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Horizons of Enchantment

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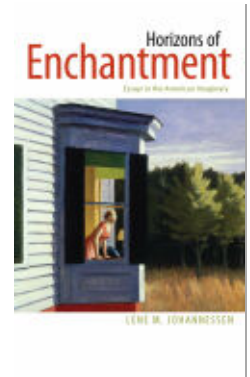
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RECALLING AMERICA: HUNTINGTON AND RODRIGUEZ

WE HAVE SEEN that the concept of the imaginary is a tool for gauging how various participants relate to, contest, and always, in some form or another, disseminate the tenets and currents that sustain the imaginary's flexible function as enabling filter. This is nowhere more evident than in the oscillation between what, from both the outside and the inside of this filter, is conceived of as the idea or ideal, Castoriadis's image *of* something, and the way this image materializes in actual understandings and practices, its institution. However, one also has to ask whether the numerous challenges to, responses to, and contestations of the master imaginary, in tandem with significant changes in the ethnic and cultural fabric, will in the end alter the filter. We therefore come to a slightly different and more general question concerning the nature of institution itself. How will the American social imaginary continue to uphold and be upheld by its constituent parts? Two works of nonfiction speak unexpectedly and poignantly to this question: Samuel Huntington's *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity* (2004) and Richard Rodriguez's *Brown: The Last Discovery of America* (2002). Even if neither author refers to the concept of the imaginary explicitly, they can be read as participants in a dialogue regarding its future. More particularly, their somewhat unlikely dialogue also reflects opposing perspectives on impulses of culturological conservation and essentialism that in the end move beyond the space of America.

In *Who Are We?* (the last book he wrote before he died in 2008), Huntington begins by posing a number of salient questions, essen-

tially regarding the future of the American imaginary as I have explored that concept. In the following introductory passage he states:

“We Americans” face a substantive problem of national identity epitomized by the subject of this sentence. Are we a “we,” one people or several? If we are a “we,” what distinguishes us from the “thems” who are not us? Race, religion, ethnicity, values, culture, wealth, politics, or what? Is the United States, as some have argued, a “universal nation,” based on values common to all humanity and in principle embracing all peoples? Or are we a Western nation with our identity defined by our European heritage and institutions? Or are we unique with a distinctive civilization of our own, as the proponents of “American exceptionalism” have argued throughout our history? Are we basically a political community whose identity exists only in a social contract embodied in the Declaration of Independence and other founding documents? Are we multicultural, bicultural, or unicultural, a mosaic or a melting pot? Do we have any meaningful identity as a nation that transcends our subnational ethnic, religious, racial identities?¹

Throughout *Who Are We?* Huntington, a social scientist perhaps best known for his influential and controversial *The Clash of Civilizations* from 1996, goes through a number of ways in which these questions can be probed, gauged, and responded to. He argues that the significance of the foundation of the United States in and as an English, dissenting, Protestant settler community cannot be ignored (he moves through a range of periods, events, trends, and societal categories, but space does not allow for a consideration here of any but his most central arguments). From that origin, Huntington argues, derive specific, salient traditions and cultural cores that to this day remain the underpinnings of the defining characteristics of the nation. The “American Creed,” as Huntington’s preferred term goes, is the product of the following elements:

the English language; Christianity; religious commitment; English concepts of the rule of law, the responsibility of rulers, and the rights of individuals; and dissenting Protestant values of individualism, the work ethic, and the belief that humans have the ability and the duty to try to create a heaven on earth, a “city on a hill.”²

These are values that originate in the settler colony, laying the foundations for later American, independent, national culture and identity, and, in various constellations and manifestations around the world, for a foreign political and at times imperialist agenda. Against the set of beliefs that secured national coherence for most of the nation's history, Huntington identifies a number of challenges and threats. As he says early on, the principal theme in *Who Are We?* is the "challenge to the continuing centrality of Anglo-Protestant culture to American national identity."³ However, in most of the chapters it is the potential undermining of American cultural and societal integrity by Hispanic immigration in general and by Mexican immigration in particular that is repeated.

Four years before his book came out, Huntington published a short piece titled "The Special Case of Mexican Immigration," where he formulated the essence of the argument he would elaborate in the book. He concluded the article on the following note: "Mexican immigration looms as a unique and disturbing challenge to our cultural integrity, our national identity, and potentially to our future as a country."⁴ While this piece went largely unnoticed, a longer article published in *Foreign Policy* in the spring of 2004 did not. Titled "The Hispanic Challenge," it argued that immigration from the south endangers American cultural unity and that, as the article begins, "The United States ignores this challenge at its peril."⁵ Mexicans in particular are described as a menace to American national stability, to cultural coherence, and to the legacy of Anglo-Protestant founding beliefs, mostly because, Huntington argues, they differ from other immigrant groups throughout American history in certain basic ways. He categorizes these as contiguity, scale, illegality, regional concentration, persistence, historical presence, and language, to mention some of the most important headings:⁶ "Unlike past immigrant groups, Mexicans and other Latinos have not assimilated into mainstream U.S. culture, forming instead their own political and linguistic enclaves—from Los Angeles to Miami—and rejecting the Anglo Protestant values that built the American dream."⁷

This argument, along with the publication shortly afterward of *Who Are We?* itself, attracted immediate attention. Many con-

demned both as conservative rants. For instance, in his article “Patriot Games,” Louis Menand concluded that “either [Huntington’s] book is a prescient analysis of trends obscure to the rest of us, or he has missed the point.”⁸ Even Alan Wolfe objected to what he called Huntington’s “moralistic passion” and “hysteria,” charges he later reiterated after a counterattack from Huntington that also appeared in *Foreign Policy*.⁹ I will not go through all the criticisms and reviews that followed, but the *Nation* columnist Daniel Lazare concluded his review of the book on a note that is relevant to what I am pursuing here. Lazare observed that *Who Are We?*

represents a return to the ideas of Edmund Burke, a longstanding hero of Huntington’s, who argued that “a perfect democracy is . . . the most shameless thing in the world” and that a nation must be seen as a mystical union “between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born.” The effect of such thinking is to reduce “we the living” to little more than “temporary possessors and life-renters,” as Burke put it, and to substitute tradition for popular sovereignty. Instead of the present triumphing over the past, it means the past triumphing over the present.¹⁰

Lazare’s critique gets at a problem that extends beyond Huntington’s analysis of the future of his America, a question of whose cultural memory, whose route, and, finally, whose imaginary shall prevail. For Huntington’s statement is really a call for a renewed commitment and pledge to the American Creed as he defines it, and while this is a perfectly legitimate position, it also dangerously evokes the ghosts of nativism and essentialism. Finally, of greatest relevance to the present discussion of the American imaginary, it seeks to stabilize, frame, and fix its enchantment of transference and to reroute its sway so that it carries specific, hardened elements. Paradoxically, the consequences of this maneuver are potentially antithetical to the America that Huntington sets out to recover and conserve.

The reflections and arguments that Huntington presents can be productively assessed in relation to another work, one with a very different vision, which appeared just two years before *Who Are We?* Richard Rodriguez’s essay collection titled *Brown: The Last Discovery of America* is the last installment in a trilogy of his books.

While Huntington's book and Rodriguez's book are obviously quite different creatures, the first a political scientist's elaborations on immigration in the United States and the second a prose writer's essays on various aspects of cultural change, they can be read as unlikely participants in a dialogue that in the end turns on the persistence of memory and claims to define the vague and ominous concept of values. Moreover, we hear in Rodriguez and Huntington the distant echoes of the actors in the New World, Spain and England, whose interventions around the globe changed it forever. The juxtaposition of the two writers demonstrates that the culturological memory borne of the moment of settling and colonization frames two different representations of the same cultural space.

In *Brown*, Rodriguez continues to ponder questions he raised in his previous book, *Days of Obligation: An Argument with My Mexican Father* (1992). There, he reflected on the historical and cultural relationship between the two neighboring nations, the United States and Mexico, and on his own personal connection to that relationship. What does America have to say to that which falls outside the categories of black and white? Rodriguez recalls:

I used to stare at the Indian in the mirror. The wide nostrils, the thick lips. Starring Paul Muni as Benito Juárez. Such a long face—such a long nose—sculpted by indifferent, blunt thumbs, and of such common clay. No one in my family had a face as dark or as Indian as mine. My face could not portray the ambition I brought to it. What could the United States of America say to me? I remember reading the ponderous conclusion of the Kerner Report in the sixties: two Americas, one white, one black—the prophecy of an eclipse too simple to account for the complexity of my face.¹¹

Brown takes the tension emanating from the histories of colonization and racialism further and meditates on the idea of “brown” itself, on the implications of “brown” Mexico in relationship to “white” America, of “impurity” to “purity”:

Brown is the color most people in the United States associate with Latin America.

Apart from stool sample, there is no browner smear in the Ameri-

can imagination than the Rio Grande. No adjective has attached itself more often to the Mexican in America than “dirty”—which I assume gropes toward the simile “dirt-like,” indicating dense concentration of melanin.¹²

“Brown,” Rodriguez elaborates, is blending; it is the impure infusion of color, of sexuality, of history, of culture, of art—the infinite instances of entities brought into contact and spilling over into each other’s spheres and spaces. It is confusion: “Brown forms at the border of contradiction.”¹³ It is also, by the same token, the impossibility of sustained purity. “Brown” is of course also the concrete physical category, and it spills over the southern border in the shape of thousands and thousands of brown bodies. They come not just as “unpleasant” reminders to some of that which is not pure; they also come with a perspective, a vision, and a route other than the English Protestant dissent that founded the United States.

Historically, the nation has always understood itself as an “east-to-west” country, with the settlers, colonists, and immigrants moving from coast to coast, from the proverbial “sea to shining sea.” The frontier was interposed as one of the tropes for an emerging cultural self-understanding. But there was always a different perspective, a “south-to-north” or “north-to-south” perspective. This was embedded in the very anatomy of the geosocial landscape of what is today the American Southwest, long before the Puritans started ordering their universe around their self-appointed status as a beacon. On both sides of the present border, the legacies and memories of pre-Columbian civilizations, of Spanish colonialism and Mexican sovereignty, did not simply evaporate once Jefferson acquired the Louisiana Purchase, Austin delivered Texas, and Polk conquered half of Mexico. The place-names strewn across the American Southwest tell their own stories. “Brown,” in other words, is code for a historical vector put into motion the moment Cortés set foot on Mexican land and asked for help in finding Moctezuma. Or it is code for the moment Columbus finally got Isabella’s blessing to go west in order to rescue Spain from an alarming budget deficit and to confirm his conviction that there was land to the west. One could go further back; obviously, a point

of original and absolute beginning is in one sense impossible to locate. From Rodriguez's perspective, however, physical and historical "brown" is biologically defined and situated in that particular moment when the Spaniard and the Indian met. From his apartment in downtown San Francisco he ponders along a south-to-north axis:

Canada has never been much of an idea for Americans. We like Canada. Our good neighbor. Never hear them. Tidy.

Downstairs . . . well, so many people come and go. What can they be up to? Mexico is a brown idea we would rather not discuss.¹⁴

However, this is precisely what Huntington wanted to discuss, and launching into a quest for national identity according to a route moving from East to West could only yield the kind of creedal concerns he voices. Moreover, this debate goes to the heart of the principles of dialogism that we find in Mikhail Bakhtin's concluding remarks in "Methodology for the Human Sciences." The following observation can meaningfully be brought to bear on the cultural context for both authors' positions:

There is neither a first nor a last word and there are no limits to the dialogic context (it extends into the boundless past and the boundless future). Even *past* meanings, that is, those born in the dialogue of past centuries, can never be stable (finalized, ended once and for all)—they will always change (be renewed) in the process of subsequent, future development of the dialogue.

At any moment in the development there are immense, boundless masses of forgotten contextual meanings, but at certain moments of the dialogue's subsequent development along the way they are recalled and invigorated in renewed form (in a new context). Nothing is absolutely dead: every meaning will have its homecoming festival. The problem of great time.¹⁵

American cultural and social history may be told as the sedimentation into a conglomerate of various cultural memories and their narratives, along with the "how"s and "when"s of their meanings' homecomings. As a nation of immigrants, the United States has long been moving away from purists' and essentialists' concep-

tions of one culture toward the manifestation of, and, in most cases, a recognition of the increasingly hybrid nature of the national character. In an optimistic view, this culturally conglomerated space perhaps even approximates Homi Bhabha's notion of third space, which

bears the traces of those feelings and practises which inform it, just like a translation, so that hybridity puts together the traces of certain other meanings or discourses. It does not give them the authority of being prior in the sense of being original: they are prior only in the sense of being anterior. The process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognisable, a new area of negotiation and representation.¹⁶

In this description, which echoes Bakhtin's comment on the reinvigoration of meanings in new contexts, hybridity constitutes a site of permanent unease and hence a site of permanent potential creativity. The skepticism about such processes can often be said to originate in and with what Andreas Huyssen calls the "turn toward memory," with the attendant desire to single out a separate space for what is perceived to be prior rather than anterior, originating rather than consecutive.¹⁷ Bhabha's "traces of . . . feelings and practises" that potentially constitute new ground may thus take on a significance and rationale as paths back to safety and, as is often the case, as paths to a sense of and desire for purity, as Rodriguez reflects upon here: "Many Americans opt for a centrifugal view of the future, a black-and-white version—I don't mean skin but cultural intransigence—deduced from history as hatred. A future of real armies on opposing sides of a cultural divide—Muslims and Hindus, say."¹⁸ Not only Americans are craving the neatness of such orderly separateness; that longing underlies currents that are stirring among all kinds of cultural practices and feelings. In 2009, for instance, Swiss voters said yes to a ban on the building of new minarets in their country, a decision that sent chills down the spines of a great many people everywhere. But the fact remained that the Swiss did not perceive minarets as acceptable participants in their social imaginary. We arrive here at the question of values, and the concept of values closes rather than opens up the flexibility of the magic that has driven and continues to drive the American social

imaginary. In 2010, the Swiss decision is unthinkable in the United States. But that may change, and Huntington's call for creedal loyalties is a signal to that effect. It is perhaps nothing more than the inevitable outcome of vectors that have grown ever more involved and complex. Rodriguez reflects that:

As lives meet, chafe, there will be a tendency to retreat. When the line between us is unenforced or seems to disappear, someone will surely be troubled and nostalgic for straight lines and will demand that the future give him the fundamental assurance of a border.

A thought that haunts many African Americans I know is that they are the same distance from the slave owner as from the slave. Both strains have contributed to their bodies, to their waking spirits. I am the same distance from the conquistador as from the Indian. Righteousness should not come easily to any of us.¹⁹

These observations suggest the complexity and vastness of the perspective one has to have in regard to Huntington's arguments and warnings. Those warnings, it is important to note, arose precisely from the highly questionable claim to righteous origination. And yet Huntington's assessments of American social and cultural history are not wrong, nor are his deliberations on the gestalt of the American Creed incorrect. I would be the first to make my students read some of his chapters in this regard; they are rarely clear delineations of historical material that often becomes a set of confused and confusing overviews. The problem is rather that Huntington fails to name what he sees as the threat by its rightful name, and it is not "Mexicans" or "illegal aliens." It is the challenge of maintaining any cultural space free of the consequences of the influences—the feelings and practices—that that space sprang from, and is fostered by. The reaction to the threat of corruption is, by the same token, the desire to preserve certain routes and roots over and above certain others. There is nothing new or unusual about this, and American history has certainly had its share of similar concerns over similar trends, as Huntington's chapter "Emergence, Triumph, Erosion" indeed demonstrates. If we go back to the mid-nineteenth century, for instance, we find that John Calhoun, senator from South Carolina, articulated his doubts

about the Mexican-American War and annexation thus: “Can we really incorporate a people so dissimilar to us in every respect,” he asked, “so little qualified for free and popular government without certain destruction to our own political institutions?”²⁰ Lewis Cass, Calhoun’s fellow senator, argued along similar lines, but whereas Calhoun urged the government to abandon the project, Cass was convinced that the undesirable population in the territories would simply dissolve: “We do not want the people of Mexico, either as citizens or subjects,” he said. “All we want is a portion of territory, which they nominally hold, generally uninhabited, or, where at all, sparsely so, and with a population, which would soon recede, or identify itself with ours.”²¹ Many, many years later Rodriguez reflects, bemused:

Standing in the burrito line in a Chinese neighborhood, I notice how many customers know the chopsticks of Spanish: “carnitas” and “guacamole” and “sí,” “gracias,” “refritos,” and “caliente,” and all the rest of what they need to know. And it occurs to me that the Chinese-American couple in front of me, by speaking Spanish, may actually be speaking American English.²²

Rodriguez’s “last discovery of America” is a kind of distorted mirror image of Huntington’s realization, the discovery that Puritan purity browns, that credal categories are not eternal, that worth and value are not permanent fissures. The discovery is perhaps also the discovery that the United States is not exempt from the legacies of its own imperialist and colonialist history: as in the case of European empires, Massey’s social relations stretch out to form rims and spaces that are connected across time and across place.

A final question in relation to the “dialogue” I have staged here is, what prompted Huntington to voice his concerns at the time he did? Possible answers to that question are in large part related to his previous book. In *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, which appeared in 1996 and has since become standard reading for political scientists and others interested in global conflicts, Huntington presented and argued for a theory of global

conflict, not between traditional nations, but between civilizations. “It is my hypothesis,” he said,

that the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics.²³

Culture, rather than ideological alliances, Huntington argued, increasingly provides the glue between nations. The broadest cultural entity is civilization, and the most important element that distinguishes one civilization from another is the spiritual or religious framework on which it is founded. Huntington identified seven or eight of these vast categories, among them the Islamic and the Western worlds. Edward Said, for one, was quick to argue against this interpretation of the world and its future. In “The Clash of Ignorance,” he criticized Huntington for his utter disregard of the variations that exist within one culture, let alone within whole civilizations. His most poignant criticism, however, addressed the underlying conception of cultures as static historical entities: “Huntington is an ideologist, someone who wants to make ‘civilizations’ and ‘identities’ into what they are not: shut-down, sealed-off entities that have been purged of the myriad currents and countercurrents that animate human history.”²⁴

A similar oversight runs through *Who Are We?* As several commentators and critics have pointed out, the book essentially transfers to the national scene the rationales of global conflicts between civilizations, which are recast as conflicts between cultures and creeds. The salience of the creed is crucial in this respect, because, even if it cannot be strictly equated with a framework of spirituality and religiosity, it is close enough, as a cultural glue. A weakened faith in and commitment to the creed potentially means a weakened nation, a faltering project exposed. As a former advisor to the National Security Council, Huntington was acutely aware of the ways of history. “All societies,” he says, “face recurring threats to their existence, to which they eventually succumb. Yet some societies, even when so threatened, are also capable

of postponing their demise by halting and reversing the processes of decline and renewing their vitality and identity.”²⁵

This is curious wording, for if the idea of renewal is in effect the revitalization of the creed, then that seems to favor one route only, a return to Anglo-Protestant foundations and the universal embrace of the beliefs and ideas that those foundations stand for. This, however, has implications for the American imaginary. For if the magic or enchantment of the imaginary has always resided in and continues to reside in the universal allure of a particular kind of individualism and pursuit of advancement that exists within a religiously malleable framework and avoids specifications according to cultural and religious groupings, then a rerouting to specific cultural and ideological groundings could in fact threaten to disenchant the imaginary. I do not mean “disenchant” in the archaically religious or sacred sense in which Taylor employs the term, but in the sense of a desymbolizing direction that moves toward a hardening and limiting of the imaginary’s magic range.

If we agree that the American imaginary, unlike its Western cousins, embeds its participants differently, in faith and commitment to the magic of what, as we shall see, Rodriguez calls the “quest of the ‘I,’” then to channel the underpinnings for this into a specific origin may lead to an abstraction of its ground along the lines of Bakhtin’s previously quoted warning about monologism: “Every cultural act lives essentially on the boundaries, and it derives its seriousness and significance from this fact. Separated by abstraction from these boundaries, it loses the ground of its being and becomes vacuous, arrogant, it degenerates and dies.”²⁶ In the case of the American imaginary, these boundaries are constituted by what I referred to in the Introduction as the “vague contours of the definite certainties of identification,” and their abstraction would be the hardening of these contours into ossified dislocation. It follows that both the imaginary and the founding documents would lose some of the universal appeal and attraction that they both constitute and are constituted by. The United States, in other words, would cease to be, as Deborah Madsen has put it, a “state of nation” and would become a “nation state,” an (unexceptional) nation like most other nations.²⁷ But, if so, what would happen to America?

Futures of Enchantment

I end this chapter, and the book, with some reflections on something that Rodriguez says in an interview about views on America such as those refracted in Huntington's *Who Are We?*: "Everywhere in America now you see people who belong to various cultural traditions; the Anglo and the Hispanic are simply the two most obvious examples. The question for the future: Can a single life be more than one, can one know and behave according to several cultural influences?"²⁸ The most profound result of the juxtaposition of Rodriguez's and Huntington's statements is that the continuity and engagement of vectors pertaining to historical moments of colonialism and colonization continue to forge the United States as a nation and as a project of modernity. There are of course more than two vectors, and I have not even mentioned that which carries Native American cultural and political history, that which originates with and in the Middle Passage, or that which carries yet other encounters with the imaginary across the Pacific. The two I have dealt with are, as Rodriguez suggests, more conspicuous because they continue to collide and conflict over the same issues that originated in alternative geopolitical and cultural orientations in relation to the same shared space. In *Brown*, Rodriguez offers a more meditative contemplation of these movements: "North of the U.S.-Mexico border, brown appears as the color of the future. The adjective accelerates, becomes a verb: 'America is browning.' South of the border, brown sinks back into time. Brown is time."²⁹ Again, the acceleration has to do with the continued attraction and sway of the imaginary's promise, the multiple encounters with, the pursuits and interpretations of what it holds in store, stirred perhaps imperceptibly by the relentlessness of Bakhtin's meanings and their homecoming festivals. Condensing and complicating such movements is what Rodriguez calls the "quest of the 'I'" in relation to the future of America:

I suspect that Huntington is most afraid of the loss of the individualistic culture that he calls America—the "I" civilization. The odd thing is that, at a time when American cultural influence is so widespread in the world, Huntington confesses to a fear that the United States will not be able to withstand the foreign. And the irony is that most of

those immigrants coming to the United States, legally or illegally, are in quest of the “I,” though they do not say it.³⁰

If the American imaginary is indeed predicated on particular ideas of the obligation of advancement and individualism as socially beneficial, and on the inherent good of this singularly new project in the world, the continued salience of the imaginary’s various institutions depends on the continued embrace of originating and underlying ideas and principles. Central to this embrace is the “quest of the ‘I,’” but the exact institution of “I” will necessarily vary according to the traces of other imaginaries and their embeddedness in other times and places. In this conglomerate of pursuits, lived and remembered realities reach back to their heterogeneously constituted and instituted encounters with the master imaginary. The American social fabric may therefore be thought of as hosting a varied array of performances of “multiple modernities,” but in the context of this “one” Western modernity, rather than the ones we so often think of as being somewhere else, as the so-called alternative modernities, as indeed Huntington did in *The Clash of Civilizations*.

We end these explorations and fieldtrips with a slightly different query, concerning the nature of institution itself (Latin *instituire*, from *in-* “in” + *statuere* “to establish, to cause to stand”: how will the American imaginary uphold and accommodate its constituent parts? Paradoxically, the emphasis on creedal truths as signifying something very specific to specific groups contradicts the original promise and serves to disenchant the very bedrock on which the American imaginary is built. That would mean turning what Sacvan Bercovitch, in his discussion of the Winthrop variation, calls the “America game” into an endgame akin to its old world relatives, “identity to be resolved in three or four moves.”³¹ I doubt this was what Huntington intended, but his call for loyalty to specificities in effect undermines the very premises of what is to be rescued. The insistence on these premises is precisely what the film *Sugar*, with which I began in chapter 1, refracts, and its nuanced reflection on and of the American imaginary makes for an appropriate conclusion.

Most fundamentally, *Sugar* speaks to the ideal of the pursuit of

individual aspiration. The scene at Roberto Clemente State Park, where the discarded players gather to play their own ball game, signifies as a field of dreams whose impact goes beyond the broken hopes of making it in baseball. The sequence of close-up shots becomes a testimony to something more, the multiple dreams of "I." The players, hailing from a range of Americas other than America, constitute the affirmation of the quest. They confirm the formation of cultural and economic rims that has been part of American history since its very beginnings. The possibilities extended to the individual and the hopes of their coming to fruition continue to attract and enchant J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur's *Americans-in-becoming*, for, as the last scenes in *Sugar* illustrate, in the end the "cold and broken hallelujah" is still praise. To many, this stubborn persistence in the worship of ideals and realities that statistics on poverty and unemployment reveal to be hopelessly flawed seems irrational at best. Given our knowledge of American social realities, it defies all logic. Yet there it is, all the faith and enchantedness of a continued "quest for the 'I,'" whatever that might come to mean. As with all magic, this is perhaps ultimately not to be subjected to the laws of rationality and logic; if it were, it would no longer enchant.

