enjoyed over black bodies" (228–29). Scott implies that Cleaver's homophobia and heterosexism, as well as his complicity and identification with historically racist discourses that ascribe superior masculinity to black men, can be attributed to his anxieties over the repressed cultural memory of interracial, homosexual rape (229–30).

While these scholars are correct in critiquing Cleaver's misogyny and homophobia, by limiting their discussions to parts 1 and 2 of the text, they overlook the ways that other sections of *Soul on Ice* anticipate contemporary developments in the theorization of gender and race. In the essay titled "The Primeval Mitosis," for example, Cleaver transforms the speech attributed to Aristophanes in Plato's *Symposium* into an allegory of race and gender oppression. In the *Symposium*, Plato has the Greek dramatist, Aristophanes, relate a story about a time when there were three genders—male/male, female/female, and male/female—and couples were fused to one another as single beings (25). As whole beings, humans were so much more powerful and ambitious than they are now that they even tried to attack the gods (Plato 26). Zeus, accordingly, punished humans for their insolence by splitting them in two, thereby transforming them into the beings that we are today (Plato 26). According to Aristophanes, all love between human beings is an attempt to restore the lost wholeness of our ancestral past (Plato 27–28).

Cleaver revises this story to come up with an account of the "roots of heterosexuality" before society was fractured by divisions of race, gender, class, and sexuality (206). According to Cleaver, our ancestors, by some "weird mitosis of the essence" divided the primeval spheres of their bodies into separate male- and female- gendered entities (206). In doing so, they simultaneously established certain rules of heterosexual attraction, which will one day result in an "apocalyptic fusion," a restoration of the lost wholeness of the primeval sphere (Cleaver 207). Before this can happen, however, men and women must prepare themselves through the creation of a unitary sexual image, that is, "a heterosexual identity free from the mutually antagonistic, antipodal impediments of homosexuality" (Cleaver 207). And this will not be possible until the society frees itself from the social divisions that currently fracture popular conceptions of masculinity and femininity along race and class lines (Cleaver 208).

Cleaver describes the origin of these fractures as follows: white men, in order to maintain power and justify exploitation, created a system of social imagery based on four archetypal figures: Omnipotent Administrator, Supermasculine Menial, Ultrafeminine, and Amazon (191, 208–11). As Omnipotent Administrators, white men monopolize administrative positions within U.S. society while relegating black men to positions of mindless labor (191, 208–09). By rejecting their physicality and projecting it onto Supermasculine Menials (i.e., black men), white men alienate themselves from their own bodies and begin to take on feminine traits (210). White women, in order that their male counterparts might continue to be recognized as men, project their "domestic function" onto black women, and thereby render themselves Ultrafeminine (211). Black women, forced into an unfair exchange of femininity for domesticity, come to be seen as

subfeminine Amazons (191, 211). The major flaw in this system, according to Cleaver, was white men's failure to take into account that by associating themselves with intellect and black men with physicality, they were inadvertently placing black men in charge of sex and the phallus (193–94, 211–12). As a result of this blunder, white men have ever since attempted to control black male sexuality by allowing themselves complete sexual freedom over white and black women, while forbidding black men relations with white women upon pain of death (194). This prohibition, for black men, had the effect of transforming white women into symbols of freedom (189). These symbols, in turn, were given a further sexual inscription by a public discourse that figures white women as the official standard of beauty (217). Cleaver believed that white women, because of the social imperative mandating that they always seem less physically capable than their already effeminate male counterparts, had estranged themselves from their bodies and developed a corresponding fear of sexual frigidity (214). Under these circumstances, it was not with white men, who had identified themselves with the mind, that white women would be able to find sexual satisfaction and relief from anxiety, but with black men, who had been identified with the body, that such needs could be met (Cleaver 215). Thus, black man and white woman, within the discourse of sexual racism, are psychic bride and groom (Cleaver 215, 217).

Accuracy competes with inaccuracy, truth with egregious error in Cleaver's analysis. Cleaver's failure to problematize the patriarchal identification of manhood with power over women (as if black manhood were based on control of black women's sexuality and access to white women) is blatantly misogynistic, and as such, must be rejected. Cleaver's narrative not only attempts to exclude the acceptance of homosexuality implied by Aristophanes's original narrative, he makes the eradication of homosexuality the prerequisite for the "apocalyptic fusion" that will once again rejoin the male and female bodies. This too is obviously unacceptable. Cleaver's uncritical association of masculinity with physical strength and femininity with a lack thereof, though typical of our society, is essentialist and lacks details of cultural and historical contingencies. And Cleaver's claim that white women become Ultrafeminine by projecting their "domestic function" onto black women is unclear. By this, he seems to imply that part of middle- and upper middle-class white female subjectivity has traditionally involved foisting the roles of mother and housekeeper upon black domestic workers. If this is the meaning Cleaver intends, he can only be faulted for failing to foresee the manner in which poor and working-class black women would be excluded from these positions and replaced by a pool of cheap (and frequently illegal) immigrant laborers. Cleaver is correct in suggesting that black men are frequently denied the

opportunity to use the full range of their intellectual capacities in a society in which white men occupy the majority of managerial and administrative positions, but fails to see that this is not a problem faced by black men alone but one encountered by women and people of color in general. Cleaver's belief that white men had alienated themselves from their bodies, and were, as a result, becoming effeminate was probably based on the popular images available of white men at the time—the crew cut-wearing All-American boy in white, button-down shirt and horn-rimmed glasses and the longhaired, flamboyantly attired hippie. It also reflects concerns within the dominant culture that I have described above as a crisis in white masculinity. Cleaver, however, seems unaware of the historical specificity of these images and fails to anticipate a time (ours) in which physical prowess instead of indicating working-class affiliation would come to be the *sine qua non* of a U.S. middle class with memberships in exclusive health and fitness clubs.

The sum total of flaws in Cleaver's allegory almost renders it worthless. However, Cleaver's "Primeval Mitosis," I would argue, might best be understood as a descriptive theory, "the irreversible beginning of . . . theory" that has not yet resolved and transcended the contradiction between description (narration) and theory, and therefore, by the very form it takes, demands that it be superseded by more precise forms of analysis (Althusser 138–40).¹⁵ What is fascinating about Cleaver's "Primeval Mitosis" is not his awkward theorizations, but the problematic out of which he works. At a time when the overwhelming majority of discussions on race displayed a distinct lack of consciousness in regard to issues of gender, Cleaver, in however flawed a manner, attempts to interrogate the intersectionality of gender, race, and class oppression. By working out of this problematic of tripartite oppression at such an early moment, Cleaver, almost accidentally, uncovers observations that put him far in advance of the "race relations" theorists of his day. "The Primeval Mitosis" supersedes "race relations" theory by: 1) demonstrating the crucial importance of the sex/gender system to race, 2) anticipating contemporary arguments about the intersectionality of gender, race, and class oppression, 3) describing the manner in which racial othering and exclusion produce a system of interracial desire,¹⁶ and 4) insisting that subjectivities within racial and sexual discourses have a relational rather than an independent existence. For Cleaver, raced and gendered subjectivities cannot be productively studied in isolation; they have to be examined in relation to one another. In other words, black masculinity, for example, is not a thing-in-itself, but a phantasmatic effect produced by the play of differences within a field of racial and gender signification by which it and white masculinity, as well as black and white femininity, are all mutually overdetermined.

Reconciliation without Guarantees: Another Allegory

While Cleaver's earlier mentioned essay, "Notes on a Native Son," is meant as an attack upon Baldwin's *Another Country*, Baldwin's novel, in many ways, is simply a more complex account of the allegory of race and gender relations Cleaver himself offers readers in "The Primeval Mitosis." However, while Cleaver focuses on the way the Omnipotent Administrator, Supermasculine Menial, Ultrafem, and Amazon function in our social imaginary, Baldwin provides Janus-faced representations of these archetypal figures that fluctuate between their suspension within the imaginary and their agency in the real.¹⁷ If we attempt to apply Cleaver's taxonomy of race and gender archetypes to Baldwin's *Another Country*, we find that Baldwin doubles the archetypes, presenting one character frozen within the racial and sexual boundaries of the U.S. cultural imaginary, and another as an agential subject transgressing these boundaries in search of a new subjectivity and a new imaginary. Richard Silenski, for example, is a stereotypical Omnipotent Administrator, while Vivaldo Moore is a white man who resists the ideology of hegemonic whiteness by working through the cultural barriers that separate him from blacks. Leona is an Ultrafem who allows herself to be objectified and abused by Rufus; Cass Silenski is an Ultrafem in flight from the stifling dependence and unimaginativeness to which such a feminized subject position has confined her. Rufus Scott is a Supermasculine Menial who is haunted by stereotypical conceptions of interracial desire; Ida, his sister, is imperiled by similar stereotypes, but struggles to communicate what race and racism has meant to her interracial relationship with Vivaldo, rather than letting the history of race and racism speak through her as it did with Rufus. Thus, while Cleaver's "Primeval Mitosis," like all allegories is relatively static, Baldwin's is dynamic and therefore offers opportunities for agency and transformation.

But *Another Country* can probably best be read in dialogue with Mailer's "The White Negro," since *Another Country* in at least three important areas offers a fascinating counter-text to Mailer's text. In keeping with Baldwin's earlier suggestions about the Blues, Baldwin shows how Jazz cannot simply be understood as "the music of orgasm," as Mailer would have it, but as with the lack that motivates the hipster's desire for blackness, Jazz is also about loss, and a desire for recognition. Baldwin further suggests, in *Another Country*, that the interracial, homosocial desire upon which Mailer's "The White Negro," is organized is not unilateral (with white men desiring black men and black men in possession of a superior form of masculinity), but shared, and complicated by feelings of fear and hatred. Finally, for Baldwin the rigid, Manichean boundaries that underlie Mailer's romanticization of blackness, and his figuration of whiteness as an absence or a lack, are themselves based upon a too simplistic a reading

of whiteness. By presenting his readers with a not uncommon white man of Irish-Italian ethnicity and working-class background, Baldwin suggests that, while class and ethnicity are not analogous to race, white men marked as "ethnic" and "working-class" can at least use these identities as a more realistic basis from which to approach interracial friendship with black men than Mailer's infantile fantasy of cross-racial embodiment.

Baldwin challenges Mailer's reading of Jazz as "orgasm" in his depiction of a young saxophonist whose mesmerizing solo is translated by Rufus to mean "Do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me?," one of several questions that haunts Rufus himself in regard to his relationship with Leona (*Another* 8–9). Instead of representing Jazz as the music of pleasure and immediacy, Baldwin shows how a fundamental lack lies at its core. Jazz, at this point in the novel, is not a content, but a performance. The Jazz musician, around whom the white hipster mimetically organizes his masculinity, is himself engaged in an appeal to the white members of his audience for recognition. The young saxophonist repeats "the same phrase, unbearably, endlessly, and variously," not because the audience is unwilling to grant him the recognition he desires,¹⁸ but because they must continually grant it in order to reaffirm the phantasmatic manhood (in this case, the "humanity" of Liberal humanism) for which the young saxophonist yearns. Two years before Baraka's description of Jazz and the Blues, in *Dutchman*, as culturally mediated aggression, Baldwin, lest whites be unduly flattered by this characterization of them as possessing the power to grant or deny the humanity of others, shows that the flip side of the young saxophonist's desire for recognition is hatred for the subject/object upon which his selfhood depends: "They were [now] being assaulted by the saxophonist who perhaps no longer wanted their love and merely hurled his outrage at them with the same contemptuous, pagan pride with which he humped the air" (*Another* 8–9).

Baldwin similarly unmask the white hipster's nightly incursions into Harlem as yet another form of dominance, or, at least, a desire for dominance. First, whites exclude blacks from entering certain neighborhoods, and then when they feel as if their "right to be being everywhere" is "contested," they re-enter black neighborhoods in order to wrest a degree of freedom from the stifling cultural homogeneity that they themselves have created through de facto segregation (Baldwin, *Another* 132). The unfamiliar territory of the black neighborhood is now imagined as a place of danger, and thereby, a place in which one's courage and one's masculinity can be tested and proven (Baldwin, *Another* 132). When this aura of danger is combined with "rage," "self-congratulation" (presumably, of cultural boundaries successfully negotiated—Baldwin is unclear), and "sexual excitement," the hipster cannot help but feel more alive than he does in his own neighborhood (*Another* 132). Baldwin, in another act of strategic

universality, comments upon Vivaldo's "slumming" as follows: "And, nevertheless, in spite of all this daring, this running of risks, the misadventures which had actually befallen him had been banal indeed and might have befallen him anywhere" (*Another* 132). In other words, the danger and excitement out of which the white Negro imagines himself to have wrested his manhood is not so much a function of cultural or geographic distance as it is of fantasy, of a psychic investment in unfamiliar space. The white hipster's knowledge of the neighborhood he sees, mainly, from the vantage point of its nightlife, is not unlike the knowledge of the white racist, inasmuch as it, synecdochically and stereotypically, allows the part to stand in for the whole. The most important thing Vivaldo could learn from Harlem is the one thing from which he is excluded—knowledge of the survival strategies that blacks have devised to deal with the "battlefield" of racism upon which they wage the war of their daily lives (Baldwin, *Another* 133). The white hipster's exclusion from this knowledge is only partly a result of the incommunicability of blacks; it, more importantly, results from a refusal on the part of the white hipster to consider the relationship between black oppression and white privilege, a relationship in which he is deeply implicated. Indeed, the alienation from which the hipster flees is more than likely the result of that privilege, and the social divisions upon which it is founded. While the hipster hopes to be lauded by blacks for his "liberal, even revolutionary sentiments," blacks, instead, see the alienation and despair from which those sentiments derive (Baldwin, *Another* 133). The hipster wants to be celebrated for his individuality, his originality, in transgressing the artificial boundaries that separate the races; while the blacks, with whom he hopes to find acceptance, see that his transgression is not voluntary, but an act of flight, and that it is "not in the least original . . . to come running to niggers" (Baldwin, *Another* 133).

In *Another Country*, Baldwin also suggests that underlying male interracial bonding is both hatred and desire, since one often desires what one is not, and hates what one cannot be. Rufus admires Vivaldo for all the things that whiteness implies in a white supremacist society—wealth, privilege, freedom. He hates Vivaldo, because these things will never be his without a radical transformation of that same society. Vivaldo desires what he perceives to be Rufus's physicality, sexuality, and soulfulness. He hates him because he imagines that, as a white man, he can never possess these qualities. These hatreds and desires necessarily go unspoken, and even get repressed by a liberal ideology that reduces the complexity of Rufus and Vivaldo's relationship to "friends, far beyond the reach of anything so banal and corny as color" (Baldwin, *Another Country* 133). What this liberal ideology cannot accept, according to Baldwin, is that "Somewhere in his heart the black boy hated the white boy because he was white. Somewhere in his heart Vivaldo feared and hated Rufus because he was black" (*Another* 134).

In contemplating his friendship with Rufus, Vivaldo wonders why they had, on several occasions, had sex with the same woman (Baldwin, *Another* 134). In an attempt to answer his own question, he remembers a time when he was in the military and he and a "colored buddy" exposed themselves to a German girl (Baldwin, *Another* 134). The German girl, while disavowing the possibility that the two men are trying to "attract one another," suspects that they have exposed themselves to compare penis size (Baldwin, *Another* 134). We, as readers, are, by no means, compelled to agree. The emphasis on fear, hatred, and desire in the passages describing Rufus and Vivaldo's friendship indicates a raced homosocial, and possibly homoerotic, desire at work that is based upon Rufus's need to symbolically challenge the social and historic subordination of black men through his relationship with Vivaldo, and the simultaneous fear and desire Vivaldo feels at the prospect of accepting such a challenge. Still contemplating his friendship with Rufus, Vivaldo describes a nightmare in which the same "colored buddy" with whom he exposes himself to the German woman accosts him with a knife seeking revenge, but "Revenge for what?" Vivaldo asks (Baldwin, *Another* 134). The unspecified offense is, of course, racism. The punishment is the same castration black men physically suffer at the hands of lynch mobs, and psychically suffer at the hands of a society that simultaneously valorizes a patriarchal conception of manhood and denies black men the full expression of it. Vivaldo has nightmares about this desire on the part of his black male friend to punish him, because he cannot accept this thought in his waking life where it would reveal the fear, hatred, and desire that underlies his relationship with his "colored buddy." As with his and Rufus's friendship, Vivaldo prefers to view this relationship as untainted by race.

Baldwin's introduction of the complex feelings of fear, hatred, and desire into the homosocial relationships between black and white men complicates Mailer's mimetic masculinity by suggesting that not only can there be no white Negroes, but there can be no reconciliation between whites and Negroes that does not negotiate the affective dissonances produced by white supremacy.

One way white men might better negotiate these dissonances, Baldwin suggests, is by acknowledging the hierarchies within whiteness by which some whites also get subordinated. Vivaldo, an Irish Italian from a working-class Brooklyn neighborhood, attempts to do so as he and Cass Silenski share a taxicab to Rufus's funeral in Harlem. Describing an earlier trip to Harlem in which he goes to pay his condolences to Rufus's family, he tells Cass that the neighborhood reminded him of his own ethnic, working class neighborhood in Brooklyn (Baldwin, *Another* 113). "I kept thinking, They're colored and I'm white but the same things have happened, really the same things . . ." (Baldwin, *Another* 113). Cass interrupts Vivaldo's

sentimental, too simplistic moment of identification, to interject, "But they didn't . . . happen to you because you were white. . . . But what happens up here . . . happens because they are colored. And that makes a difference" (Baldwin, *Another* 113–14). It is not that Vivaldo is wrong in pointing out the similarities between race and class, but if he is truly to understand what Baldwin earlier refers to as "the reality of the Negro experience" (an "experience" Baldwin was only partially justified in describing in singular terms in the early 1960s), then he has to be able to account for the manner in which class functions to redouble and intensify the marginalization poor and working-class African Americans already face as racialized others. Vivaldo tries to exclude himself from being implicated in the racism, poverty, and oppression he sees in Harlem by claiming that "I didn't do it. I wouldn't do it, whoever was doing it was doing it to me, too" (Baldwin, *Another* 113), but, if he is to take part in the racial reconciliation *Another Country* presents as only a possibility rather than a *Soul on Ice*-style teleological inevitability, he must match his affective disidentification with the effects of race and class oppression with a refusal to benefit from the system that creates those effects.

Cleaver suggests that Baldwin's *Another Country* is out of touch with a time when Richard Wright's prophecy that "The machine gun on the corner is the symbol of the twentieth century" was quickly being fulfilled (Cleaver 136). That Baldwin is well aware that *Another Country's* complex representations of the conflict-ridden relations of gender, race, and class may no longer be allowable once those conflicts escalate to crisis proportions is evident from Baldwin's allegorical treatment of the small role that Eric, the gay, expatriate actor in *Another Country*,¹⁹ lands in a French film. Eric appears in two of the film's scenes. In the first scene, he is shown seated at a table with a group of students engaged in passionate political debate (329). Eric's character, in contrast to the other students, appears hungover (329). His eyes are closed, his head is thrown back, and his face wears an expression Baldwin describes as "a footnote to the twentieth-century torment" (329–30). In contrast to Mailer's stereotypical notions of manhood, and Cleaver's celebration of unitary (hetero)sexual images, Baldwin describes Eric's character as possessing a "masculinity . . . defined and made powerful, by something which was not masculine" (330). After having listened to the students for longer than he can stand, Eric's character stares at them blankly and then abruptly departs, looking as if he is going to be sick (330). Ironically, it is Eric's character who is shown in the final scene of the film firing a machine gun from a rooftop (329–30).

Baldwin's description of the film is interesting because of its parallels to his troubled relationship to the Black Power Movement.²⁰ Eric's character feels both drawn to and alienated from the young students by

whom he is surrounded. Their arguments are unsubtle and insincere. The violence they so casually discuss torments Eric's character, whose sexual ambivalence mirrors the ambivalence of his political commitments. Here, Baldwin's description corresponds to Reid-Pharr's discussion of the scapegoat. Because the homosexual is seen as representative of a prior cultural "boundarylessness," he is violently excluded from the community that forms itself against the threat of that "boundarylessness." The machine gun, which, if not the symbol of the twentieth century, was at least a potent symbol for the Black Power Movement, is footnoted (qualified) by the torment of those whose politics and sexualities are not so rigidly defined. And yet, Baldwin, like Eric's character, instead of using that ambivalence to unsettle the artificial unity of Black Power ideology, in many ways, became one of its strongest supporters.

Conclusion

World War II, I have argued, brought about a crisis in white masculinity. White men in the post-war era began to feel ambivalent about whiteness, and to fantasize about what it would be like to be black. But the texts in which these fantasies are inscribed, namely, Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, Norman Mailer's "The White Negro," Norman Podhoretz's "My Negro Problem and Ours," and John Howard Griffin's *Black Like Me* tell us more about the repressed fantasies of white men than they do about what it means to be black. James Baldwin's "The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy" attempts to function as a corrective to Mailer's "The White Negro" by exposing these fantasies and exploring their insidious appeal to white men. Unfortunately, during the era in which Baldwin wrote, whiteness was read as universal and race and ethnicity were figured as local and limiting. In an attempt to negotiate these obstacles, Baldwin allows his narrative voice to waver between a "strategic universality," on the one hand, and an unequivocally raced and classed subject position, on the other. Likewise, "The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy" shuttles back and forth between two contradictory visions of the relationship between black and white masculinity, the Manichean vision Baldwin sometimes shares with Mailer, and the specular vision the essay seizes upon in its best moments. While Baldwin's "The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy" does much to unsettle the false assumptions about race and masculinity on which Mailer's "The White Negro" is based, it ultimately fails to disentangle itself from the masculinist presuppositions it attempts to critique.

Baldwin's *Another Country*, on the other hand, can be read as both a highly effective response to Mailer's "White Negro" and a more complex rendering of the racial and sexual dimensions of the same U.S. social imaginary that Cleaver attempts to map six years later in *Soul on Ice*. While

Soul on Ice anticipates contemporary developments in social theory by attempting to map the intersectionality of gender, race, class, and sexuality, Cleaver's sexism and homophobia, combined with the rigidity of the analytical framework he erects in the "Primeval Mitosis" chapter, render *Soul on Ice* unable to account for the fluidity these concepts would acquire in postmodern U.S. society.

Cleaver works with archetypes; Baldwin with characters. Some of Baldwin's characters are frozen within the roles allotted to them by society; others desperately try to break free in hope of creating a new society, "Another Country" as Baldwin would have it. *Another Country* responds to Mailer's representation of Jazz as "the music of orgasm" with elegiac, Blues-based representations of Jazz that evoke feelings of loss and a desire for recognition. In its exploration of the relationship between Rufus and Vivaldo, *Another Country* suggests that the interracial, homosocial desire underlying texts like Mailer's "The White Negro" is not simply a product of white male psychology, but is shared by black men and complicated by feelings of fear and hatred on both sides.

Black masculinity is a "hot" topic in gender and cultural studies.²¹ This is partly due to the high visibility of black masculinity (as performed by men of all colors) in an increasingly global U.S. popular culture, and partly due to the unconscious, invisible workings of media elites who insist on representing black masculinity as a sexual and emotional fullness, a potency and plenitude.

Black masculinity should be studied. But, as Eldridge Cleaver implicitly argues, it should not be studied in isolation. Black masculinity acquires meaning within a social-relational framework, a semiotic grid in which white masculinity and black and white femininity also feature prominently.²² For all of the flaws and missteps in their arguments, Mailer, Baldwin, and Cleaver attempt to undertake such studies. Furthermore, the roles of desire, fantasy, projection, and aggression (sometimes conscious and analytical; at other times, unconscious and problematic) serve as a warning to contemporary scholars whose disproportionate focus on black masculinity runs the risk of pathologizing black men. The social relational perspective of Mailer, Baldwin, and Cleaver reminds us that the direction of the scholar's gaze is not determined solely by the object, but also by desire of the scholar in all of his or her ambivalence.

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NOTES

1. See Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991).

2. My reading of the interests of liberal policymakers and U.S. corporate elites in the paragraph above comes from Derrick Bell, "Brown v. Board of Education and the Interest Convergence Dilemma," *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement*, ed. Neil Gotanda, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Gary Peller, Kendall Thomas (New York: The New Press, 1995) and Adolph L. Reed, *Stirrings in the Jug: Black Politics in the Post-Segregation Era* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1999) 55–78.

3. See Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment* (Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1983).

4. See Theodor Adorno, *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York: Harper, 1950); Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1959); Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*; David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1953).

5. Marcuse defines surplus repression as "the restrictions necessitated by social domination," and contrasts it with basic repression, or "the 'modifications' of the instincts necessary for the perpetuation of the human race in civilization." Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (New York: Vintage, 1955).

6. Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (New York: Penguin, 1955), 180; Norman Mailer, "The White Negro: Superficial Reflections on the Hipster," *Dissent* 4.3 (1957); Norman Podhoretz, "My Negro Problem—and Ours," *The Commentary Reader: Two Decades of Articles and Stories*, ed. Norman Podhoretz (New York: Atheneum, 1966).

7. I am alluding to Dinesh D'Souza's neoconservative apologia for racism, *The End of Racism: Principles for a Multiracial Society* (New York: Free Press, 1995).

8. One can only wonder what Leopold Senghor, Leon Damas, and Aimé Césaire would think of this *ex post facto* addition of The Beatles to their ranks. While they would probably not be unsympathetic to the surrealist impulses of *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, they would probably stop short of endorsing The Beatles putative "negritude."

9. The combination of unconscious racism and paternalistic liberalism underlying this statement is the type that would tempt a black interlocutor to respond, "Thanks, Norm. That's very white of you."

10. I employ the virgule here to imply that Baldwin's essay is just as much a biographical treatment of Mailer as it is an autobiographical self-exploration of Baldwin.

11. George S. Schuyler parodies this culturally endorsed confidence in his satirical science fiction novel *Black No More* (1931), when the black protagonist Max Disher is transformed into a white man who renames himself Matthew Fisher:

Six hours later, bathed, fed, clean-shaven, spry, blonde and jubilant, he emerged from the outpatient ward and tripped gaily down the corridor to the main entrance. He was through with coons, he resolved, from now on. He glanced in a superior manner at the long line of black and brown folk on one side of the corridor, patiently awaiting treatment. He saw many persons whom he knew but none of them recognized him. It thrilled him to feel that he was now indistinguishable from nine-tenths of the people of the United States; one of the great majority. Ah, it was good not to be a Negro any longer! (George S. Schuyler, *Black No More* [New York: Modern Library, 1999] 19)

12. "At lilac evening I walked with every muscle aching among the lights of 27th and Welton in the Denver colored section wishing I were a Negro, feeling that the best the white world had offered was not enough ecstasy for me, not enough life, joy, kicks, darkness, music, not enough night" (Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* [New York: Penguin, 1955] 180).

13. I am not suggesting that Cleaver *was* an integrationist, but that the revolutionary nationalism to which he subscribes articulated itself more in opposition to the Civil Rights Movement's emphasis on nonviolence than its philosophy of integration. The ideal of integration occupies an ambivalent space in *Soul on Ice*. In chapters like "Convalescence," it is clearly something Cleaver not only hopes for, but presents as all but inevitable. In other chapters, Cleaver seems to desire a violent revolution within which the status of whites is unclear.

14. The critic to whom I am referring is Robert Reid-Pharr. His discussion of Eldridge Cleaver's letters to Beverly Axelrod can be found in "Tearing the Goat's Flesh: Homosexuality, Abjection and the Production of a Late Twentieth-Century Black Masculinity," *Studies in the Novel* 28.3 (1996): 376-77.

15. That Cleaver himself held such an understanding of his efforts is apparent from an aside in "The Primeval Mitosis," in which he states:

Just how this works itself out is a problem for analysis by sociologists and social psychologists on the mass level, and the headshrinkers and nutcrackers on the individual level. What we are outlining here is a perspective from which such analysis might best be approached. (Cleaver, *Ice* 217)

16. This is still a neglected area of discussion in theories on race and racism.

17. For an excellent example of the theoretical application of the two-faced Roman deity, Janus, see Bruno Latour, *Science in Action* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1987).

18. The reading that follows is informed by Hegel's discussion of Lordship and Bondage in G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977): 111-19.

19. In his sexuality, his status as an expatriate, and his career in the arts, Eric is the character in the novel who most closely resembles Baldwin.

20. For more on Baldwin's strained identification with the Black Power Movement, see Henry Louis Gates, "The Welcome Table: James Baldwin in Exile," *Exile and Creativity: Signposts, Travelers, Outsiders, Backward Glances*, ed. Susan Rubin Suleiman (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1998).

21. Recent examples of scholarship on this topic include: Maurice O. Wallace, *Constructing the Black Masculine: Identity and Ideality in African American Men's Literature and Culture, 1775-1995* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2002); bell hooks, *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Athena Mutua, ed., *Progressive Black Masculinities* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Mark Anthony Neal, *New Black Man* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Rolland Murray, *Our Living Manhood: Literature, Black Power, and Masculine Ideology* (Philadelphia, PA: U of Penn P, 2006); Natalie Hopkinson and Natalie Y. Moore, *Deconstructing Tyrone: A New Look at Black Masculinity in the Hip Hop Generation* (San Francisco, CA: Cleis Press, 2006); Riché Richardson, *Black Masculinity and the U.S. South: From Uncle Tom to Gangsta*

(Athens, GA: U of Georgia P, 2007); Robert Reid-Pharr, *Once You Go Black: Desire, Choice, and Black Masculinity in Post-War America* (New York: NYU Press, 2007).

22. This statement should not be read as an attempt to negate the historical and cultural presence of Native Americans, Chicanos, and Asian Americans. Rather, what I am suggesting is that the racial logic of U.S. society still functions in a polarizing Manichean fashion which forces the various nationalities and ethnic groups that constitute the social body to orient themselves in relation to the gravitational pull of the white/black dichotomy.

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