

“WHAT’S BECOME OF OUR BLISS”?
THE POLITICS OF RECOGNITION: RECONSIDERED
TRANSRACIALISM AND TRANSGURATION IN
RALPH ELLISON’S *JUNETEENTH*

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Abstract

How do we create a true politics of inclusion, what Nelson Mandela has called a “non-racial democracy”? This essay argues for the importance of artistic representations of a “multiracial imagined community” in helping us to imagine a more attractive alternative to the “diseased imagination” of racialism. Ralph Ellison was an Oklahoma writer who emphasized our cultural inter-relatedness as a means of helping achieve a more inclusive politics. His novel *Juneteenth* illustrates the role of the arts in articulating a moral philosophy which can help create the change in consciousness which is a necessary precondition of reconstructive social movements. All reform requires coalitions, and coalitions require new vision: new paradigms to facilitate social and cultural awakening. *Juneteenth* critiques the root paradigm of racialism, and challenges the pieties of identity politics regarding how to create a new pattern. This essay concludes by applying the novel’s complex dramatization of “the true inter-relatedness of blackness and whiteness” to contemporary identity politics, such as racialized commentary about controversial Caucasian rap artist Eminem.

INTRODUCTION

“*And this is what’s become of our Bliss.*”

This line, from Ralph Ellison’s posthumous novel *Juneteenth* (1999), describes a “white”-looking boy raised among Afro-Americans¹, who later rejects this culture and becomes a racist senator. More broadly, it expresses a betrayed hope that North American leaders could put into practice a true “politics of inclusion.” Yet Ellison’s Bliss is also a symbol of interracial co-creation; of blind faith (ignorance is bliss); and even of political reconstruction.

Before spelling out these themes, I want to first let readers know the purposes to which I apply the analysis of this essay. I approach cultural texts (literature, film, etc.) as “aesthetic resources” for the emancipation from mental slavery (to join Bob Marley with Herbert Marcuse). Specifically, following Ellison’s lead, I will argue that representations of multi-“racial” commu-

nity such as *Juneteenth* are one important pre-condition of multi-ethnic social movements. “Social action must be animated by a vision of a future society,” Noam Chomsky has written. And this vision of the future will be most effective if grounded in a re-examination of the past. As Jose Limon insists, “cultural re-imagining cannot happen without cultural remembering.”²

How do we remember? Our memory can be blinkered by unconscious schema or expectations which predetermine what we see. Or memory can be liberating if it is re-imagined, if we correct the “habit of repressing” the recognition of intercultural commonalities, indeed, of kinship. The notion that North Americans have repressed recognition of an interracial kinship is central to Ellison’s works. His perspective is far from an effort to whitewash differences, but rather is a historically grounded assertion that commonality and difference can

co-exist. Indeed, they have always co-existed, if only we take off the blinders of binary racial mythology.

Ellison is a representative of a tradition of writers who believe that visionary art can facilitate this re-imagining, giving us an inspirational or a corrective horizon towards which we orient ourselves. Ellison is like what Wayne Hampton has called a "guerilla minstrel" who uses his artform to express concern over social issues, i.e., the continuing dilemma of how commonality and difference can co-exist in a multi-ethnic society. For Ellison, fictional narratives give us a historically grounded vision of a future society—a future in which we learn to avoid repeating the exclusionary politics of the past. "If the ideal of achieving a true political equality eludes us in reality," he wrote, "there is still that fictional vision of an ideal democracy [which] gives us representations of a state of things in which [our differences, "racial" or otherwise] are combined to tell us of [new] possibilities such as those when Mark Twain set Huck and Jim afloat on the raft."³

Such visions of an "ideal democracy" are meant to make visible a "more attractive alternative" to the history from which Huck and Jim were escaping, and to keep us from falling into cynicism regarding the problems of the present.

This view of a *more attractive alternative* to what Frederick Douglass called the "diseased imagination" of racialism has guided my study of multi-ethnic freedom movements, and of artistic expressions of a "multi-racial imagined community." The present essay is a continuation of my attempt to think through the consequences of recognizing the social construction of race, while remaining tempered by awareness of the ongoing power of "racial formations." Here again, I ask some "big questions" which have driven my writing and teaching.⁴ Namely:

1) How do we create the multi-ethnic coalitions which will be necessary to pursue issues such as social justice, educational reform, and environmental sustainability?

2) What sort of language do we need to develop what Mandela calls a "non-racial democracy"?

3) How can the arts help us develop new models of identity and community, in which commonality and difference can co-exist?

My approach here is an interdisciplinary form of cultural studies in-between the social sciences and the humanities. Yet this is also a form of social critique, with an eye to implications for political practice. I am not just looking back to assess what Ellison's novel can tell us about the writer and his times. Rather, my approach is what I have called a glance in the "contemporary rear-view mirror."⁵ That is to say, it is of utmost importance to keep in view what is behind us, but even more imperative that we use this knowledge to prepare for what is rushing up on us, lest we have a head-on-collision. Following Ellison's lead, I am using his artistic vision as a tool to look at some contested issues of the present. Ellison and his novel offer us a vantage point from which to critically re-examine our preconceptions about what diversity means. *Juneteenth*, situated within the border culture of early Oklahoma, spawns a narrative of transracial transfigurations. Such transfigurations are necessary in order to move beyond the politics of race, Ellison believed, and in order to move towards the politics of inclusion. At the end of this essay I will use the issues raised in *Juneteenth* as an occasion for comment on the ongoing controversies over the relationship between "black" culture and a supposedly "white" mainstream, as evident in debate over the Caucasian rapper Eminem, or the interracial romance *Save the Last Dance*.⁶

ELLISON'S OKLAHOMA AND THE QUESTION OF FATHER FIGURES

Ralph Ellison's life and work were a fundamental challenge to the black and white binaries of racial mythology. Ellison was a writer who rejected the ghetto-ized box of "black writer." His work is in fact an extended meditation on what he called "the true inter-relatedness of blackness and

whiteness." The character Bliss in *June-teenth*, like the *Invisible Man*, dramatizes the social construction of race.⁷

Ellison's determination to resist what he called "the deadly and hypnotic temptation to interpret the world and all its devices in terms of race" arises from encounters with "breaks" in the Racial Divide, as he experienced this in Oklahoma. "One cannot overestimate the extent to which [Ellison] derives his point of view from the experience of growing up in Oklahoma," insists John Callahan, his literary executor. Oklahoma was admitted as the 46th state in 1907, seven years before Ellison's birth. Oklahoma was a racial frontier: prior to joining the United States, it was known as "Indian Territory." Many Southeastern tribes, such as the Cherokee, had been forcibly resettled there. And for many years before Oklahoma became a state, as a territory it was a sanctuary for runaway slaves seeking the protection of the Five Great Indian Nations, as Ellison noted. There was another large emigration to Oklahoma by Afro-Americans after the collapse of the Reconstruction (the historical backdrop of Toni Morrison's *Paradise*). Many of these emigrants conceived of it as, and lobbied for it to be, a "black state." This notion of a Westward exodus to Indian territory as a land of freedom found expression in popular culture. Ellison noted, as when Bessie Smith sang about "Goin' to the Nation, Going to the Terr'tor'."⁸

Euro-American settlers came relatively late in this process. In the first years of statehood they did not have the same degree of political and economic dominance as was typical of other Southern states. Recalling the interracial friendships which he and his family had during the years after statehood, Ellison remarked: "I guess it's the breaks in the pattern of segregation which count." This liminal period of breaks in Oklahoma's Racial Divide has been captured in Edna Ferber's *Cimarron*. Domination by Anglo elites was increasing, and there was racist violence, as in the 1921 Tulsa riots. But there were also numerous Indian million-

aires, and a considerable degree of economic autonomy in numerous black communities. The segregation laws being passed were not uniformly enforced, in the state's early years.⁹

Ralph's father Lewis Ellison and his mother Ida Milsap emigrated to Oklahoma from Chattanooga, Tennessee, determined to start a family in the relative freedom of a frontier state. Of his childhood in Oklahoma City, Ellison recalled that they lived in a "white middle-class neighborhood," and that "there was never a time that we didn't have white friends." His father "had many white friends who came to the house when I was quite small, so that any feelings of distrust I was to develop towards whites later on were modified by those with whom I had warm relations."¹⁰ But it was hardly a privileged childhood, or a predominantly white cultural milieu. Lewis Ellison died when Ralph was three, and the family was quite poor. Ralph attended a segregated school. His immediate cultural referents were largely Afro-American.

Somehow, in this frontier environment which was both provincial and culturally vibrant, Ralph and his crew of friends grew up thinking of themselves as potential "Renaissance Men."¹¹ Ellison remembered his crew as "members of a wild, free, outlaw tribe which transcended the category of race," many of them fatherless. Their need for "father and mother substitutes" shaped their search for, and fabrication of, "heroes and ideals." The models these budding "Renaissance Men" chose were a mixed lot: jazz musicians, scientists, gamblers, scholars, stunt men. "We were seeking examples, patterns to live by," Ellison wrote. "We were projecting archetypes, re-creating folk figures, [heroes which often] violated all . . . accepted conceptions of the hero handed down by cultural, religious and racist tradition." The archetypal figures he and his childhood friends identified with were "projections, figures neither white nor black, Christian nor Jewish." One important model for Ellison, an archetypal figure capable of containing both black pride and transracial

Renaissance ambitions, was Frederick Douglass.¹²

I refer to Douglass, along with Ellison and Bob Marley, as “integrative ancestors” who can be claimed by more than one ethno-racial group. Ellison articulated a similar notion of trans-racial community, by claiming literary ancestors of several nations, and in the way in which he consistently points out the ways in which “black” culture or institutions are inevitably rooted in multi-ethnic or interracial network. In his essays, Ellison applied this perspective to *The Black Dispatch*, the paper he delivered as a boy in Oklahoma City. The support networks for such papers invariably seemed to be interracial: some white citizens of Oklahoma City helped support Roscoe Dunjee’s paper, Ellison pointed out, “just as a black sailmaker . . . kept William Lloyd Garrison’s paper, *The Liberator* going in the name of Abolition,” and in a similar manner as “whites kept Frederick Douglass’ paper going.”

And how can we learn to recognize that inter-relatedness? Ellison characterized interracial interactions as a sort of “antagonistic cooperation.” Whether one focused on the antagonism, or the cooperation, the end result was still co-creation, to which all of us could lay claim, and for which all of us must take responsibility. There is a redemptive power, in Ellison’s logic, to the recognition of inter-relatedness. It can lead to cultural transfiguration, Ellison suggests, in which we learn to take joint responsibility for the world we created together, rather than merely assigning blame for how it came into being.¹³

Ellison’s answer to this question of mutual recognition is: we achieve it through the re-imagining and collective remembering of the language of literature, of myth, of popular culture.

THE SYMBOLIC LIFE

Roscoe Dundee, the Oklahoma newsman, understood that “America moves through myth,” Ellison wrote: cultural myths which are always in a state of flux and transfor-

mation. Therefore, “the problem is to keep up with the metamorphosis and find out who Frederick Douglass is today.” Because despite generational change, “the patterns of society demand again and again repetition of that same heroism with a new body and a new face.”¹⁴

If cultural heroes reappeared only in transfigured form, then what would a “new heroism” look like? In what style and in what format would each new generation project its re-imagined archetypal ideas? Shortly after he moved from Oklahoma to Alabama, Ellison began to formulate his own artistic answer to these questions, in what was a fusion of the “Renaissance Man” and “New Negro” ideals. In typical fashion, he chose both black and white models. His first literary hero was T.S. Eliot, whose *The Wasteland* served as a study guide for young Ellison, enabling him to see the mythic dimension of his own experiences. Alain Locke was also a role model because his theory of the “New Negro” pointed Ellison towards the realization that “black culture” was at the cornerstone of the American experience: so central that “everyone who is touched by it becomes a little bit Afro-American.”¹⁵

This notion that all Americans are culturally part “black”—if in denial about their hybridity—is a central theme of *Juneteenth*. And again, Ellison drew heavily on his Oklahoma roots in creating this novel. As Callahan write in his Introduction to *Juneteenth*, “For Ellison the geography, history, and human diversity of Oklahoma embodied the actual and potential if oft-denied richness of the country.”¹⁶

Yet if it was the richness of Afro-American folk culture in Oklahoma which most consistently fired Ellison’s imagination, it was cultural traditions from outside the black community which often gave him the “lense” through which to see the uniqueness of this specifically “Negro” culture. “I was taken very early with a passion to link together all I loved within the Negro community and all those things I felt in the world which lay beyond,” Ellison writes in

Shadow and Act. And very often, it was an Oklahoma context, in which the inter-penetration of Afro-American, Native, and Euro-American cultures was abundantly evident even during segregation, which gave Ellison the grounding to criticize "the insidious confusion between race and culture which haunts this society."¹⁷

Ellison had what Mark Busby calls an "integrative imagination." "There is no specifically American vernacular and language which has not been touched by us and our style," Ellison asserted. "*I don't recognize any white culture,*" he emphasized. "I recognize no American culture which is not the partial creation of black people. I recognize no American style in literature, in dance, in music . . . which does not bear the mark of the American Negro."¹⁸

Ellison's colleague Albert Murray once wrote that "the mainstream in America is not white, but mulatto." If much of Ellison's work published while he was alive was an illustration of this assertion, the story of Bliss in *Juneteenth* shows Ellison dramatizing our deep denial of our hybridity. I have previously discussed the importance that substitute father figures played in his imagination after his own father died when he was three. In his essays, he is adamant about the importance of European writers in his imagination. "Writers as artists are sons of many fathers," he asserted, in opposition to those who would want to confine him to a "black box," in which his only possible form of kinship would be with black writers such as Richard Wright.¹⁹

During a 1977 interview, when Ishmael Reed accused Ellison of downplaying black influences, Ellison declared: "An artist can't do a damn thing about his relatives, but he can sure as hell choose his artistic ancestors." Ellison, then, engaged in a form of "self-fathering." As a character says in *Invisible Man*: "Be your own father."²⁰

In *Juneteenth*, Ellison reversed the equation, giving us Bliss, an apparently Caucasian boy, who is raised by an Afro-American preacher, Reverend Hickman. This story has particular resonance for Con-

temporary American culture, with its fascination with a black "street" culture that is, in turn, is obsessively concerned with "white boys" as outsiders or intruders against which "authentic" black culture is defined. More broadly, Ellison uses this narrative to examine the reasons for and the result of many Americans' refusal to acknowledge Afro-Americans as co-parents or co-creators of our culture, as well as our political and economic systems.²¹

TRANSFIGURATION: THE POLITICAL INTERFACE OF RELIGION AND RACE

The epigram chosen for *Juneteenth* is a poem by T.S. Eliot which reflects on "the use of memory" as a form of "liberation" in which the "faces and places" of the past "become renewed, transfigured, in another pattern."²² The transfiguration in which Ellison is specifically interested is that in which heroic figures such as Frederick Douglass reappear "with a new body and a new face," and in which Americans discover the interracial links which Ellison believes are the cornerstone of the American experience.

An archetypal instance of transfiguration is Matthew 17:2. The disciples see Jesus on a mountaintop, conversing with Moses and Elijah, while "his face shone like the sun." More broadly, transfiguration can refer to any sudden transformation in outward appearance which also indicates inner change. People have often used the language of transfiguration to describe "race leaders," or nationalists who fuse political and spiritual ideals. Thus, Martin Luther King, Jr., who was fond of quoting "the cross we bear precedes the crown we wear," seemed visibly transfigured at the end of his "Mountaintop" speech, on a stormy night just before he was assassinated. In one strain of North American cultural mythology, racialized transfiguration leads to political redemption: often as a blood sacrifice which atones for the sins of exclusion, and sets a moral tone necessary for the enactment of inclusive democracy. This mixture of the political and the spiritual in relation to the

struggle for racial equality is evident over a long sweep of American history: hence, abolitionism and the Civil Rights movement have been referred to as a "secular church," i.e., a *movement of moral vision applied to political inclusion*.²³

Juneteenth is not a utopian novel. It is partly a requiem for the failure of American politics to carry forward the sort of national transfiguration envisioned by icons of the Civil War era: Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass. Yet the failure, suggests Ellison, lies primarily within our imagination: we have already experienced this transfiguration, culturally, but racial mythologies have blinded us, kept us from recognizing it. It is a failure both of sight, and of faith—the loss of faith that political inclusion is achievable.

Juneteenth opens in 1955 with a group of elderly "Southern Negroes" chartering a plane, in which they "swooped down" on Washington D.C. in order to try to save a man they claim as a Prodigal Son, Senator Sunraider, from the lethal consequences of his own racist politics. And in trying to protect him, they must try to reclaim him. To redeem him, For these are the people who raised Sunraider when he was a boy known as Bliss.

This is the congregation of the Reverend A.Z. Hickman, who was Bliss/Sunraider's de facto father. These are the long-suffering, freedom-seeking "black folk" of literature, film, and myth: the archetypal Afro-Americans of Civil Rights dramas such as *I'll Fly Away*, or in the real-life footage of *Eyes on the Prize*. They are the embodiment of the search for freedom as both political and spiritual avocation. These people are the conscience of America, Moses before Pharaoh, speaking truth to power in a deeply dignified way.²⁴

With the intuition of the folk, Hickman and his congregation have come to warn their wayward son, Senator Sunraider, that his life is in danger. His secretary refuses to see them. They are powerless, in North America's halls of power. And yet the black folk carry their own sort of power: the

power of myth, of moral legitimacy. The secretary is so disoriented by the "quietly insistent" manner of these black visitors that "she could no longer see the large abstract paintings hung along the paneled wall, nor the framed facsimiles of State Documents which hung above a bust of Vice-President Calhoun" (4). Here we see, in a manner similar to the Liberty Paints segment of *Invisible Man*, the black constituency, or the repressed black cornerstone of the American republic, making invisible the dominant "white mythology."

Hickman and his congregation, however, are denied access to Senator Sunraider. So they sit in the gallery of the Senate. During Sunraider's speech, an angry man rises in the gallery to fire upon the Senator, who says, with an inflection that betrays both the religious and racial roots of his upbringing: "LAWD, WHY HAST THOU . . . forsaken . . ." (26).

So Hickman and his church have arrived too late to save Sunraider. But Hickman still hopes to reclaim him, and thereby to redeem him. The rest of the novel is centered on memories that Sunraider and Hickman have, in a hospital, as Sunraider lays dying, while Hickman prods him to remember who he is, and from where he came. So in the language of contemporary critical theory, *Juneteenth* is about the politics of recognition: the recognition of transracial inter-relatedness as a form of redemptive transfiguration.²⁵

TRANSRACIALISM: BETWEEN BLACK & WHITE AND LIVING COLOR

After watching Senator Sunraider, his son, fall in the speaker's well, Hickman begins to sing from the gallery: "Why has thou take our Bliss, Lord? . . . Your were our last hope, Bliss." And the Senator, in his blood-bathed delerium, begins to respond to the call. He begins calling out for Hickman (38-9). So against the wishes of Sunraider's aides, Hickman is brought to the Senator's hospital bed.

Much of the first third of the novel concerns Hickman training the young boy Bliss (the future Senator) in the theatrics of a re-

ligious tent revival. Bliss is made to lay in a coffin, and then stage a resurrection from the dead at a dramatic moment in Hickman's sermon.²⁶ Hickman trains Bliss in the fine art of making people believe in the illusion. "You got to look like you feel it, Bliss," Hickman instructs. And has him repeat John 11:25—"I am the resurrection and the life" (46). Hickman bribes the youth constantly with ice cream to ensure his participation, and to restrain the boy's occasional urges to puncture the illusion.

The suspension of disbelief is of course a pre-requisite of faith. And Bliss is invaluable to Hickman in facilitating this suspension. Later in the novel, Hickman confides to a semi-conscious Senator Sunraider in the hospital: "You made me feel like I wasn't a fraud" (113). Bliss' participation has a redemptive feel for Hickman for several reasons: Bliss' youthful innocence, and probably his color, contributes to the suspension of disbelief. Furthermore, Hickman himself has been transfigured or "reborn" through adopting Bliss: from a womanizing, hard-drinking, hard-blowing jazz trombonist, to "God's Trombone."

Bliss' racial ambiguity is central to the whole story: to the suspension of disbelief in matters of faith and religion; to how he came to live with Hickman; and eventually, to why he is wrenched away from his black home and community, and seeks a new direction.

As Hickman and Bliss tour the circuit with their resurrection show, Afro-Americans are continually commenting on Bliss' appearance. He is called "li'l ole hi-yaller," "yella," "Indian," "half-white," and "white." A street tough boy trying to provoke a fight remarks: "He probably got him some mean cracker blood too!" (55). Bliss then smashed the boy's head with a rock.²⁷

Racial ambiguity also affects the relationship between Bliss and Hickman, his "father." Hickman confesses mixed emotions about this child, whose fair skin transforms his relations with both blacks and whites. He also struggles with racial mythologies, as obstacles arise in fulfilling the

destiny he has in mind for Bliss (which is to be a Lincoln-like "liberator"). At one point, Hickman remarks that his apprentice is "definitely a preacher," yet has a serious flaw: "I guess whoever it was give you that straight hair and white skin took away your singing voice" (63).

Is he or isn't he? Nobody knows for sure. As one of Hickman's church women says, "he don't show no sign [of blackness] in his skin or hair or features, *only in his talking*" (218).

Other facets of the Bliss' racial ambiguity surface in Chapter Five, one of the most hauntingly lyrical sections of a sometimes uneven manuscript.²⁸ This chapter takes place during a transitional phase of Bliss' life when he was a film-maker (a continuity in his career of casting spells or spinning illusions). The setting is Oklahoma, "Out there where they thought the new state a second chance for Eden" (65). The chapter relates Bliss' seduction of a young multi-ethnic woman (Cherokee, Anglo, and Afro) he calls "Miss Teasing Brown." She in turn calls him "Mister Movie Man," but cannot place him. "Once in a while you sound just like one of us," she says. "I just talk as I feel," he responds. To which she replies: "Well, I guess you feel like us—every once in a while" (73). Later she asks if movie-making is like piecing together scraps of a quilt, "with all the colors of the rainbow in it." Almost, Bliss says. "There has to be a pattern though and *we only have black and white*" (my emphasis). His lover replies:

"Well, there's Indians and some of the black is almost white and brown like me" (83).

THE ILLUSION OF EMANCIPATION

The novel pivots on the memory of a Juneteenth celebration in which Bliss' illusion of belonging to a black community is shattered. This memory is inspired when Sunraider, in the hospital, regains consciousness and has a conversation in which he reflexively calls Hickman "Daddy." He wants to remember the event that drove them apart. Hickman reminds him.

"Juneteenth," the Senator said, "I had

forgotten the word.”

“You’ve forgotten lots of important things from those days, Bliss” (114).

Juneteenth is a holiday primarily celebrated among Afro-Americans in Texas, and in other states where Texans have migrated. It commemorates the day in 1865 in which slaves in Galveston finally got word of Emancipation. “*The celebration of a gaudy illusion,*” Sunraider thinks, semi-conscious; “a bunch of old-fashioned Negroes celebrating an illusion of emancipation, and getting it mixed up with the Resurrection, minstrel shows and vaudeville routines” (115-16).

Sunraider’s characterization is condescending, but accurately describes the mixture of religious and political themes one often witnesses in such entertainments, and a certain carnival or vaudeville flavor often tinged by racial stereotypes. Hickman reflects, in a monologue directed to the semi-conscious Sunraider, that in those days “we hadn’t started imitating white folks who in turn were imitating their distorted and low-rated ideas of us” (132). Both Sunraider and Hickman’s assessments have an element of truth: the Resurrection spectacle they staged during that Juneteenth celebration did occur during an era when there was a more distinctly “black” folk culture. Yet even that black folk culture was tinged by blackface traditions—created within an interracial hall of mirrors.²⁹ The fair-skinned Bliss was clearly a key part of the success of the variant of this racial/religious myth Hickman was staging. The other Biblical version of the transfiguration remarks that Jesus’ clothes were “dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could have bleached them” (Mark 9:3). Christian hymns sung by people of all colors speak of being “washed white as snow.” Clearly, Judeo-Christian transfiguration has historically been associated with whiteness, or the sun. And Bliss, a “white” boy, would represent this purity for a black Christian audience of that era.

Just before the climactic moment of that Juneteenth “Resurrection,” so long ago, which Sunraider is remembering as his life

ebbs, an Anglo woman stormed into the tent revival. The tall redheaded woman in a purple dress rushed forward, knocking over chairs, and declaimed: “He’s mine, MINE! That’s Cudworth, my child. My baby. You gypsy niggers stole him, my baby. . . . I’m taking him home to his heritage” (155-56).

Bliss is lifted from the coffin, with the white woman pulling on his head, the black church women pulling on his legs and arms. As Hickman recalls this scene in the hospital, he frames it in historical perspective: “the fight between her kind of woman and ours goes way back to the beginning . . . to when women found that the only way they could turn over the responsibility of raising a child to another woman was to turn over some of the child’s love and affection along with it. They been battling ever since” (160). Hickman notes that most of his “deaconsesses had been nursing white folks’ chillun from the time they could first take a job . . . and had fought battles with the white women every step of the way” (161).

This is another instance of what Ellison describes as a historical antagonistic cooperation between blacks and whites. It describes a situation that was a reality for many Anglo children in the south for a couple of centuries: they spent much of their early childhood being nurtured by black women, playing with black children, and yet then were “reclaimed” by their white parents when the time came for them to learn about their “heritage.” As Hickman observes, “that situation must make a child’s heart a battleground” (161).

Ellison’s notes make clear his intent in this scene: “Bliss’s coffin is a threshold . . . [A]fter its symbolism of rebirth (Christian) he does indeed find rebirth—but in an ironic reversal he becomes white and anything but the liberator he was being trained to become” (357).

Hickman and his congregation have to hide their Bliss. The confrontation with the white woman sets off a debate: could Bliss really be her son? Hickman’s? Anything is possible, one woman surmises. “Half the devilment in this country caint be located on account of it’s somewhere in between

black and white and covered up with bedclothes in the dark" (218).

THE SHOCK OF RECOGNITION

One thing is sure: as Hickman had surmised, this conflict, being torn between two "races," two "heritages," two opposed but intersecting sets of hopes, turned Bliss's heart into a battleground. Bliss was now forced to recognize that he was in essence fatherless and motherless. The old illusion of belonging could no longer be sustained. Bliss would continue creating illusions, and he continued to speak of resurrection. But he found a different audience, and turned his back on the people who raised and nurtured him. The shock of recognition: that the crazed white woman at the revival was, if not his mother, then someone who looked like his mother, and that Hickman was not his real father—this shock set in motion the transformation of Bliss. Once the pride and joy of black people, he metamorphosized into Senator Sunraider, who repressed the memory of this earlier connection, and made racist jokes. He used the skills he had learned on the revival circuit, but now within a political arena.

In one of *Juneteenth's* most moving scenes, Hickman leaves Sunraider's bedside and walks to the Lincoln Memorial. He had been pondering how Bliss evolved into something so different than what they had imagined. "We made a plan, or at least we dreamed a dream and worked for it but . . . the dream got out of hand" (270). And Bliss turned away, "even at the very last moment, refusing to recognize us . . . who for years haven't asked anything except that he remember and honor the days of his youth" (271). Bliss' story is a secret: both a tragedy and a mystery, as is the real, repressed story of the nation. A reporter had asked Hickman how he could cry for a man who hated his people. He couldn't explain the truth, but mused: "if we can't cry for Bliss, then who? If we can't cry for the Nation, then who?" (274). The tragic mystery of both the nation and Bliss are based in the repression of how inter-connected "black"

and "white" people actually are.

During these thoughts Hickman came upon the statue of Lincoln, in whose expression he recognized a part of himself: "That look, that's us! It's not in the features but in what . . . those eyes, have to say" (280). A church-woman who had followed him cried out: "Ain't that Father Abraham?" Hickman nodded, thinking "Yes, with all I know about him and his contradictions, yes . . . And with all I know about white men and politicians of all colors and guises and intentions, yes . . . She's right . . . you're one of the few who ever earned the right to be called 'Father'" (281).

It is after this encounter with the memory of Lincoln that Hickman reflects: "And to think, we had hoped to raise ourselves that kind of man" (283). Back at the hospital bed, looking at the dying Sunraider, he wearily concludes: "And this is what's become of our Bliss" (286). Whereupon Hickman finally returns to the repressed secret of how Bliss came into being. And how the dream of his people, who hoped to raise Bliss to be a liberator, was deferred, derailed. It becomes clear that this is, indeed, also the story of a nation: in some ways an almost unbearable tragedy, yet in other ways a mystery which challenges our most fundamental assumptions.

The scene is one of racial horror and dread. Hickman, then a young hell-raising musician, is waiting in his house, a gun on his lap, fearing or expecting a racist mob. This mob has already earlier lynched his brother and killed his mother. A pregnant woman steps into his house, already in labor, and pleads that Hickman find a woman to help her deliver her child. Hickman puts his gun to her belly and wants to kill both mother and unborn child. This same woman had blamed Hickman's brother Bob for her pregnancy. He was lynched and mutilated; "his wasted seed . . . now a barbaric souvenir floating in a fruit jar of alcohol and being shown off in their barbershops and lodge halls and in the judge's chambers down at the courthouse" (297).

Yet here the woman is, having decided

that Hickman was the only man in town who might show her Christian charity. She calls herself a Christian, yet confesses she is a liar, and a murderess. She assures Hickman that his brother Bob had nothing to do with the pregnancy, but she refuses to name the father. Hickman understands that "she'd have destroyed the nation just to protect her pride and reputation in that little old town" (297). He is incredulous: "Do you think that after being the son of a black preacher in this swamp of a country I'd let you put me in the position of trying to act like Christ? . . . Tell me, what kind of endless, bottomless, blind store of forgiveness and understanding am I supposed to have?" (299-300).

Yet then the woman's water breaks, and he crosses a Rubicon: "that instinct and life inside her had reached out and tagged you and you were It" (300). He helps into the world new life, the offspring of a woman who has destroyed life in his own family. When the boy is born, and he cuts the umbilical cord, the birth awakened in Hickman "*some cord of kinship stronger and deeper than blood, hate or heartbreak*" (302, my emphasis).

After nursing the child a few days, the woman announced that she was leaving, and implored him to keep the child. "It's the only way, Alonzo Hickman . . . Take him, let him share your Negro life and whatever it is that allowed you to help us all these days . . . [Y]ou'll need him to help prevent you from destroying yourself with bitterness. With me he'll only be the cause of more trouble and shame and later it'll hurt him" (308).

Hickman lets her walk, reflecting: "Hickman, you had wanted a life for a life and the relief of drowning your humiliation and grief in blood, and now this flawed-hearted woman was offering you two lives—your own, and his young life to train. Here was a chance to prove that there was something in this world stronger than all their ignorant superstition . . . Maybe the baby could redeem her and me my failure of revenge and my softness of heart" (311).

"I'll call him Bliss, because that's what

they say ignorance is," he decides (311). The child Bliss would grow up ignorant of his origins, of the original sin of his mother. He would have a chance for new beginnings.

A writer of less vision than Ellison might not find the route from racial horror to transraciality and transfiguration. But as always Ellison focuses on the consequences of antagonistic cooperation: of co-creation, and the move from assigning blame, to taking responsibility. Even in this story, rooted in the horror of the most extreme forms of racial violence, the responsibility cannot be assigned solely along the lines of race.

Certainly a primary part of *Juneteenth* is a lesson about the moral bankruptcy that develops when "whites" refuse recognition of their inter-relatedness with other "races." Meditating on the dream his congregation had of raising a "liberator," and the distance Bliss deviated from this dream, Hickman mused: "I guess we hoped for the Prodigal's return. But in a country like this, where prodigal boys . . . forget where home is . . . our hoping and waiting [becomes] a *true test of our faith or at least our love*" (315).³⁰

The disjuncture between the Bliss of their faith and dreams, and the Sunraider of national politics, is so great that Hickman wonders if "maybe the real one, the true Bliss got lost and this is somebody else." But he concludes with finality, "this was Bliss . . . It's him and there lies the nation on its groaning bed" (316).

But the flight from interracial recognition is not just a "white" problem. Hickman also wrestled with his own conflicted feelings, with what role his own rage, his own illusions, and his own refusal of recognition may have played in Bliss' deviation from the dream.

Around 1935, when Bliss was a rising politician, some Georgia politicians located Hickman and tried get him to admit his connection to Bliss. "I lied and denied so he could climb higher into the hills of power hoping that he'd find security and in his security and power he'd find his memory and with memory use his power for the good

of everyone" (316).

This is another illusion, and another racial mythology. Today we might name it the Clarence Thomas Syndrome. The belief that we should support a public figure on the basis of racial origin, or original racial affiliation, on the faith that this origin will determine allegiance in our place and time.

When Bliss was a baby, Hickman's struggle with recognition and responsibility was intense. He at first carried the baby in a briefcase, and "lied that he was my dead sister's child." He travelled with the child, "still mixed up over why I was trying to save him but needing to bad enough to learn to pray" (313). A year later, Hickman was "still mixed up in my emotions about him but always having him with me" (313). And it is no wonder that his emotions were confused: aside from Bliss as a reminder of the horror he lived through, there was the matter of Bliss changing every facet of his present life, in ways beyond his control. Black women rejected Hickman, accusing him of "laying around with a white gal," because of the fair-skinned baby he carried. They saw Bliss as "half-white," as proof of Hickman's guilt-by-miscegenation. So Bliss, the child, forced Hickman into celibacy. Another marker of his complete transfiguration from hell-raiser to man of God and would-be miracle worker.

MUSIC'S TRANSGURATIVE POWER

The true miracle is perhaps that out of horror, sometimes comes redemption. Through Bliss, Hickman found his redemption in playing spiritual music. The young man who had tried to blow all his rage and joy and gusto into his jazz trombone now played God's trombone. And he tried to blow into his Bliss the breath of life, the hope of justice, and reconciliation.

In his dialogue at the hospital with Bliss/Sunraider, and with his own conscience, Hickman quizzes himself many times: If I had done this or hadn't done that, would things have turned out differently? If he hadn't declined to recognize Bliss early in his political career, could he have been re-

claimed? Hickman feels that the dream of raising a white child to be a "liberator" of or powerful representative of black people, has been a failure. And he clearly feels that part of the failure was his own.

Ellison's answer on "lessons learned" from this story comes primarily in two forms. One, at the novel's end, can be found in Hickman/Ellison's memory of the Oklahoma of his youth. And the other is in Sunraider's speech at the beginning of the novel, to which I will return shortly.

While meditating on this seeming failure ("this is what's become of our Bliss"), Hickman recalls elements of Oklahoma when he was a young man that had made the dream of transracialism and transfiguration seem achievable. Because anything seemed possible in those days, Oklahoma was "the new country which He gave us, the Indian Nation and the Territory then, and everything wide open and hopeful" (319). And the people who lived together on that frontier were a diverse lot, including "a lot of half-Indian Negroes, those 'Natives,' they called them . . ." (318). He remembers "That Texas white boy who was always hanging around till he was like one of us." They asked him why he hung around when "You could be President."

"Yeah, but what's the White House got that's better than what's right here?" Tex replied.

"Maybe Bliss could tell him." Hickman mused (319).

He also remembered a day when they had gone "to the polls with ax handles and pistols, some whites and Indians with us, and battling for the right. Long back, now Oklahoma's just a song, but they don't sing about that . . . Run up a skyscraper and forget about the foundation" (319).

Still, Hickman affirms: "Yeah, but we got it all in the music." He describes the music and the life that went with it as "Its own communion and fellowship" (319). In the memory of the musical fellowship, hope is kept alive. Earlier, Hickman explained the music's power to the boy Bliss: "we had received a new song in a new land [which

we] had to use . . . to build up a whole new nation" (127-8). "*Keep to the rhythm and you'll keep to life*" Hickman told Bliss (129). The music inspired faith: "They couldn't divide us . . . Because anywhere they dragged us we throbbed in time together." He described the music as "*the spirit of our redemption*" (130).³¹

But at the dying Sunraider's side, Hickman's thoughts turned back to fast living in the New Eden, when he was a jazz musician. The sort of "communion and fellowship" inspired by this wild dance music was of an entirely different sort. Maybe, Hickman thinks, "I should tell him about those times; maybe it was the self-denial that turned him away" (318).

Hickman (reflecting Ellison's view) describes music as like a code. The story Hickman feels he should have told Bliss was the repressed story about the "new song" of a fast-living, multi-ethnic community in the New Eden. And not just the illusion of resurrection (318-19). Hickman realizes that he, too, has run up a skyscraper, while neglecting the foundation. But the real story, the repressed story, is still there: "we got it all in the music." People can follow the rhythm to the source, and in the source, there is a shared memory, and there is a form of liberation. The music has "*transfigurative power*."³² This was a form of music and community that crossed barriers: racial frontiers, and the boundaries between secular and sacred.

Yes, that was Bliss then.

SUNRAIDER'S SPEECH: CO-CREATION RE-IMAGINED

But Bliss now (1955) carried some of the music Hickman taught him. In his Senate speech, one hears many voices, some arrogant and pompous, but some wise. There is praise of the importance of diversity (19), and even a meditation on the importance of memory. What is Ellison up to in this speech?

The speech is framed in such away that one would not tend to imagine that there could be anything of redeeming value in

Senator Sunraider's words. We have already been clued in that he is a racist, and he gives evidence of this in the speech. Yet the first time I read the speech, I experienced a sense of "cognitive dissonance" between the way I understood I was supposed to be reading the speech, and the actual content of some parts of the speech, which in part read as an extension of Hickman's worldview, and often, as an expression of Ellison's own deepest convictions, as expressed often elsewhere, about "unity in diversity."

Sunraider's speech is in fact central to Ellison's message, regarding antagonistic cooperation as co-creation, and the unexpected challenges that interracial co-creation presents to overstanding "what diversity means."³³ To understand the significance of this speech in the novel, and in Ellison's thought, I want to suggest two necessary framing devices:

1) the speech must be understood as a form of call-and-response with a multiracial audience;

2) the speech is a fictional re-visioning of Eliot's poem about liberatory memory, in which "faces and places" of the past "become renewed, transfigured, in another pattern."

If we re-visit the speech as an illustration of call-and-response: as an interactive, dialogical speech paradigm, then it becomes clear that much of Sunraider's speech is in fact a reaction to the aspirations of his long-repressed "family," Hickman and his Afro-American congregation.

In the call-and-response style of communication, which has most often been associated with "black" religious traditions and African-derived musical patterns, "a speaker governs the use of language under tutelage of the audience," as Molefi Asante writes.³⁴ The part of Sunraider's speech which Ellison included came after the Senator had been distracted by a hallucinatory "cinematic image" of the "heraldic eagle" of the Great Seal hovering over his head. (Shades here of the *Invisible Man's* throw-away line about "making the old eagle rock dangerously") (576). Looking upwards,

Sunraider becomes aware of "a collectivity of obscure faces, staring down . . . from the tortured angle provided by a segregated theater's peanut gallery" (12). Sunraider does not register that this is Hickman's congregation, but he does sense an "expectation of some crucial and long-awaited revelation which would make them whole" (13). He is "pleasurably challenged" by their attitude of expectation, and shifting emotional gears, he finds himself "giving expression to ideas the likes of which he had never articulated," words and ideas which arose "from some chaotic region deep within him" (13).

Ellison does not tell us which of Sunraider's ideas are new, and which merely voice the ideology of a Southern Senator in a segregationist era. But a form of call-and-response is happening, it becomes evident, of which the Senator is not fully conscious. His "family" is pulling certain themes out of him. Glancing at them, he thinks: "*In whose name and under what stress do they think I'm speaking?*" (12). Hickman's congregation still loves Bliss, their Prodigal Son. They still claim him, recognize him, as their partial creation. And they do have an attitude of awaiting "revelation." But Sunraider delivers a speech that is directed to all members of his audience. So we find him playing to racists, but also affirming diversity. We find him praising the founding fathers, yet calling on the audience to break with history.

There are numerous affirmations here of North America's role as a "Redeemer Nation," imposing its will in a form of what Octavio Paz has called "imperial democracy."³⁵ Sunraider uses fulsome praise of the "awesome vision" of the forefathers to justify what seems to be a jingoistic nationalism. Yet I was struck by the ways in which this speech actually establishes a more problematical relationship to the past, and to the founders, similar to that employed by the abolitionist orator Frederick Douglass in his "July 5th Speech."³⁶ This is not immediately evident, given the set of expectations Ellison signals to his readers.

Yet something else besides bigotry or stale patriotism is at work here: something perhaps only explainable in terms of Sunraider's response to the expectations of that audience in the peanut gallery, or the awakening of long-buried parts of his consciousness, which speak to ways in which *that* family has trained him. For Sunraider has not come to merely praise the fathers. He says: "In our beginning our forefathers summoned up the will to break with the past. They questioned the past and condemned it and severed themselves from its entangling tentacles" (14). This is, in fact, quite like Douglass' attitude towards the founding fathers: Sunraider wants to both "affirm and revitalize their awesome vision" (15). He wants not "to reject the past; rather . . . to overcome its blighting effects"; to "redeem" the past by "transforming" its "obsolescent" ideals" (16).

So what are these "entangling tentacles" of the past which must be "remembered but rejected"? The Senator says that "we become victims of history . . . if we fail to evolve ways of life that are more free [and] more human" (19). And in this context Sunraider poses a "fatal question" of history, whose past patterns he says we must "remember selectively, creatively." That is: "How can the many be as one?" The answer: "Through a balanced consciousness of unity in diversity and diversity in unity" (19).

This reads very much like "the next phase" that the *Invisible Man* had envisioned in his search for multiracial community: "Our fate is to become one, and yet many—this is not prophecy, but description" (577). ("I am neither seer nor prophet," Sunraider says before advocating "unity in diversity" [19]). And does it matter that the one line was voiced by a "black" man; the other by a "white" man? Does that alter the meaning?³⁷ To the degree that Ellison wants us to think about co-creation, and about the possibility that commonality and difference can co-exist, why would he put these words about transforming the patterns of the fathers, and about the need for

diversity in unity, in the mouth of a racist Southern Senator?

Sunraider certainly seems to be a racist. Or is playing to racists. Shortly after making a zen-like pronouncement about the inter-relatedness of "darkness in lightness" (20), Sunraider makes a crude joke about "Coons" driving Cadillacs (23). We are told that the Senator's applause is "accented here and there by enthusiastic rebel yells" (24). Yet immediately after his racist joke about "our darker brethren," he also equates "their crass and jazzy defiance of good taste" with "the flexible soundness of the nation." And he asserts the need for "citizen-individualists possessing the courage to forge a multiplicity of creative selves and styles" (23).

What is going on here? Racial ambiguity? Hypocrisy? Can we imagine that, in engaging in call-and-response with an audience whose expectations are so different, Sunraider is responding to the expectations of both his racist constituents, while also rising to meet the expectations of that audience whose presence in the peanut gallery somehow pleases and challenges him?

Let us return again for a moment to the idea around which Ellison has centered this novel: that of a liberatory memory which transfigures the faces and places of the past in a new pattern. Was Hickman's dream in fact a complete failure? Elements of liberatory discourse, and transfiguration into oneness, remain in the Senator's speech, alongside a racist joke, and crude nationalism. There is a recognition of the need to break from old patterns, while *re-invigorating* certain visions of the past. In his bedside meditations, Hickman had reflected on the masks that public figures wore. Ideals are embodied in people, yet "men change and have wills and wear masks" (284). This makes it difficult to differentiate between the human being "inside," and the persona adopted in order to meet the expectations of people "outside."³⁸

Behind Sunraider's mask, is there something redeemable? Something recognizable as having been created by both black and white people, even though Sunraider him-

self, in public, apparently refused to recognize this?

I sense that Ellison is challenging us to think about the consequences of co-creation in new ways. The offspring of our co-creation come from inter-twined roots. They may follow a trajectory similar to our expectations, but with unexpected fruits. Hickman and his people dreamed of raising a modern-day Lincoln, who would fight for the black people who raised him. It did not work out quite that way. Another "heritage" claimed him. Yet when Sunraider adopts Psalms 121:1, "We lift up our eyes to the hills and we arise" (15), which heritage is he forwarding?

To what does Sunraider refer when he speaks of "remembered but rejected things"? Could one of those remembered but rejected things be the notion of racial solidarity itself? Sunraider has probably also rejected Hickman's notion of liberation. He had told the boy: "*Bliss, you must be a hero just like that little lad who led blind Samson to the wall, because a great many grown folks are blind and have to be led toward the light*" (228). When the child becomes a man, he puts away childish things. Even as a boy, this notion of liberation "troubled" him. And as a man, he clearly envisioned liberation as reconstruction, not as total destruction. As building a new structure, with selected elements of the past, rather than pulling or burning the roof down on our heads.³⁹

These questions are alive with us today. One fascinating story of the 2000 Presidential campaign was an uneasy dance between Democratic vice-presidential candidate Joseph Lieberman, and civil rights leaders. They were suspicious of Lieberman because he had made critical comments about affirmative action. When stories were released about his participation in a 1963 Civil Rights voter registration campaign in Mississippi, civil rights leaders gave him the benefit of the doubt. Yet the tenor of the debate was of racial solidarity as a form of faith: if his conscience had been forged fighting for equal rights, then how could he

question affirmative action? That was not part of a conceivable trajectory, in the conventional wisdom of latter-day civil rights leaders. In fact, to claim roots in the struggle for racial equality, yet to also question the underlying logic of affirmative action, was perceived of as an "apostasy." A break with the faith of the fathers.⁴⁰

CONCLUSION: THE CONSEQUENCES OF CO-CREATION

Ralph Ellison's work does not advocate a specific politics, but he sees the re-imagining of the past as a necessary step in the transfiguration of identity in the present, and the reconstruction of a politics of inclusion in the near future. *Juneteenth* insists, in a variety of voices, that to repeat the patterns of the past without critical re-examination is a form of "mental slavery," to quote Bob Marley. So when Sunraider speaks of the need to "redeem" past ideals by transforming them, he clearly speaks for Ellison. When Sunraider urges his audience not to be "passive slave[s] to the past" (23), he speaks not only for Ellison, but for a much broader cultural and spiritual tradition. This language calls to mind certain liberatory elements of the scriptural tradition in which Hickman trained Bliss. Such as Paul's admonition to "Submit not again to the yoke of [mental] slavery" (Galatians 5:1). Or his letter to the Romans (12:2). "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind."

The inherited pattern which Ellison most clearly believes must be remembered but rejected, as a form of mental slavery, is racialism. Resistance to racialism was the cornerstone of Ellison's artistic re-imagining of history. Racialism is what Jung called a "category of the imagination," or what Freud called a *schema*, i.e., a largely unconscious pattern of thought.⁴¹ Freud once remarked: "We are often able to see the schema triumphing over the experience of the individual." We often tune out experience that doesn't fit into the boxes we use to categorize experience, and this is cer-

tainly true of racialism. Racial mythologies have caused us to ignore experience which does not fit within the normative black/white binary of "official" American politics and culture.

In *Juneteenth* Ellison challenges this binary thought pattern in a way surely meant to trouble our ingrained habit of assigning blame and responsibility, once more, along the lines of race.⁴² Ellison has a "white racist" character voice the approach he endorses, which is "to remember selectively, creatively" (29). Hickman, on the other hand, a character with whom it is much easier to empathize, attempted a complete break with history. He hoped that ignorance of the past was Bliss. But repressed memory is memory which returns, disguised, and writes our script for us, in ways beyond our control.⁴³

With "creative memory," we can reclaim the past, especially repressed parts of memory, that can serve as resources for constructing a new pattern, for gaining a more inclusive vision of a future society. Re-imagined memory allows us to revitalize the vision of our ancestors. This balancing act in which we seek to embrace redeemable ideals, but reject "obsolescent" ideals, is voiced in common sense terms by Denzel Washington's character in *Mississippi Masala*. Walking along the shores of a Southern lake, he tells his Indian lover: "racism is like a family recipe. You've got to know what to eat, and what to leave on the plate."⁴⁴

To move beyond racialism (one of the "isms and schisms" Marley hoped to vanquish), and into new patterns of culture, politics, and spirituality in which commonality and difference can co-exist: that is a fundamental challenge of the politics of inclusion. One part of that process is to achieve a forms of kinship or solidarity with people who do not look like us, do not think like us, or who do not share parts of our political or religious ideology. This would require a culture-based, rather than a blood-based or ideology-based definition of kinship. Once we understand that culture can-

not be accurately linked to "race," or color, then cultural communities and social solidarities can be imagined on a foundation other than surface appearances.⁴⁵

Ellison's *Juneteenth*, then, is a call for us to re-imagine cultural kinship. And he does this through re-examining an issue that continues to have contemporary resonance: the relationship of so-called "white" youth to "black" culture.⁴⁶

Well-meaning "white" youths used to come to Ellison's lectures and ask: "what can we do about the black man in a white society?" And Ellison would say, "Why don't you start by examining how black you are." In other words, changing the patterns of exclusion cannot be done while maintaining the illusion of separation.⁴⁷ Writing the new script must start from a recognition of inter-relatedness, of kinship. And this calls for a rethinking of racial terminologies themselves.

White is the color of a piece of paper. Who wrote on that paper? Ellison was telling his students that no matter what their skin color, they were culturally part black. And therefore, a part of the "mulatto mainstream." Bliss was Ellison's testament about this problematic inter-relatedness.

Let us conclude by forwarding this discussion to the present, and ask: who are the Blisses of our own day? What do they say to us, about us? Can we recognize them as our co-creations?

A) Anti-Types

Let me propose a parallel: a white youth raised amidst black culture, who grows to make disturbing utterances on an (inter)national stage. Eminem is Bliss.

At least, Eminem is a version of this inter-relatedness embraced by commercial culture. If Sunraider fled his black host culture, Eminem embraced it, was transfigured by it. According to news reports, the vile-mouthed Eminem who has become a number-one selling rap star is very much an adopted persona. Marshall Matthers, a lower-class Caucasian youth raised in downtown Detroit, was doing "conscious rap" not long before vaulting to

superstardom. Then Matthers joined forces with Doctor Dre, who made his name and fortune glorifying the gangster lifestyle that he had once lived. Dre, a former member of the group Niggaz With Attitude, pushed Matthers to re-invent himself, and encouraged the emergence of Matthers' anti-social alter-ego, "Slim Shady." This became his ticket to success: in the world of rap music, the gangster style is seen as the authentic style, the "black" style, the "street" style. Rappers who do themes of positivity are dismissed as "soft niggas" who are not "keeping it real."⁴⁸

Speaking of "white" youths raised among "blacks," and later reclaimed for a Eurocentric heritage, Hickman had said to Bliss: "Come the teen time . . . they cast out the past and start out new . . . Even their beloved black tit becomes an empty bag to laugh at and they grow deaf to their mammy's lullabies" (162). Now, quite the opposite has happened. While the "racism is eternal" school of thought has a continuing vogue, it would be more accurate to say that Americans have historically had a love-hate relationship with black people, and that in recent years, among young people, this has turned into a form of idolization: "the enormous vogue of all things black."⁴⁹

So, if youths like Eminem grew up sucking on the breast of black culture, then who created the pattern they copied, or internalized? Eminem was raised by contemporary "black culture" to "keep it real" by living the thug life myth. His success is an inevitable extension of opposition as fashion, a virulently misogynic oppositionality, in a thriving marketplace of oppositional gestures.⁵⁰ And the furor over Eminem's success (sounds authentic, but doesn't look authentic) is a reflection of a deep neurosis, centered on a refusal of recognition re: "black urban" culture's interconnectedness with its predominantly suburban (but increasingly international) consumers. If being authentically "black" requires one to be fiercely opposed to all things "white," then what does someone like Eminem do to this binary?⁵¹

Has Eminem co-opted and corrupted rap music, and hip-hop culture? Or has he perhaps given voice to, and exploited, the inherent contradictions of its obsessions with racial authenticity: the confusion of commodified oppositional postures with being a "true revolutionary"?

Let us take another, reverse angle on transfiguration and transracialism: that of Michael Jackson seeking to make himself "white." We might say that Michael Jackson was not so much transfigured as disfigured. He seemed to be somewhat conscious of what he was doing, and offered his reconstructed face as a stigmata for our racial obsessions.⁵²

Trying to follow the trajectory of Ellison's thought, I would say that the ultimate disfiguration is the Procrustean violence of the black/white binary. So the "mulatto mainstream" must say: this part of me doesn't fit [in a world constructed on racial binaries]? Then chop it off! Perform plastic surgery! Michael Jackson is certainly not the first to be disfigured by racial mythologies. Let me only point to Malcolm X's fabrications about his Caucasian grandfather as one example of the extremes to which many have felt compelled to go, to reinforce the social division between black and white.⁵³

The more attractive alternative to binary racialism already exists. We need only shed binary blinders in order to recognize it.

B) Proto-types

Juneteenth, as a narrative of life on racial frontiers, has a place in a mainstream American history, literature, and political culture. This legacy of interraciality and co-creation may be a repressed history. But as depth psychology tells us, the greater amount of force we expend in repressing something, the greater will be its force when it returns.⁵⁴ And today we are witnessing the tremendously forceful return of the "mulatto mainstream." Tiger Woods, Derek Jeter, Jason Kidd, Halle Berry, Mariah Carey, Ben Harper, Findley Quaye, Sade, Bob Marley, et al. This is a very partial list of public figures, in sports, music, and film,

who are offspring of interracial unions, and who to various degrees, directly or indirectly, trouble our binary racial mythology.

The evidence that this is just the tip of an iceberg is overwhelming. We have genetic proof now that Thomas Jefferson did indeed father children from one of his Afro-American slaves. The contemporary repercussions for identity, for community, and for politics were spelled out on a PBS special edition of *Frontline*: "Jefferson's Blood" (5-2-00).⁵⁵ The "true inter-relatedness of blackness and whiteness," it becomes ever more evident, has been normative in America since colonial times, in high and low places.

The body of scholarship that has emerged within the last decade which traces this history of inter-penetration and co-creation is enormous. Let me only mention a few of the landmark authors which have mapped this domain in encyclopedic detail: Shelly Fisher Fishkin, Neil Foley, Paul Gilroy, Grace Elizabeth Hale, David Hollinger, George Hutchinson, Frances Karttunen, José Limón, Mechal Sobel, Eric Sundquist, and the master of this domain, Werner Sollors.⁵⁶

Such scholarship has opened up countless new vistas on the "true inter-relatedness" of American politics and culture.⁵⁷ *Juneteenth* is part of a domain which, in the title of Sollors' masterwork, is *Neither Black Nor White Yet Both*. My intent has been to suggest the political implications of learning to recognize the pervasiveness of a co-created cultural tradition. Regarding the figures of Ellison's writing, the range of figures from popular culture I listed above, and the cultural domain being explored by the scholars of border cultures (or what Latin American scholars call *mestizaje*).⁵⁸ I ask: How can we remember these people and this shared history in order to re-imagine community, or social solidarity and political coalitions? And how can this re-remembering help us to enact an inclusive vision of a future society?

We can start by learning to recognize and re-claim "heroes and sheroes" raised by

more than one parent culture, such as Frederick Douglass; to take them out of their racialized boxes, and put them into the mainstream of cultural and political discourse. These sorts of figures can serve as reference points in debating the politics of inclusion, because more than one ethno-racial group can learn to trust them, and to identify with them, in at least a partial way. We must first let them be as they are, not what we expected them to be, and to engage them on the third space on which they live, beyond the binaries of race.⁵⁹

Identity politics or the politics of recognition in this era has mostly lost sight of the coalition politics needed to engage in structural reform. Identity politics has become addicted to gestures of opposition, at the expense of creating more attractive alternatives. I would hope that one legacy of Ellison's work would be that the politics of recognition needs to move beyond narcissism. Rather than merely demand that mainstream institutions recognize ME and my culture, we need to begin thinking through the consequences of co-creation. The politics of recognition is itself a redeemable ideal, if it leads us to see something of ourselves in others outside of our own home base of race, class, gender, or nation: like Hickman in front of Lincoln, who recognized commonality not in the face of Lincoln, but in what Lincoln looked towards. His eyes saw, after all is said and done, a concept of justice, and of nation, far more inclusive than that entertained by most Americans of his day.

Juneteenth is a capstone of Ellison's work, in that it portrays interracial recognition, the affirmation of multi-ethnic kinship, as a form of redemption. And it reaffirms the importance of "the illusion of emancipation." Like Bob Marley's "Songs of Freedom," ritual expressions of rebirth or regeneration are not without practical value, especially in cynical times. They serve as an orienting horizon, the sun of a faith under whose light we are transfigured, and see more clearly our common humanity, the "One Blood" that ties us to each

other, and to our common mother, the Earth.⁶⁴

FOOTNOTES

[AUTHOR'S NOTE: Thanks to Alberto Mata for his persistence, and for being brave enough to champion non-traditional scholarship. Portions of the section "Ellison's Oklahoma and the Question of Father Figures" are adapted from "Invisible Community: Ralph Ellison's Vision of a Multiracial 'Ideal Democracy'," in *On Racial Frontiers: The New Culture of Frederick Douglass, Ralph Ellison, and Bob Marley* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Citations in parenthesis are from Ralph Ellison, *Juneteenth*, edited by John F. Callahan (New York: Random House, 1999). When not indicated otherwise, italics are Ellison's.]

- 1) I use "Afro-American" rather than "African American," in part because it seems less chained to a specifically U.S. context. I also find Orlando Bagwell's point of view persuasive: "Afro-Americans are not Africans; they are among the most American of Americans, and the emphasis on their African-ness is both physically inappropriate and culturally misleading. Furthermore, in light of increasing immigration of Africans from Africa to the U.S., it is best to reserve the term African Americans to describe this group." *The Ordeal of Integration* (Washington, DC: Civitas/Counterpoint, 1997), xi.
- 2) José E. Limón, *American Encounters: Greater Mexico, The United States, and the Erotics of Culture* (Boston: Beacon, 1998), 160. Noam Chomsky, "Language and Freedom," quoted in *Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky and the Media* (Part Two: Activating Dissent), dir. Mark Achbar and Peter Wintonick (Montreal: Necessary Illusions, 1992). Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics* (Boston: Beacon, 1978). "Aesthetic resources" is from Charles Reitz, *Art, Alienation, and the*

- Humanities: A Critical Engagement* with Herbert Marcuse (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 5. "Marcuse believed that any genuinely emancipatory social movement had to be directed by, and responsible to, the human truths that only the aesthetic faculty of the imagination could develop," writes Rietz (167).
- 3) Bernard Boxill, ed., "Introduction," *Race and Racism* (Oxford UP, 2001), 21. The habit of tuning out or "not seeing what we share with others" in inter-ethnic contexts, writes Boxill, is a form of myopia that leads to a denial of commonality or kinship. People invested in racialized worldviews "develop a habit of concentrating their attentions on their racial differences when they think of or associate with people of other races, and ignoring or repressing what they share with such people" (22). Wayne Hampton, *Guerilla Minstrels* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986). Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Vintage, 1952/1982), xx.
- 4) "diseased imagination": Frederick Douglass, "The Races," *Douglass Monthly* (August 1859). David Hollinger, "Culture, Color, and Solidarity," Postscript to 2nd edition of *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism* (Basic Books, 2000). Social construction: Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Illusions of Race," In *My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (Oxford UP, 1992), 28-46; Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line* (Harvard UP, 2000). Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formations in the United States* (New York and London: Routledge, 1986/1994). Among the works in which I have pursued this theme: "Frederick Douglass' Multiracial Abolitionism: 'Antagonistic Cooperation' and 'Redeemable Ideals' in the July 5 Speech," *Communications Studies* 48:3 (Fall 1997); "'You Can Sample Anything': Zebrahead, 'Black' Music, and Multiracial Audiences," *New Formations* (Winter 1999/2000); "Romancing the Racial Frontier: Mediating Symbols in Cinematic Interracial Representation," *Spectator* 16 (Fall/Winter 1995/96); "Rap Music's Double-Voiced Discourse: A Crossroads for Interracial Communication," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 15 (1991).
- 5) rear-view mirror: Stephens, *On Racial Frontiers*, 1-11; 57-60. In prior work, I have engaged contemporary critical theory in depth, esp. as it applies to representation, but will here mention only two recent works that have influenced my thinking, at the interface of political theory and debate on diversity: *Theorizing Multiculturalism*, ed. Cynthia Willett (London: Blackwell, 1998), esp. Nancy Fraser's essay "From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a 'Post-Socialist' Age," and Charles Taylor et al., *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton UP, 1994), ed. Amy Gutmann.
- 6) Among a slew of articles about Eminem obsessively focusing on "the white boy thing," one of the most perceptive is Scott Poulson-Byrant, "Fear of a White Rapper," *The Source*, June 1999, 174 ff.
- 7) *Invisible Man* is centrally about a search for multiracial community. The novel's hero serves as a Hermes archetype who carries messages back and forth between "white" and "black" worlds. He also acts as a trickster who undermines the assumptions of both groups. Stephens, "Invisible Community: Ralph Ellison's Vision of a Multiracial 'Ideal Democracy,'" in *On Racial Frontiers*, op cit. On Ellison's hero as a trickster: T.V. Reed, "Invisible Movements. Black Powers: Double Vision & Trickster Politics in *Invisible Man*," in *Fifteen Jugglers, Five Believers: Literary Politics and the Poetics of American Social Movements* (Berkeley: U. California, 1992). A forceful statement of Ellison's

- determination to claim a much broader identity than "black protest writer" is made by Stanley Crouch, "The Measure of the Oklahoma Kid," in *The All-American Skin-Game* (New York: Pantheon, 1995), 83-92. "inter-relatedness": Ralph Ellison, "Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke," reprinted in *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison* (New York: Modern Library, 1995), 107. In an essay reflecting on his Oklahoma heritage, "Going to the Territory," he wrote that "by ignoring such matters as the sharing of bloodlines and cultural traditions by groups of widely differing ethnic groups . . . we misconceive our cultural identity." *Essays*, 595-6. In what seems to be a cultural sense, he refers to "my mixed background" in the Introduction to *Shadow and Act* (*Essays*, 56).
- 8) temptation: Ellison, "Introduction," *Shadow and Act*, in *Collected Essays*, 57. John F. Callahan, "Chaos, Complexity, and Possibility: The Historical Frequencies of Ralph Waldo Ellison." In Kimberly Benston, ed., *Speaking for You: The Vision of Ralph Ellison* (Washington, D.C.: Howard UP, 1987), 131. "Indian Nations"/Bessie Smith: "Going to the Territory," *Collected Essays* (New York: Modern Library, 1995), 600-1. Ellison quotes the lyric in *Juneteenth*, 59. Oklahoma as racial frontier: Ellison's essay "Going to the Territory," *Essays*, 604. See also references to Oklahoma in Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West* (New York: Norton, 1998). Black state in literature: Toni Morrison, *Paradise* (New York: Plume, 1997/99).
- 9) "breaks": "That Same Pain. That Same Pleasure," interview with Richard Stern, in *Essays*, 71. Edna Ferber, *Cimarron* (New York: Bantam, 1929/ 1963). See discussion of interracial dynamics of this novel in Mary V. Dearborn, *Pocahontas's Daughters: Gender & Ethnicity in American Literature* (Oxford UP, 1986), pp. 128-30. Oklahoma was more commonly thought of as Southwestern in the early 20th century, and is sometimes still referred to as part of the Southwest. Hence, Ellison differentiates between his "Southern experience" (at Tuskegee) and "my South-Southwestern identity." "An Extravagance of Laughter," *Essays*, 658. Re: Indian millionaires, there was a horrifying episode in which some Osages were defrauded of their oil money by Anglos who married in the tribe and then had family members disposed of. This has been documented most recently by Dennis McAuliffe, *Bloodland: A Family Story of Oil, Greed and Murder on the Osage Reservation* (Council Oak Distribution, 1999).
- 10) "middle-class/warm relations": "That Same Pain," *Essays*, 71. "white friends": Hollie West interview, Maryemma Graham and Amritjit Singh, *Conversations with Ralph Ellison* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1995), 255. The sense in which I'm using the term "crew" is informed by a history of Caribbean scholarship on "crews" as associations of young men. A recent use of this term is Norman Stolzoff, *Wake the Town and Tell the People: Dancehall Culture in Jamaica* (Durham: Duke UP, 2000), 186-7.
- 11) vibrant: "I recall that much of so-called Kansas City jazz was actually brought to perfection in Oklahoma by Oklahomans." Intro to *Shadow and Act*, in *Collected Essays*, 51.
- 12) Models for budding "Renaissance Men": *Ibid*, 52-3.
- 13) Integrative Ancestors: "They can act as a common icon or shared antecedent, an 'integrating personality' through whom diverse groups trace many of their ideological beliefs, their expressive style, or their model of identity and cultural rootedness." Stephens, *On Racial Frontiers*, 4. "Roscoe Dunjee and the American Language," *Essays*, 456-9. The Philadelphia black sailmaker was

- James Forten.
- 14) Ibid. C.G. Jung, *The Symbolic Life* (Princeton UP, 1976), *Collected Works*, XVIII, and "The Transcendent Function," in *The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche* (Princeton UP, 1969), *Collected Works VIII*, 67-91.
 - 15) "Alain Locke," *Essays*, 441-2, 445, my emphasis.
 - 16) Ralph Ellison, *Juneteenth*, Ed. by John F. Callahan (New York: Random House, 1999), xix.
 - 17) "link together": *Essays*, 71. One humorous example of the role of Ellison's Oklahoma upbringing in his tendency to see all American culture as "racially hybrid" is in his "Portrait of Inman Page," Ibid, 587. "insidious confusion": "Going to the Territory," *Essays*, 606. True inter-relatedness: Ellison, "Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke," *Essays*, 107.
 - 18) James Alan McPherson, "Indivisible Man," originally in *Atlantic Monthly* 226 (Dec. 1970), my emphasis, and in Ellison's *Collected Essays*, 356. Mark Busby, *Ralph Ellison*, 39, 141.
 - 19) writers as fathers discussed in Stephens, "Invisible Community," *On Racial Frontiers*, 114-22. Albert Murray, *The Omni-Americans* (New York: Dutton, 1970), 112.
 - 20) Ishmael Reed, Quincy Troupe, and Steve Cannon, "The Essential Ellison," *Y'Bird Magazine* 1 (Autumn 1977); Graham & Singh, *Conversations with RE*, 361-2. "self-fathering": Eric Sundquist, *Frederick Douglass: New Literary and Historical Essays* (Oxford UP, 1990), 12. "own father": *Invisible Man*, 156.
 - 21) Ontension between rap artists and black entrepreneurs, and the Euro-American males who buy most of their product, but from whom they must continually distance themselves. see this perceptive piece about the creators of FUBU: Leslie Kaufman, "Trying to Stay True to the Street," *New York Times* (March 15, 1999), B9. On the ironies and ambiguities and sometimes hostilities faced by Caucasian performers in this domain, see also Somini Sengupta, "A Multicultural Chameleon," *New York Times*, October 9, 1999, and N.R. Kleinfield, "Guarding the Borders of the Hip-Hop Nation," *New York Times*, July 6, 2000.
 - 22) T.S. Eliot poem "Little Gidding," *Juneteenth*, ix.
 - 23) David Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York: Vintage, 1985/88), 7.
 - 24) Re: the nickname Hickman's congregation gives him, "God's Trombone": see James Weldon Johnson, *God's Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse* (New York: Penguin, 1927); Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Drum Major Instinct," in *I Have a Dream: Writings and Speeches That Changed the World*, ed. James M. Washington (New York: HarperCollins, 1992).
 - 25) Nancy Fraser, "From Redistribution to Recognition?" , op cit., and Taylor et al., *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, esp. K. Anthony Appiah, "Identity, Authenticity, Survival: Multicultural Societies and Social Reproduction," 149-63, and Jurgen Habermas, "Struggles for Recognition in the Democratic Constitutional State," 107-48. An obvious reference in Ellison's dialogue with William Faulkner is *As I Lay Dying* (New York: Random House/Vintage, 1930/1990).
 - 26) This carnival-like "resurrection" is really a Southern, rather than a "black" cultural tradition. The roots of this form of theatrical transfiguration go back to the 18th century Great Awakening—which we now know was a multiracial phenomenon Frank Lambert, *Inventing the "Great Awakening"* (Princeton UP, 1999). On the multiracial character of the Great Awakening, see Mechal Sobel, *Trabelin' On: The Slave Journey to an Afro-Baptist Faith* (Princeton UP, 1979), and *The World They Made Together*:

Black and White Values in 18th-Century Virginia (Princeton UP, 1987).

- 27) *Juneteenth*, pp. 49, 52, 55, 311, 225. The hypersensitivity of mixed-race people to issues of racial "authenticity" is a pervasive feature of the literature and culture of racial frontiers. See for instance my interview with Jeremy Marre, director of the PBS documentary on Bob Marley *Rebel Music*, in which he comments on Marley's rage towards those who deemed him less than fully black (http://www.jahworks.org/music/movies/jeremy_marre.html). This can be heard on-line at www.ireggae.com/sounds/jeremymarreint.ram.
- 28) The novel was skillfully edited by Ellison's literary executor John Callahan. However, it had to be assembled from a manuscript long enough to fill three novels. Although much of the writing is powerful, on the visionary level of *Invisible Man*, it is clear that as Ellison himself acknowledged, he never fully achieved a structural unity between some sections of this work.
- 29) The most nuanced recent studies of interracial dynamics in blackface I have read are W.T. Lhamon Jr., *Raising Cain: Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop* (Harvard UP, 1998), and Eric Lott, *Love & Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (Oxford UP, 1993). Re: "Bamboozled": Stephen Holden, "Trying on Blackface in a Flirtation With Fire," *New York Times* Oct. 6, 2000, B14. I have discussed the "hall of mirrors" effect regarding the combination of religious and racial mythology in contemporary reggae in "Rasta Prophet as Sound Boy Murderer: Garnett Silk inna de Dance," *Jahworks* October 2000 (http://www.jahworks.org/music/cd/g_silk.html). Re: the origins of dance in an interracial hall of mirrors, with blacks parodying whites imitating blacks, see James Haskins, *Black Dance in America* (New York: HarperCollins, 1990), 14.
- 30) "waiting . . . our love". Emphasis mine. This is perhaps "blind faith," but then blind faith is a staple of romantic love, as well: "I don't want to wait in vain for your love" (Bob Marley, *Kaya*, Island, 1978).
- 31) keep to the rhythm/spirit of our redemption: my emphases. Bob Marley says much the same thing in his song "One Drop," in which the heartbeat rhythm is a source of unity, in which "you'll find your redemption." From *Survival*, Island, 1979.
- 32) "music's transfigurative power": from Ann Power's review of dance music artist Moby, "A Mild-Mannered Nerd Turned Cool Rock Star," *New York Times* (Oct. 24, 2000), my emphasis.
- 33) overstanding—I am signifying here on Rastafarian language, which means "achieve a fuller awareness of." Tracy Nicholas, "Rasta Talk 'Bout I and I," *Rastafari: A Way of Life* (New York: Anchor, 1979), 38-40. The best scholarly study of Rastafarian beliefs and culture is Barry Chevannes, *Rastafari: Roots and Ideology* (Syracuse UP, 1994). "diversity means": I have quoted a lecture of Troy Duster, UC-Berkeley Sociologist, from "The Diversity Report" which UCB commissioned and published in 1990.
- 34) Molefi Asante, *The Afrocentric Idea* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1987), 18.
- 35) "imperial democracy": Octavio Paz, "Mexico and the United States," in *The Labyrinth of Solitude and Other Writings* (New York: Grove, 1985), 375. Ernest Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America's Millennial Role* (U. Chicago Press, 1968).
- 36) Gregory Stephens, "Frederick Douglass' Multiracial Abolitionism: 'Antagonistic Cooperaton' and 'Redeemable Ideals' in the July 5th Speech," *Communication Studies* 48:3 (Fall 1997), 1-19.
- 37) Yes and no: color-blindness has become the ideology of conservatives. David Hollinger distinguishes between being

- "color conscious" in order to address continuing discrimination, and the de-emphasis of color in matters of culture. "Color, Culture, and Solidarity," op cit.
- 38) C.G. Jung, "The Persona as a Segment of the Collective Psyche." *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology* (Princeton UP, 1953/1966), par. 245-6.
- 39) I would also compare this to Frederick Douglass refusing to side with John Brown's Harper's Ferry raid, which he knew would be suicidal, but which he later used to great effect rhetorically. It was not the form of liberation which he personally felt most committed to, but it made his version more palatable, just as Malcolm X made Martin Luther King, Jr. seem more acceptable. See David Blight, *Frederick Douglass' Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1989), 95-98. "It seems like total destruction's the only solution." Bob Marley, "We and Dem." *Uprising* (Island, 1980).
- 40) Kevin Sack, "Trip South in '63 Gave Lieberman a Footnote, and Hold, in History," *New York Times* (September 26, 2000), A19.
- 41) Sigmund Freud, Standard Edition 17, p. 119, quoted in Michael Vannoy Adams, *The Multicultural Imagination: "Race," Color, and the Unconscious* (London: Routledge, 1996), 45. C.G. Jung, *Psychology and Religion* (Princeton UP, 1958/1969), 518.
- 42) Randall Robinson, *The Debt: What America Owes to Blacks* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 2000).
- 43) Sigmund Freud. "Repression." in *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gray (New York: Norton, 1989), 572.
- 44) *Mississippi Masala*, dir. Mira Nair, 1992.
- 45) Hollinger, *Postethnic America*, 189. William Julius Wilson, *The Bridge Over the Racial Divide: Rising Inequality and Coalition Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).
- 46) Simon Jones, *Black Culture, White Youth* (London: MacMillan, 1988); Roger Hewitt, *White Talk Black Talk: Inter-racial Friendship and Communication Amongst Adolescents* (Cambridge UP, 1986); Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Routledge, 1993); Mark Costello and David Foster Wallace, *Signifying Rappers: Rap and Race in the Urban Present* (New York: Ecco, 1990).
- 47) Illusion of separation: Gail Straub, *The Rhythm of Compassion: Caring for Self, Connecting with Society* (Rutland, VT: Tuttle, 2000), 96. "how black you are": Ralph Ellison, "Indivisible Man," *Collected Essays*, 373. Robert Farris Thompson has said "If you don't know how black you are, you don't know how American you are." "The Kongo Atlantic Tradition," lecture at the University of Austin, February 28, 1992, quoted in Fishkin, *Was Huck Black?*, 132.
- 48) An appraisal that puts Eminem's lyrics in a broader context is David Plotz, "Eminem: The rapper is sadistic, misogynistic, and fantastic." <http://slate.msn.com/Assessment/00-06-09/Assessment.asp>. For perceptive commentary see Scott Poulson-Byrant, "Fear of a White Rapper," *The Source* (June 1999), 174 ff., and Chris Norris, "The Shady Bunch," *Spin* (August 2001), 74-82. The latter makes it clear that Eminem's closest friends and associates in Detroit have always been and continue to be Afro-Americans. Norris also portrays Eminem as a performer who remains focused on the music "at a moment when his multiplatinum rap colleagues are all about their clothing lines and diversifying portfolios" (82).
Re: the usage of the binary "soft niggas" vs. "field niggas" (which echoes the "house niggers" vs. "field niggers" terminology of Malcolm X), see the interview with NAS in *Rap Pages*, June 1999.
- 49) Helen Delpar, *The Enormous Vogue of Things Mexican: Cultural Relations between the United States and Mexico, 1920-1935* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1992); Jése Limón,

- "The Other American South: Southern Culture and Greater Mexico," in *American Encounters*, 7-34. For a work on the vogue of things Afro-American that anticipates my position, see George Hutchinson, *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White* (Cambridge: Belknap/Harvard UP, 1995). Re: The "racism is eternal" school: in Postethnic America, David Hollinger speaks of "a game of competitive disillusionment" (169), which infects a large number of writers on race relations. Two of the most-cynical winners in the black-folks-as-victims and white-people-as-inherently-racist contest: Derrick Bell, *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), and Andrew Hacker, *Two Nations: Black and White, Separate, Hostile, Unequal* (New York: Scribner's, 1992). The majority of so-called "critical race theory" suffers from this tendency. See for instance Mari Matsuda, et al., eds., *Critical Race Theory, Assaultive Speech, & the First Amendment* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993).
- 50) Pick up any issue of *Vibe*, *Source* or *X-tra Large*, and see the reams of ads devoted to products positioned as "rebellious," "gangster," or "alternative." Thug life: The tattoo Tupac carved on his belly. After Tupac's death, he was transformed by the music industry, and in the minds of many youths, into a Black Christ, or revolutionary, who died fighting against the system. Neil Strauss, "Hip-Hop Requiem: Mining Tupac Shakur's Legacy," *New York Times* (April 11, 2001). <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/04/11/arts/11NOTE.html>.
- 51) "opposed to all things white": see my discussion of rapper KRS-One and his use of Malcolm X's racial mythologies expressing this re: Frederick Douglass in *On Racial Frontiers*, 58-59. Rap has become so successful that urban American youth are now making big money teaching Japanese housewives hiphop dances moves. *ABC News* carried a report on this about 1998.
- 52) Gregory Stephens, "The Man in the Mirror," *UC-San Diego Guardian* (February 18, 1993). "Watching Jackson trying to explain himself [on NAACP's 'Image Awards'], I got the feeling that he was almost a sort of Jesus figure. He had 'stigmatized' his face in order to become a transracial icon—not so much out of disgust with himself as disgust with society's racial neurosis."
- 53) Bruce Perry, *Malcolm: The Life of a Man Who Changed Black America* (New York: Station Hill Press, 1991). Arnold Rampersad, "The Color of His Eyes: Bruce Perry's Malcolm and Malcolm's Malcolm," in *Malcolm X: In Our Own Image*, ed. Joe Wood (St. Martin's, 1992). Gregory Stephens, "Demythologizing Malcolm X," *In These Times* (Oct. 28, 1992); "Between the Lines of Malcolm X's Life," *San Francisco Chronicle* (August 30, 1992); "Spike Lee and Beyond: Other Voices on Malcolm X," *San Francisco Chronicle* (Jan. 1, 1993).
- 54) Freud, "Repression," op cit.
- 55) John Carman, "On 'Frontline,' Jefferson's Lasting Legacy," *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 2, 2000. A more melodramatic commercial version of this was the CBS docu-drama "Sally Hemings: An American Scandal." Caryn James, "A Founding Father and Perhaps the Mother," *New York Times* (Feb. 11, 2000). There has been a debate in scholarship and popular culture about this affair stretching across two centuries. The most up to date scholarly assessments can be found in Jan Lewis, Peter Onuf, and Jane Lewis, eds., *Sally Hemings and Thomas Jefferson: History, Memory, and Civic Culture* (University Press of Virginia, 1999). See also Annette Gordon-Reed, *Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings: An American Controversy* (University Press of Virginia, 1998). The film *Jefferson in*

Paris includes a very nuanced treatment of this episode.

- 56) Shelly Fisher Fishkin, *Was Huck Black?*, op cit.; Neil Foly, *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Paul Gilroy, *Against Race*, op cit., and *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Harvard UP, 1993); Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Pantheon, 1998); David Hollinger, *Postethnic America*, op cit.; George Hutchinson, *Harlem Renaissance in Black and White*, op cit.; Frances Karttunen, *Between Worlds: Interpreters, Guides, and Survivors* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1994); José Limón, *American Encounters*, op cit.; Mechal Sobel, *Trabelin' On*, and *The World They Made Together*, op cit.; Eric Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature* (Cambridge: Belknap/Harvard, 1993); Werner Sollors, *Neither Black Nor White Yet Both: Thematic Explorations in Interracial Literature* (Oxford UP, 1997), and *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture* (Oxford UP, 1986). Also, I could not recommend too highly *The Journey of August King* (dir. John Duigan), a film set in 1815 which is visionary in the way it looks beyond racial myths, and re-imagines a full range of attitudes re: the 90% of ante-bellum Euro-Americans who did not own slaves.
- 57) W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1935), 469. Kathryn V. Lindberg, "Raising Cane on the Theoretical Plane: Jean Toomer's Racial Personae," *Cultural Difference & the Literary Text: Pluralism & the Limits of Authenticity in North American Literatures* (Iowa City: U. Iowa Press, 1996), 49.
- 58) Among the huge literature on mestizaje,

I will mention only as starting points Claudio Esteva-Fabregat, *Mestizaje in Ibero-America* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1995), and a bracing if too-cynical critique of the romance of mestizaje as hybridity: Ernst Rudin, "New Mestizos: Traces of a Quincentenary Miracle in Old World Spanish and New World English Texts," in *Cultural Difference and the Literary Text*, Ibid, 112-29.

- 59) I refer to Bob Marley's line "We refuse to be what you wanted us to be," from "Babylon System" (*Survival, Island*, 1979). "heroes and heroes" was a phrase Maya Angelou used at a speech I heard her deliver at the University of Texas in 1988. One historian who has most explicitly addressed interracial inter-relatedness is William Freehling, *The Reintegration of American History: Slavery and the Civil War* (Oxford UP, 1994). See also Orlando Patterson, *The Ordeal of Integration: Progress and Resentment in America's "Racial" Crisis* (Washington, D.C.: Civitas/Counterpoint, 1997). C.G. Jung articulated a theory of mediation which I find useful in this context, re: creating an interracial "third space": "The confrontation of the two positions generates a tension charged with energy and creates a living, third thing . . . a movement out of the suspension between opposites." The establishment of a relation between opposites, in a third space, Jung calls the "Transcendent Function." This can only happen if conflict is allowed, while moving beyond a binary model: "So long as these are kept apart—naturally for the purpose of avoiding conflict—they do not function and remain inert." *The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche* (Princeton UP, 1960/1969), 90, my emphasis. Homi Bhabha has discussed the notion of a "third space" in *The Location of Culture* (Routledge, 1994).