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POSTNEGRITUDE AND CRITICAL THEORY

African diasporic cultures wander through three major philosophical frames: the racial accommodation practiced by black conservatism, the middle-class appropriation represented by black liberalism, and the race-based resistance offered by black nationalism. Certainly, all three philosophical positions are a response to the racism prevalent in American and European culture. Frantz Fanon refers to this type of cultural domination as *cultural imposition*. In discussing the cultural imposition upon black Martinicans, Fanon remarks,

> Without turning to the idea of collective catharsis, it would be easy for me to show that, without thinking, the Negro selects himself as an object capable of carrying the burden of original sin. The white man chooses the black man for this function, and the black man who is white also chooses the black man. The black Antillean is the slave of this cultural imposition. After having been the slave of the white man, he enslaves himself. The Negro is in every sense of the word a victim of white civilization.[1]

Black conservative thought externally performs the function of the "black man who is white" and acquires certain social benefits from the white man who "chooses the black man" as his beast of burden. Booker T. Washington's politics of racial accommodation and Supreme Court

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Justice Clarence Thomas's criticisms of affirmative action are examples of this exchange between blacks and whites.

The black descendants of African people who reside in Europe and the Americas are indicated by the terms Negro, black, and Afro-followed by the name of the country they inhabit. For example, I refer to the black people living in Britain as the "Afro-British," and I refer to blacks living in France as the "Afro-French." In using these terms, I am aware that there exist cultural differences between the Afro-British from Trinidad and those from Jamaica. I am also aware that the term African American collapses the cultural differences between black Americans of Haitian and those of Jamaican ancestry. I acknowledge their ethnic difference but I am also aware that their experiences of racism are common to blacks throughout the western world. Finally, the use of the terms "Negro" and "black" does not directly indicate any qualitative difference between the two terms. Racially hostile experience is what unites people of African ancestry. Yet and still, the experiences of class, ethnicity, sexuality, and religion constitute additional factors in the self-esteem of blackfolk. These extraracial factors create problems for a single definition of blackness as founded simply on race. This is especially true when race is not as static a term as one might wish to believe. Moreover, any analysis of black self-esteem must include considerations of the extraracial factors.

Fanon explains racial self-hatred as resulting from "cultural imposition" that produces blacks who racially objectify other blacks. According to Fanon, the Martinican's psychopathology (and, by correlation, that of any black of the diaspora) begins at a certain age when the West Indian recognizes that he embodies a black body but his collective unconscious (which is determined by the dominant European and or Anglo-American culture) equates the color black with an evil, careless, and bad-tempered nature. Fanon writes that, "Everything that is the opposite of these Negro modes of behavior is white. This must be recognized as the source of Negrophobia in the Antillean. In the collective unconscious, black = ugliness, sin, darkness, immorality. In other words, he is Negro who is immoral. If I order my life like that of a moral man, I simply am not a Negro."[2] This type of self-hatred appears simultaneously in reactionary, as opposed to actionable, forms of black conservatism, liberalism, and nationalism.

Fanon describes the dehumanizing racial elements of "cultural imposition" and shows how this is applicable to the cultural imposition of

sexism, homophobia, classism, and ethnocentrism in European and American culture. I refer to these five elements—racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, and ethnocentrism—as the "destructive residue" of singular regimes of truth. A *postNegritude* analysis interprets the overlapping relationship between destructive residue and certain forms of black conservatism, liberalism, and nationalism. "PostNegritude" acts to subvert racism, sexism, and homophobia through womanist subversion of white and black patriarchal modes of production. It resists classism and ethnocentrism by affirming that black cultural identity is constantly unfolding to reveal its relationship to secular humanity.

This extended understanding of cultural imposition, then, recognizes the false threat of any "real white (or real black) man . . . waiting for me . . (who) will tell me that it is not enough to try to be white (or black), but that white (or black) totality must be achieved."[3] PostNegritude employs Fanon's nonbiological understanding of the collective unconscious which, according to Fanon, "is not dependent on cerebral heredity; it is the result of what I shall call the unreflected imposition of a culture."[4] Therefore, blacks and other similarly oppressed groups are not fated to view the world in one conventional manner.

The "postNegritude" project interprets essentialist and dualistic myths about whiteness and blackness, masculinity and femininity, heterosexuality and homosexuality, civilized and primitive as forms of a dying colonialism. The incumbent collective fears produced by these cultural myths transcend the boundaries from which these racial, gender, and sexual dualisms have their beginnings.[5]

Conservatism, liberalism, and nationalism coexist within the same world. They normally overlap and create contradictions. In black culture, their overlapping and coexistence create eruptions of funk and open spaces for various types of negotiations. For example, the rank-and-file politics of the black church exemplifies this conservative, liberal, and nationalist overlapping. This form of liberation politics tends to produce heterosexist, Christian, male-centered interpretations of the world. Surely, I acknowledge the importance of the African American church in assisting millions of blacks before and during the civil rights movement of the sixties. Furthermore, the Black church has produced such progressive black leaders as Jesse Jackson, Bishop Desmond Tutu, and Cornel West. Nonetheless, this institution has contained other liberation struggles.

In 1890s America, the politics of racial accommodation publicly accepted segregation in all its social, political, and cultural forms. From

1890 to 1915, Booker T. Washington was the most prominent black American leader because he was able to publicly promote racial segregation while he built the first black-directed trade school and privately fostered antisegregationist activities. Black accommodationist thought is a reaction to debilitating racial and social inequities that seem endless. Frantz Fanon describes the sociopsychical aspect of black accommodationist thought in this fashion:

> When the Negro makes contact with the white world, a certain sensitizing action takes place. If his psychic structure is weak, one observes a collapse of the ego. The black man stops behaving as an *actional* person. The goal of his behavior will be The Other (in the guise of the white man), for The Other alone can give him worth. That is on the ethical level: self-esteem.[6]

During periods of economic instability, racial accommodation becomes a strategy of survival for certain black Americans leaders. A recent marker of the perpetuation of racism by white policing forces has been registered in the videotaped beating of Rodney King by Los Angeles police officers. The Simi Valley jury's decision against prosecuting the white officers demonstrates the degree of racial injustice that prevails when a black man's human worth is determined by a jury of mostly white lower-middle-class suburbanites.

Yet and still, race is not the sole mediating factor in American judicial decisions. Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, an African American and eminent conservative, won his appointment to the Supreme Court because of his race as well as his conservative legal opinion on abortion rights and affirmative action. Supreme Court Justice Thomas rejects the policy of affirmative action, even though such a policy could have prevented the existence of the predominantly white Simi Valley jury.

The Negro is contained within a white racist gaze as a nigger-object wherever (s)he goes. Therefore, and though I shiver at the racial dualism of this criticism, the racial and class differences between black Rodney King and the white Simi Valley policing jury are differences of primary importance. Such racial and class differences determine the (im)balance of American justice. The jury sanctioned the beating of Rodney King in finding the white Los Angeles police officers not guilty. Their verdict of not guilty reveals the permanence of institutional

racism in American social life that never escapes the consciousness of the racial Other. The black Other recognizes racism's videotaped and ominous emergence as white cops and their guilty black suspect. The black Other hears their testimonies that are teeming with racial fears of blackness, its ugliness, its sin, its darkness and immorality. This dark messenger of ugliness threatened these white officers who have law in their side holsters, nightsticks in their hands, and the self-righteous support of a Simi Valley jury. This type of lawman is understood by the Simi Valley juries of this land. Their verdict is not a miscarriage of American justice but a direct result of it. Fanon is correct to point out that mental traumas occur when black racial Others meet with the policing agents of white patriarchy. Nonetheless, the racist practices of certain policing agents cannot determine encounters with blackfolk like Rodney King. Black survival is dependent on the appropriation and subversion of social injustices.

APPROPRIATING DOMINANT FORMS
AND ENTERING THE MIDDLE CLASS

Black progressive thought tends to appropriate and borrow from the traditions of American social-reform movements which, like the mainstream in the Abolitionist movement, stresses moderate social, political, and legal remedies for black social uplift. Rather than using the strategies of the black conservatives who publicly accept second-class citizenship while covertly struggling against racial discrimination, black progressives use judicial rulings to obtain and safeguard their civil rights.

In the beginning of the twentieth century, W. E. B. DuBois, a contemporary rival of Booker T. Washington, was the most important black intellectual to propose a liberal arts education for certain African Americans. DuBois argued that the "talented tenth" of the African American population would best prepare the remaining blacks for the responsibilities of full American citizenship. DuBois believed that educated blacks would return to their communities and become the politicians, teachers, and religious leaders of the black masses. The political writings of W. E. B. DuBois, the 1940–1960s court battles of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the 1960s Southern Christian Leadership Council, the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and Jesse Jackson's "Rain-

bow Coalition" exemplify American reformism and black progressive thought. Similar to the interracial composition of the initial SNCC membership, the Rainbow Coalition consisted of a multiracial, multiethnic, and progressive constituency who sponsored Jesse Jackson's 1988 presidential campaign.

Similar to the developmental history of Asian American, Chicano, and Native American Studies, the African American Studies, commonly referred to as Black Studies, has had an ambiguous relationship with American consensus-oriented cultural paradigms. Regardless of the political and ideological merits of a national cultural-studies paradigm, black culture tends to resist being assimilated into any cultural-studies paradigm which ignores the importance of race, class, and gender. Moreover, this resistance is further increased by nonblack Americans who oppose their government's present (and former) suppression of democratic liberation movements in southern Africa, the Americas, and the Pacific rim.

Other differences between the two cultural-studies paradigms include the international scholarly interests of African American studies (also expressed in panAfricanism and black nationalism). Contrarily, American Studies applies a national perspective to study social and cultural phenomena within the United States. Another point of contention between the two includes the criticism that Americanists tend to use Euro-American norms and models formulated by the past and present white male arbiters of American culture. Initially, these Euro-American taste makers discerned the intellectual and aesthetic merit of black works based on Euro-American values. This predominance of Eurocentric models, if we limit ourselves to the discipline of American cultural studies, has all but changed with the development of such extra-American studies programs as Chicano/Chicana, Asian American, Native American, Jewish, Black, Women's, and Gay Studies. Now, many critics find that certain Africanist and Afro-Americanist scholarly works support forms of heterosexism, male chauvinism, ethnocentrism, racial essentialism, and anti-Semitism.

Furthermore, many African Americanists discuss the intellectual and aesthetic merits of black cultures in the Americas, Europe, and Africa by collapsing important ethnic and religious differences between and among these black communities. Now, and without fear of being labeled a racist, white Americanists can criticize Africanists and African Americanists of this additional ethnocentric folly since certain scholars

make essentialist claims about culturally different black communities. Yet and still, the international black community meets with racial discrimination in Europe and the Americas. The experience of color discrimination, and the communality of the experience of racism, provides blacks with a tie that binds them with a victim-identity which in its nationalist and panAfricanist mode takes two forms—Negritude and "postNegritude." I will elaborate on the differences between the two forms later.

As early as the 1950s, Fanon cautioned against black essentialism but held that blackfolk are internationally despised and, therefore, the antiracist struggle and "Negro" identity is of primary importance to any black person regardless of their nationality. Fanon states,

> In the beginning I wanted to confine myself to the Antilles. But, regardless of consequences, dialectic took the upper hand and I was compelled to see that the Antillean is first of all a Negro. Nevertheless, it would be impossible to overlook the fact that there are Negroes whose nationality is Belgian, French, English; there are also Negro republics. How can one claim to have gotten hold of an essential when such facts as these demand one's recognition? The truth is that the Negro race has been scattered, that it can no longer claim unity. . . . In the universal situation of the Negro there is ambiguity, which is, however, resolved in his concrete existence. . Against all the arguments I have just cited, I come back to one fact: Wherever he goes, the Negro remains a Negro.[7]

Negritude describes the international movement of black cultural and political production from the 1920s to the present while "post-Negritude" is an extension of this movement to encompass other identities which blackfolk may share with nonblacks.[8]

Before continuing with this discussion, I hope that my criticism of Negritude is not misunderstood as a total rejection of this movement. The criticism expresses an earnest *desire* for Negritude to realize that black cultural

> [i]dentity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a "production," which

is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation. This view problematises the very authority and authenticity to which the term, "cultural identity," lays claim.[9]

In returning to the damaging effects of Eurocentric cultural criticism, one must remember that historical duration affects and limits the degree of empowerment of any "truth" regime. When one ignores the transient quality of "truth," one also ignores the ever-changing and fluid characteristics of certain empowered whites and their indeterminate relationship with multinational capitalism and its processes of "cultural imposition." Such a move would also ignore those Others who have never been *directly* empowered by the macroregimes of cultural production. In commenting on systems that establish universal interests, Pierre Bourdieu offers a set of questions which one should consider before proposing such universalizing norms. He asks,

> Who has an interest in the universal? Or rather: what are the social conditions that have to be fulfilled for certain agents to have an interest in the universal? How are fields created such that agents, in satisfying their particular interests, contribute thereby to producing the universal . . . ? Or fields in which agents feel obliged to set themselves up as defenders of the universal (such as the intellectual field in certain national traditions. . .)? In short, in certain fields, at a certain moment and for a certain time (that is, in a nonreversible way), there are agents who have an interest in the universal.[10]

In the sixties, the dominant paradigm of American identity fractured when the civil rights movement and black nationalism demanded a reformulation of the American values and norms. Blacks, womanists, feminists, and other equally marginal groups questioned the myths and symbols of the not-so-great white patriarchal leaders. Historically, American culture has maintained racially separate and economically unequal places for its nonwhite and female citizens. Now, these groups reject their positions of silence, invisibility, and unimportance.

Generally, white middle-class male academics established programs to study American norms and values. Though they had honest intentions when constructing the American mind as a national identity,

these men were agents of their class position, race, and gender. The founders of American cultural studies, with few exceptions, were white middle-class males who busily attacked the European hegemony in the American liberal arts education. Blinded by their ideological goals, they explained post-WWII American culture by their subjective visions. Quite understandably, a new and racially mixed generation of American intellectuals refuted and reformed the existing interpretive claims, all of which offended many of the older generation of white, male guardians of post-WWII culture. The status quo held that the liberalism which now reigned in the academy was their doing, and they, therefore, could not be guilty of ethnocentrism, sexism, and other crimes against the academy. The more rigid patricians held that debate must be civil and their patriarchal myths and values must not be subverted. The consensus family order must not be divorced of its heterosexual, Euro-American male discursive norms. Black nationalists appropriated the patriarchal discourse of their brothers and attacked its Eurocentric myths. White feminists followed and appropriated the Eurocentric paradigm of their lovers, brothers, and father, and then attacked their sexism. Womanists and feminists of color subverted both racial and androcentric hegemonies while their gay brothers and lesbian sisters combined the progressive elements of the black nationalists and white feminists to disrupt the hegemony of heterosexual ways of being. All of these critical processes, if taken together, damaged the unquestioned legitimacy of whiteness, maleness, and heterosexuality.

Black American culture, like other racially borderline cultures, grew separate from, but in many psychological ways similar to, the white American mainstream. In describing the cultural tension between celebrating ethnic difference and affirming an American identity, Asian American scholar Elaine H. Kim notes,

So much writing by Asian Americans is focused on the theme of claiming an American, as opposed to Asian, identity that we may begin to wonder if this constitutes accommodation, a collective colonized spirit—the fervent wish to "hide our ancestry," which is impossible for us anyway, to relinquish our marginality, and to lose ourselves in an intense identification with the hegemonic culture. Or is it in fact a celebration of our marginality and a profound expression of protest against being defined by domination?[11]

Kim underlines the ambiguity that reigns in the un-meltable lives of non-European Americans. Consequently, black intellectuals and artists portray their criticisms of mainstream American culture in a conspicuously racial manner yet they argue for opportunities to participate in a reformulated mainstream America. Their criticisms celebrate marginality, otherness, and difference. Exhibiting the simultaneity present in most "postNegritude" processes,[12] this form of criticism is a profound protest against white patriarchal standards. Black creativity explores the arbitrary relationship that blacks have not only with America but also with black patriarchal forms which have not yet dismantled their own subsystems of cultural imposition. Consequently, certain blacks face double and triple alienation from both the black and white communities. In his autobiography *Bourgeois Blues*, Jake Lamar describes an instance of this dilemma of an embattled double consciousness:

> By the end of my first semester, I felt as if I were in a social limbo. I avoided getting linked to any clique, but every time I passed the black tables without taking a seat, I felt a twinge of guilt, as if I were breaking some rule, betraying some obligation. . . The breezy cordiality I displayed with most everyone masked the growing anger I felt. I was angry at all the people, white and black, whom I saw as small-minded, bigoted and shallow. And I was angry at myself, for while all I wanted was to be accepted as myself, I feared that the self I cherished so much was terminally ambivalent.[13]

Unfortunately, certain types of antiracist criticisms inadvertently sustain the racial dualism that European colonizers used to rationalize their imperialistic intrusions in Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Additionally, if marginal and borderline groups merely focus on single identity issues such as race, their efforts will conceal the extraracial issues of class, gender, and sexual orientation.

Until recently, black-oriented cultural-studies paradigms glossed over issues of gender, class, and sexual orientation. As stated earlier, debates over the construction of black identity can no longer sustain Negritude's previously one-dimensional racial definition of Africa and its black European and black American diasporas. The "postNegritude" view of "Africa" refuses the image of an idyllic country of black primitives who evaded European cultural imposition. "PostNegritude" reasoning and creativity are processes which realize that

The original 'Africa' is no longer there. It too has been trans-
formed. History is, in that sense, irreversible. We must not
collude with the West which, precisely, normalises and appro-
priates Africa by freezing it into some timeless zone of the
primitive, unchanging past. Africa must at last be reckoned
with by . . . (black diasporic) people, but it cannot in any
simple sense by merely recovered.

It belongs irrevocably, for us, to what Edward Said once
called an 'imaginative geography and history', which helps
'the mind to intensify its own sense of itself by dramatising the
difference between what is close to it and what is far away'
Our belongingness to it constitutes what Benedict Anderson
calls 'an imagined community'. To *this* 'Africa', which is a
necessary part of the (black diasporic)   imaginary, we can't
literally go home again.[14]

Thus, the end of Negritude and the beginning of "postNegritude" indi-
cates a historical shift in black thinking about Africa, black cultural
production, and the political effects of nomadic multinational corpora-
tions. These factors and other extra-racial phenomena determine the
psychological identity and socioeconomic conditions of any commu-
nity. These factors also limit the historical moment that any marginal
and borderline entity negotiates across racial, ethnic, class, sexual, and
ideological boundaries.

BLACK NATIONALISM AS A FORM
OF CULTURAL RESISTANCE

Black nationalism is a third philosophical form that remains important
to any discussion of black cultural studies and the idea of "post-
Negritude" and "womanism." In its most progressive manifestations it is
a form of political and economic resistance that aligns itself with other
progressive forms of political and economic resistance. As a political
and cultural movement, black nationalism acknowledges the intercon-
nected historical experiences of black communities in Europe, the
Americas, and Africa.

The culture of the African diaspora includes concrete and particu-
lar experiences of black people after their physical removal from Africa.
Their experiences include the overlapping of African cultures and

European cultures, and thereby create black cultures that are neither purely African nor purely European. In fact, there are no pure European cultures. The idea of nation-state identity is based on an imagined singular wholeness and artificial national borders. One need only to witness the ethnic warfare in what was formerly Yugoslavia and the on-going civil strife in various African nations.

The creolization of the black diaspora (the racial and cultural mixing of people) is an unarguable fact. Still, many members of this diaspora view the continent of Africa as their spiritual source and the home of their ancestors. The cultural production and politics of this type of consciousness are black nationalism and panAfricanism, which remain important tools but have their drawbacks. In the above, I quoted Stuart Hall's comment on the problems of one-dimensional identity, which is "not as transparent or unproblematic as we think." Hall suggests that identity is always in a process of becoming. Thus, identity is always incompleteness, and according to Hall, "[t]his view problematises the very authority and authenticity to which the term, 'cultural identity,' lays claim."[15] Any theory that acknowledges "the becomingness of blackness" evokes a "postNegritude" understanding of black cultural identity. Black nationalism and panAfricanism, in their most progressive narrative forms, stress a "becomingness of a blackness" that has not yet arrived. Only in this narrative form are nationalism and panAfricanism a part of a "postNegritude" which is the "play" located between two different spaces. The "post" in "postNegritude" denotes a second phase of previous forms of Negritude and panAfricanism,

> [a] second, related but different view of cultural identity. This second position recognises that, as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant difference which constitute 'what we really are'; or rather — since history has intervened — 'what we have become'. . Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of 'becoming' as well as 'being'. . . . It is not something that already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialist past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power.   Identities are the names we give to the

different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past.[16]

This form of black nationalism and panAfricanism is evident in black visual art. Black films such as Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* (1991) and Spike Lee's *Jungle Fever* (1991) use narrative and filmic devices that call forth both Negritude and postNegritude sensibilities. The postNegritude is also apparent in the negotiation between black masculinity and black gay identity in the visual works of Marlon Riggs and Rotimi Fani-Kayode. It is visible in Gordon Parks's FSA "Charwoman" photographs that indicate tension between Black and American identity. PostNegritude visual construction permeates Adrian Piper's mixed-media collages that speak of the arbitrariness of her racial identity.

PostNegritude is also discernible in black literature. For instance, such 1960s novels as John A. Williams's *The Man Who Cried I Am* and Ayi Kwei Armah's *Fragments*, Adrienne Kennedy's absurdist play *The Funnyhouse of a Negro*, and Bob Kaufman's poetry dramatize psychological tensions that arise when Negritude and postNegritude identity paradigms meet during the literary hegemony of Negritude aesthetics.

APPROPRIATION, NEGOTIATION, AND RESISTANCE

Neither black conservatism, liberalism, nor nationalism express pure forms of appropriation, negotiation, and resistance to mainstream Euro-American culture. Black culture develops within and around the competing tensions created by the intermittent desire to appropriate, negotiate, and resist mainstream American and European cultures. Since the late sixties, Black Studies has negotiated its place within American and European universities. Similar to any other academic discipline, its leading spokespersons, such as Houston Baker at the University of Pennsylvania, Hazel Carby at Yale, and Henry Louis Gates and Cornel West at Harvard, employ elements of appropriation, negotiation, and resistance to safeguard a space for black cultural studies within the American academy. Each of these scholars directs a Black Studies program at a predominantly white institution. The alliance between the black scholar and the white university as well as between these black scholars and nonblack scholars is of a political nature. This is especially true when one considers the European origins of these four elite universities and the general marginality of black studies in the academy.

The marginal space of black cultural studies in educational institutions does not permit its black scholars to avoid theoretical questions. In fact, black communities who experience socioeconomic and psychic processes of racial discrimination demand the formulation of theoretical explanations. They also demand practical ways of resisting these destructive processes. Any serious theory of black resistance should consider the nonessentialist writings of Frantz Fanon, Stuart Hall, and womanists. In form and application, theories of resistance should attempt to explain the interrelationship of processes of racism and macrocosmic processes of ethnic, sexual, and religious bigotry.

Pierre Bourdieu states that "in every field . there is a struggle for a monopoly of legitimacy."[17] The "struggle for a monopoly of legitimacy" should not pit advocates of panAfricanism and black nationalism against those Others who are equally victimized. Professor Barbara Christian, the former chair of the Afro-American Studies Department at the University of California at Berkeley, underscores the problems of this struggle. In criticizing the race for legitimacy by black academics, she writes,

> My major objection to the race for theory . . . really hinges on the question, 'for whom are we doing what we are doing when we do literary criticism?' It is   the central question today especially for the few of us who have infiltrated the academy enough to be wooed by it. The answer to that question determines what orientation we take in our work, the language we use, the purposes for which it is intended.[18]

In response to Christian's question I offer "postNegritude" as a tentative answer. The root of a postNegritude aesthetics is founded upon a womanist ideology which is similar to Michele Wallace's description of black feminism. Wallace writes that it is

> [a] socialist feminism, not yet fully formulated, whose primary goal is a liberatory and profound (almost necessarily nonviolent) political transformation. Second, I assume as well that black feminist creativity, to the extent that its formal and commercial qualities will allow, is inherently critical of current oppressive and repressive political, economic and social arrangements affecting not just black women but black people as a group.[19]

The language of the "postNegritude" inevitably appropriates certain theoretical notions without totally relying on their paradigms. The root of the "postNegritude" is the psychical and sociocultural history of postcolonialism. A "postNegritude" orientation appropriates nonessentialist ideas and negotiates a sociopsychic space which acknowledges

> [t]hat *race* functions to constitute concrete individuals as white and black. Here the movement from subjects to men and women, to black and white, not only 'marks the conceptual distance between two orders of discourse, the discourse of philosophy or political theory and the discourse of reality,' it marks the conceptual distance of race and the race-oriented forms of popular culture.[20]

Yet, this sociopsychic racial space resists the colonizing urge to find legitimacy in the arms of static theoretical and political discourses of racial and sexual essentialism. "PostNegritude" wants to bring the videotaped beating of Rodney King into the churches of white middle-class America—the Simi Valley of the American racial mind.

THE MICROSTRUGGLES AND MINIPOLITICS OF POSTNEGRITUDE

The growth of any paradigm is measured by its ability to maintain its canon and lessen the destructive effects of dissent by those exterior texts and discourses that would usurp its rules and beliefs. Black Studies has always been a marginal discipline within the academy. It has also sustained its place within the academy by appropriating, negotiating, and resisting those other essentialist texts and discourses that threaten the unity of one black voice.

Recently, black feminists, gays, and lesbians have expressed critical paradigms that synthesize racial and extraracial issues. It is their advancement of this synthesis that rejuvenates the present debate in black cultural studies. The "minority discourses" of these doubly and sometimes triply victimized members deny the initial assumptions of Negritude, black nationalism, and panAfricanism—black cultural identity. The extraracial concerns of these three groups expand the meaning of blackness and create diversity where racial stagnation and fraud once reigned. "PostNegritude" shifts reveal the rich polyphony that has always existed in black culture.

Before I discuss these minority voices of a racial minority community, I should like to refer to the cautionary words of Caren Kaplan, a first-world feminist critic. In commenting on feminist criticism, she provides a womanist understanding of the political nature of the "post-Negritude" project that I am describing. Kaplan writes,

> The first stage in this process is refusing the privilege of universalizing theories. Some of us may experience ourselves as minor in a world that privileges the masculine gender. But our own centrality in terms of race, class, ethnicity, religious identity, age, nationality, sexual preference, and levels of disabilities is often ignored in our own work. All women are not equal, and we do not have the same experiences.   When we insist upon gender alone as a universal system of explanation we sever ourselves from other women. How can we speak to each other if we deny our particularities?[21]

Kaplan underscores the arbitrary nature of minority and majority status for white women. Her comments are also relevant for people of color whose gender, class, ethnicity, nationality, and sexual orientation may afford them privileges over others like them. All people of color are not equal. We do not have the same experiences. Thus, we must avoid universalizing race, class, and postcolonial subjectivity, and acknowledge our particularities as we learn to speak of our similarities.

Kaplan also warns feminist critics against repeating forms of imperialism. She writes, "First world feminist criticism is struggling to avoid repeating the same imperialist moves that we claim to protest. We must leave home, as it were, since our homes are often sites of racism, sexism, and other damaging social practices."[22] Black critics should consider her advice when writing on the constitution of black culture, black identity, and black theory. Critics who desire a world in which racial dualism, ethnocentrism, and nationalism have lost their currency, must avoid the same imperialism and racism that enslaves and dehumanizes third-world people, though they may live in first-world metropolises in Europe, the Americas, and Australia.

In the chapters that follow, I will discuss how certain visual and literary works dramatize black history as well as introduce *invention* in the construction of black cultural identity. I will borrow from the works of Frantz Fanon, Stuart Hall, and certain womanist critics (women and

men) to argue that many of these creative works express the understanding that

> [t]here is no white world, there is no white ethic, any more than there is a white intelligence. There are in every part of the world (wo)men who search. I am not a prisoner of history. I should not seek there for the full meaning of my destiny. I should constantly remind myself that the real *leap* consists in introducing invention into existence. In the world through which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself.[23]

Part of my concern thus far has been to discuss how negotiation and resistance occur when Negritude and postNegritude paradigms meet at the crossroads of the becoming of blackness. Additionally, I have analyzed the sociopsychic effects of the unreflected imposition of ethnocentric cultural paradigms.[24]

In the following chapters I move from a description of post-Negritude to an interpretive application of its principles. In doing so, I discuss and critically analyze the artistic processes that permit minority discourses within certain black diasporic and African communities. As I suggested above, "postNegritude" represents a reconstructed black philosophy of cultural identity and cultural production. The following chapters analyze how marginal and borderline people of African ancestry use the visual and literary arts to scrutinize monolithic forms of black subjectivity. Their works inscribe womanist, gay, lesbian, and interracial experiences into the constitution of black culture and black identity.

SUMMARIZING THE COMPONENTS OF POSTNEGRITUDE

Some readers may perceive, albeit incorrectly, that I offer different kinds of definitions of *postNegritude*. To avoid this confusion, I will summarize postNegritude's various components. First, I will list a few of the varied *tensions* that provide free zones in which *postNegritude actions* might occur.

The recently televised spectacles like the Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas hearings, the videotaped Rodney King beating, the Simi Valley jury's not-guilty decision, the urban revolt following the Simi Valley verdict, the O.J. Simpson trial and the jury's not-guilty judgment, pro-

vide some of the crucial raw materials that produce debates about "race card" justice in America. These debates and reactions create *post-Negritude tensions* and provide free zones for possible *postNegritude actions*. These spectacles about lived experiences, however, should never be taken as the postNegritude in and of itself. The Hill-Thomas, Rodney King, Simi Valley, O.J. Simpson episodes increase the already present tensions of race, gender, class, and religion. These social tensions might then percolate into postNegritude actions through creative, revelatory, and political processes.

For example the Hill-Thomas hearings brought to the national forefront how diversified is black political thought on the civil right movement's legacy and sexual harassment in the workplace. The hearing revealed, to popular audiences, the existence of an articulate and conservative group of African Americans who had been previously unknown to this audience, and ignored by both black and nonblack liberals. Anita Hill, not Clarence Thomas, created the necessary post-Negritude tensions that opened, revealed, and exposed the many free zones in which postNegritude acts can occur. Throughout this work, I will repeatedly list various *components of postNegritude*, so as not to confuse the reader with *postNegritude tensions* that give rise to the possibility of *postNegritude actions*.

PostNegritude acts constitute any effort to challenge hegemonies of power through critical analysis (as this book outlines), through social action (as followed the Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas hearings), and through the creative imagination (as present in some of the visual and literary works discussed in this book). PostNegritude, then, creates, reveals, and exposes the nonessential nature of socially constructed ideas about race, gender, class, and nation. The community that supported Hill's right to publicize Thomas's alleged sexual harassment serves to *create* a womanist postNegritude. The extension of Hill's experience to speak for and about all women *and* men who are sexually harassed in the workplace *reveals* the nonessentialist actional processes of any postNegritude act. Further analysis of the Hill-Thomas hearings exposes the many languages that postNegritude can speak to issues beyond the oneness of race, gender, class, and nation in the black and nonblack communities.

So, black conservative political voices interrupt the hegemony of liberalism in the black community and provide a dialogic space, a free zone for *Other* voices to speak and act. A professional African American

woman, such as the Yale-educated lawyer Anita Hill, provides a prece-
dence for other black conservative women who might normally be si-
lenced by their own conservative politics and/or professional realities.

In this book, I do not discuss how postNegritude analysis applies to
the O.J. Simpson trial but I will comment on it briefly here. The Ameri-
can media constructed the O.J. Simpson trial as another B movie-cum-
telefilm of a courtroom drama. The trial's news coverage brought the
issues of class, interracial intimacy, and multinational capitalism to an-
other level of mediocrity. The jury's not-guilty verdict provided the nec-
essary postNegritude tensions to filter through America's medi(a)ocre
strainer. The jury's not-guilty verdict, like Hill's accusation, created an
American entertainment-industry Frankenstein-like monster—The
O.J. Simpson Jury. Nonblack liberals revealed some very hideous racist
traits. Most, but not all, African Americans were not shocked by these
revelations and, in a very postNegritude utterance, acknowledged this
to mainstream media. Basically, they said that their sociopolitical lives
had not greatly changed since the fifties. They admitted that there had
only been a reshuffling of the individual players (the black middle
class). Still, "race card" determinants defined who among the American
middle classes became fat and who remained comfortably lean, and
what classes were totally out of the picture frame—the poor and work-
ing poor. For instance, as I recall, the white female lawyer, not her
black male colleague, receives the most lucrative multimillion-dollar
book contract. This reality and the fact that both public prosecutors
stubbornly relied on the testimony of Mark Furman, a racist policeman,
reveals the systemic business-as-usual racism that the media and most of
the public mistakenly identify as a singular "race card" meted out by
one all too powerful black lawyer—Johnnie Cochran. PostNegritude
revelation uses this fissure to utter that "the whole deck is a history of
race-card dealings with all people of color, not just with one black rich
O.J. Simpson." PostNegritude does not make villains of individuals who
are produced by an inhumane system. PostNegritude thinking human-
izes the individual and states, "It is the system, not the individual cops
such as Mark Furman or publicity-hungry lawyers like Johnnie
Cochran, who load the deck and deal the cards." Therefore, the tragic
fall of an American sports hero, the issue of interracial marriage and
biracial children, and the rumors of an impending interracial marriage
between the dream-team lawyers are all possible postNegritude tensions
but they become mere hyperbole that obscures the "race card"

realpolitik. Ironically, the jury's verdict was mostly affected by classism (O.J.'s wealth afforded him the best legal team), racism (O.J.'s interracial marriage provoked Mark Furman), and sexism since O.J. physically abused Nicole.

The O.J. Simpson trial marks, after the Hill-Thomas hearings, the second time within a five-year period that white liberals squared-off with the majority of the middle, working, and poor classes in the Black community. These are postNegritude times that create *tensions* that do not guarantee postNegritude creations, revelations, and expositions of the nonessential nature of race, gender, class and nation.

These very popular spectacles of postNegritude *tensions*, like the Hill-Thomas hearings, resemble serialized B films that are available to the largest popular audience—the television viewer. If the reader will permit my stretching the definition of a film genre, these B courtroom dramas evoke popular sentiment that is far from being postNegritudinal in kind, but may, however, create postNegritude tensions and free zones for dialogic occasions as illustrated in the proliferation of radio-television talk shows and nonacademic and scholarly essays and books commenting on the Hill-Thomas hearings and the O.J. Simpson trial. Again, they do not create examples of the postNegritude. The postNegritude *tensions* produce free zones for postNegritude actional politics as illustrated in the actional exchanges between Michael Lerner and Cornel West.[25]

I have not exhausted the list of postNegritude's many components, but postNegritude should not be confused with the various tensions and opportunities that occur and call forth a postNegritude action.