

NRAACP



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Table of Contents:

- 2. Western Thought and the Assumption of Benevolence
 - 8. Defining America's Borders in Black and White: Nation, Citizen and Privilege
 - 13. Identity Politics and the Tea Party
 - 19. Culture, Commodity and Babylon
 - 24. Power, Art and the Duty of the "Black" Artist
 - 28. The Menace of Violence and the Formation of the NRAACP
 - 34. The First Meeting of the NRAACP – in my Head
 - 36. Appendix I, NRAACP Manifesto
 - 37. Appendix II, Amendments to the Constitution
 - 38. Appendix III, Timeline
- Bibliography

*“Pushed into the corner
Of the hobnailed boot,
Pushed into the corner of the
“I-don’t-want-to-die” cry,
Pushed into the corner of
“I don’t want to study war no more,”
Changed into “Eye for Eye,”
The Panther in his desperate boldness
Wears no disguise,
Motivated by the truest of the oldest
Lies.*

Langston Hughes
The Panther

Western Thought and the Assumption of Benevolence

The truest of the oldest lies. It is recognized that race has no biological truth. There is a single human race yet the history of perception and representation have produced notions of race that run deeper than color, culture, or nation. William James, the father of Pragmatism, a truly American philosophical tradition said, *“There is nothing so absurd that it cannot be believed as truth if repeated often enough.”* Is race the truest of the oldest lies? An idea thought up to legitimize a social policy. Its not that I have a problem with forced labor per say, but it does not chime in with the thoughts of the French Enlightenment or the American Revolution. Now here is a contradiction, which European thought has been able to resolve in the New World.

The United States began without a history. In its process of self-realization and self-recognition, the nation has had to reconcile its narrative – of religious freedom, liberty, and justice for all, success through hard work – with its actuality of intolerance and violent aggression. (Durham 200)

The European mentality has always considered itself to be right. Whether it is through divine right, the Rights of Man, or Manifest Destiny, Western history stands as a monument to self-legitimization. Even today economic embargos and wars fought without American Ground troops are considered to be “morally better” perhaps because the violence is not obvious. With the recent Banking Bailout the “harsh” language used by the government to reprimand the bankers assumed that they had moral fiber. It assumed that they would “do the right thing.” They had made a mistake and thus as wealthy and responsible players in the system, they had learned from that mistake. Our society is built upon the assumed goodness of man. In the West, this is a mix of Pagan ideas of rebirth and Abrahamic ideas of forgiveness. The Christian assumption or hope in the innate goodness of man, although a helpful guide for an optimistic outlook on the world is only a half-truth. There is no inherent good or bad in the desire to survive and to prosper. Although

these are good things they do not imply morality in human interaction, simply because the survival of one individual or their family may rest on the destruction of another. So there is the conflict between goodness, which is there and realizes itself in the most basic love of family and dependency on company, and selfishness. There are many ways to address or name this conflict, be it security and freedom, be it order and chaos or be it good and evil, but the polarities of any action depend on perception and not on some universal morality.

The stranglehold of oppression cannot be loosened by a plea to the oppressor's conscience. Social change in something as fundamental as racist oppression involves violence. You cannot progress here without violence and upheaval because it is a struggle for survival for one and a struggle for liberation for the other. Always the powers in command are ruthless and unmerciful in defending their position and privileges. (Williams 72)

Language often draws a direct connection between doing the “right thing” and the status quo, because the maintenance of order is of utmost importance to human interactions. The Administrative Control Hermeneutic “*interprets the world essentially as a managerial problem to be solved by professional, expert administration.*” (Patrick 11) If maintenance is the prime mover then political action, which disrupts the order or disrupts civil society can be seen as a problem. While this may be the most basic reaction at the time of disruption, change that results in an evolution of thought may force history to be viewed differently. Whereas the Civil Rights movement was troublesome for many white people and perhaps one could argue for the “nation” at the time, today we understand it as an important historical event.

“Truly discursive publics, i.e., mass membership interest groups, can impede the smooth administration of administrative democracy if they are not aligned with current administrative policy formulations and if they are powerful enough so that they must be reckoned with. They are neither diffuse or manageable and become anti-democratic by administrative definition.” (Patrick183)

Thus when a movement is viewed from within its time period and it does not fit “comfortably” into a civilized society, it will come up against the established control of the time. The more comfortable an arm of a movement the more frictionless it will be accepted. Now this is only if the change is understood as inevitable. If we look at the nonviolence of the civil rights movement advocated by the NAACP and see the cultural change implied by what it demanded, it is obvious the violent reaction was a matter of discomfort at change and privilege. But as the treatment of blacks as second class citizens would no longer be accepted, the visual of blacks waiting patiently makes for a better portrait of America than a history of American resistance to acceptance. Sharing is a difficult but important childhood lesson. As a nation we have cleaned this epoch up and designated good guys and bad guys. There are heroes who are held high, vanguards of history, while others, who fit less the image of the movement today, are swept under the rug. While the time was brutal and “America”, whether it be the establishment, white America or the American

majority was apathetic or hostile to change and black America had to fight against American values of the time to become Americans themselves. The historical notion is that America did the right thing. America learned the mistakes of its past. Despite it's past wrongs, America is better now. The Nation is allowed to be proud as a whole due to the direct actions of specific individuals. So history may be co-opted by the present to form a past that supports the present.

Seen from the tribal mentality, (help your own/ help yourself), there is a basic animal legitimacy to the 60's white mentality. When reasons for policy are made by a cost benefit analysis then a policy of further sharing of benefits might have its antagonists, among the Haves. This mindset could also be seen as reasoning for some administrative decisions. It is right to place an Embargo because there is no state of war. It is right to go to war if no Americans die. It is right to pay the rich as long as there is no chaos. So to not disrupt the comfort of the majority could be seen as good administration.

When the situation is seen tribally from the side of the disenfranchised, it is fair to see violence in the face of violence as necessity. Robert Williams stated:

He (the negro) does not introduce violence into a racist social system- the violence is already there and has always been there. It is precisely this unchallenged violence that allows a racist social system to perpetuate itself. When people say that they are opposed to Negroes "resorting to violence" what they really mean is that they are opposed to Negroes defending themselves and challenging the exclusive monopoly of violence practiced by white racists. (Williams 76)

Though from the idea of Williams, to bear arms is to demand what is entitled. For the establishment, this armed black man is a threat to peace and a threat to the status quo. So if we compare the self-defense ideas of Williams with the nonviolent strategy of the NAACP, perhaps there is little difference in demands but there is a problem of historical representation. There is thus a problem with discomfort and acceptance. America and people in general have a problem seeing past problems as present problems. *"The US exists as a result of the invasion of other peoples' lands and the genocide of those people, not at some tragic earlier point in history but continually. Americans have not noticed this. Americans insist fanatically upon their goodness and innocence."* (Durham 188) While the Civil Rights movement was very much a violent struggle for change and people died and killed for this "non-violent" movement, Americans have more comfort with the ideas of peaceful change and Christian suffering as catalyst, then they can stomach the idea of people being forced in this country to defend their homes with guns because no one else will. The image of blacks waiting for change, though far from the truth, fits with many American's views of America's political ideals and racial preconceptions. Contemporary unrest is seen as a problem while past unrest is simplified so that it can be forgiven and forgotten. In the case of America's history of racial and cultural violence America has changed its laws and its customs. The effort is to blend American Ideals with American reality. It is America's makeover, but a fundamental problem is that *"if you stick a knife nine inches into my back and pull it out three inches, that is not progress.*

Even if you pull it all the way out, that is not progress. Progress is healing the wound, and America hasn't even begun to pull out the knife." El Hajj Malik El Shabazz (Malcolm X) I would argue that America has begun to remove the knife and maybe even taken out the knife, even if it is only for aesthetic reasons. There is a push to just cover up without first healing the wound. This wound is still open and it may just be infected. Just like "Skin" has created another culture at the birth of this nation, so the wound creates another culture.

There is thus the grave importance after so many years of western domination that the contradictory views created by this domination come to light. I would not suggest that Europeans or white people are worse than non-Europeans or black people but I will suggest that a position of authority has certainly brought the evil human traits that white people *also share* to the limelight. By being in control, one is also in the spotlight and all eyes are on center stage. It is only natural to want to look good when everyone is watching. So it makes sense to accentuate the positive and hide the negative, regardless of the brutality of remaining on top. After so many centuries of such action, I would propose that automatic hereditary membership has made it more difficult to see the costs and the benefits of membership, as well as the difficulties of non-membership.

With this subconscious cover-up so well in place, I would agree with Brian Patrick that as a trend the administrative route of mass democracy "*represents a continuation of Western society's colonial habits. Except energy that was once directed outward, often under the justification of bringing order to the heathen, is now sublimated into making the more perfect democracy, at home and abroad. So the administrative control hermeneutic, in its untrammled form, can be regarded as a inward-directed, interior type of colonialization by elite managerial classes over client under-classes.*" (Patrick 187) As Robert Williams and Martin Luther King Junior's more radical side ("Poor People's Movement" and labor connections) are swept from the Civil Rights Movement, history and culture are formed to create as civil a society as possible. I too want a civil society, but I am certain that this will not be possible as long as people are convinced that we have civil society and always have had it. I would also say that Western thought uses language and its systems of categorization, including art, to highlight positive social aspects and to beautify uncomfortable pasts. Man is a wolf to man and America has a history of racial subjugation and violence. Whether racism is maintained through greed or through guilt, it is deeply engrained in the American conscious, yet not recognized. Racism is simply a part of the system of covert American subjugation, but as it becomes less important as a control we must take care that race is not maintained as a form of aesthetic entertainment, in the tradition of Gobineau, Benetton and BET. In the spirit of the Civil Rights movement, America may truly have the potential to be the home of the free, not simply as a name's sake. The Second Amendment grants America's citizens the right to bear arms, yet when ever guns and groups of colored people are brought together an old American warning light goes off: "violence." I formed the National Rifle Association for the Advancement of Colored People just for this reason. I wish to bring this hypocrisy to light. I understand that this way of seeing

violence and race is a result of years of separation, which has created a border between two Americas. This border legitimizes fears, fears through ignorance. I want modern Americans to question their fears. If armed Blacks make someone uncomfortable I want them to ask themselves: "Do I think that Black Americans are more violent than say Whites or Asians?" or "do I think that armed Blacks may legitimately act violently, due to years of subjugation that still persists?" America has issues to deal with. Divides in America became very clear to me after moving back to the States after 8 years abroad and experiencing the election of the first Black president of the USA. So as Black Americans have been doing for years, I now ask all Americans:

"How does it feel to be a problem?" (Du Bois 7)

I think that it is important that language be understood carefully. This is especially important for making value judgments about history or about societies. Many believe that truth is some overarching power or thing. In the philosophical sense, this is perhaps the notion of an amassed collective opinion. Any event will have a very different meaning and thus truth, depending on who saw it and from where. As events slip into the past, by collecting the opinions contemporary opinion may develop toward this truth, but as time progresses the teller falls further and further from the actual event. If we look at the Holocaust deniers, it is hard to separate their claim for historical accuracy with their wish to rid Palestine of the Jewish state. There is a problem of historical accuracy but even worse, the shroud of history is used as justification for actions today, when the issue is land and ideas of right and wrong have little to do with these conflicts. To return to the notion of goodness, the West has felt the need to legitimize its every action through a notion of benefiting humanity. Even war is legitimized through a greater benefit to humanity, be it to rid the world of evil or to spread good or democracy. If we were to look the classic example of the Holocaust from the perspective of post war Germany, it is clear that even a reaction with positive social results to a horrible event, may be a denial of that event. I lived for eight years in Germany. There remains certain awareness among Germans in regards to personal freedom, state power and pacifism. This comes to a large extent from the experiences of World War II, the Holocaust and occupation. Germans would decline to outright talk of pride and fatherland, yet I did sense a strong support of their overall national mental development after the Second World War. Though most Germans would steer away from the term "Leitkultur" publicized by the CDU politician Friedrich Merz, there is still a sense of the correctness and goodness of the German social hermeneutic, even among Leftists. There is the problem that this theory has when it is combined with the politics of immigration, a problem that is evolving not just in Germany but all over Europe and the First (White) World.

There are other connections that could be made that are dangerous. Although I do feel that the lessons of acceptance and pacifism are good and that through this

experience Germany has learned, it would be quite another statement to say that the Holocaust or even the bombing of Dresden and the Russian push west were good learning experiences. To judge historical events on a moral scale is ignorant of inherent human selfishness. It judges actions on the result that they achieve and not on the actions themselves. This gives great advantage to the winner. Another danger is this. A view, which allots pride in ideals to the holder without identifying these as ideals, could lead to a misunderstanding of historical context and a lack of awareness of the typical us/them dichotomy. So if one speaks of right and wrong then one must be aware that the us/them dichotomy is being used, us being right, naturally. If one ignores the truth of this then, for example a typical bourgeois German would be against anti-Semitism, but might at the same time have a problem with immigrant Muslims. It is not because "they" are immigrant Muslims but because "they" do not learn German, or "their" women are oppressed, and their "backward" lifestyle does not agree with the German sensibilities. In essence a war of ideas becomes a war of good/evil or right/wrong. A third more general fear of mine is with the notion of progress. The experience although remembered in a negative light, is seen through the eyes of the removed, learned, reformed, modern German, and thus becomes something that is overcome and thus the evolution to today becoming a point of cultural pride. Evils of the past are purified to fit into the chain of events in narrative of the road to progress. Although one may learn from bad experience, it is a mark of Christian self-forgiveness, Darwinian evolution, and Western progress to align this with an overall feeling of general human social development. I believe that such a use of language to beautify history is a human method to continue doing things the way they have been done, yet still give everyone a sense of accomplishment.

To get to the point at hand, the same goes for America. Language has a meaning that is less dependent on the words and more dependent on the speaker. America's history or racism has given rise to a polarity of thought that could imply very different uses of a word, Orwellian doublespeak.

Words used in common by all men do not always have a meaning common to all men. Men have engaged in life-or-death struggles because of differences of meaning in a commonly-used word. The white racist believes in "freedom," he believes in "fair trial," he believes in "justice." He sincerely believes in these words and can use them with great emotion because to the white racist they mean his freedom to deprive Negroes of their basic human rights and his courts where a "fair trial" is that procedure and "justice" that decision which upholds the racist's mad ideal of white supremacy. (Williams 54)

How language is used and by whom it is used is the true barometer. As Machiavelli recognized so long ago, power needs to use both love and fear. It is a matter of winning people over or conquering the will. If both can be done then power is most secure.

There have been two polar extremes in the idiomatic handling of the coercive aspect of power. One has been the tendency to acknowledge human force openly,

then to humanize it by the use of various social strategies such as fictive kinship, clientship, and asymmetric gift exchanges. The other extreme has been the method of concealment, in which coercion is almost completely hidden or thoroughly denied. Indeed, it is even presented as the direct opposite of what it is, being interpreted as a kind of freedom. (Patterson 18)

Freedom as a philosophical concept can be universal. But in the physical and the legal it is necessary to see it in terms of the individual and the social. Physically, all individuals are free. Any man or woman may go where they want and do what they want. The only differences that affect individuals are the social or legal consequences. In this regard we begin to see that universal freedom is impossible. The ultimate freedom of one individual would imply the infringement of freedom on others. This is the classic problem that caused the United State's Civil War: one man's freedom depends on another man's enslavement. So when one speaks of freedom and especially of spreading freedom, I think that we need to consider what is meant. My thesis is that America's language of freedom is and has always been misleading. Freedom is hierarchically based on money, property and control. This has always been so, since the first king and the first slave walked the earth. Let us not be confused by ideas of progress. Take for example the notion of operation Iraqi Freedom. The intent was indeed to spread freedom to Iraq. I do not even argue that this plan utterly failed but what I do wish to question is the notion of whose freedom is spread to Iraq. It would be foolish to assume that all Iraqis could indeed receive freedom. Perhaps some Iraqis might gain freedom. What though is obvious is that certain individuals do exercise total freedom in Iraq without consequences in that country, in this country or anywhere in the world. When one looks at the actions and consequences of US mercenary soldiers, Blackwater (or XI or whatever they want to be called), we see that they exercise extreme freedom. These individuals have imported their own freedom into Iraq. Remember, freedom isn't free.

Defining America's Borders in Black and White: Nation, Citizen and Privilege

"Our ancestors, and those who were thought to be wise, used to say that it was necessary to hold Pistoia by means of the factions and Pisa by using fortresses. Accordingly, they fostered discord between their subjects in some towns, so that they could maintain their hold on them more easily. This policy may have been sound in the time when there was a certain equilibrium in Italy; but I do not think that it should be imitated today. My own view is that divisions never benefit anyone; on the contrary, when faction-ridden cities are threatened by an enemy force, they always fall very quickly. The reason is that the weaker faction always rallies to the invader, and the other is not strong enough to resist." (Machiavelli 73)

Preconceptions of political place and social status have a lot to do with race in America. How many Americans hold an assumption of functionality, be it perhaps hunting or robbery, when a poor man has a gun while the assumption is recreation

when a well to do man or woman has a gun? These assumptions have as much to do with social class, as they do with race in America. It is both historical and legal. Someone with something to lose will be defending their property or they may be enjoying their free time. Someone with nothing, one could assume, would use that weapon to acquire something. So it is no surprise, and probably stems from a fear of repercussions or revenge, that white Americans would associate armed blacks with violence. Considering America's racial history, black violence might be a no brainer. So there is white guilt mixed with fear, but media portrayal furthers a socially accepted combination of poverty, violence and crime. On top of it all there is the inability to share and give up some of what one has. After all America was built on the pull yourself up by your own bootstraps mentality. Wealth like poverty is justified. The American individualistic hermeneutic professes that any one can accomplish anything, and because of this ideal, poverty is seen as a personal deficiency.

Social class is one's position in a hierarchical social stratification based on income. Individuals who, as a group, receive similar levels of prestige within the community and who share similar tastes, interests, consumption patterns and lifestyles are of one *social status*. The term socioeconomic status (SES) "*refers to the combined influence of income, occupation, education, material possessions, cultural tastes and prestige on social ranking.*" (Brinkerhoff, White, Ortega) The way social class, upbringing and opportunity are seen in America are combinations of the "pull yourself up by your own bootstraps" Puritan individualistic work ethic and social Darwinian natural selection. SES, despite a reality of an archaic aristocracy and brutal defense of property, is seen as a just reward for work and general "goodness" but not as just a reward for control. Why is one so or so? There are two theories on social stratification and both have similarities and differences in meaning, yet are equally important, when considering race, class and power in the United States. *Functionalism* is the belief that every structure in society has a function. If it did not fulfill a function then it would disappear. Functionalism would point to the importance of poor people. We need poor people, if we are to have rich people. Thus slavery was eradicated because wage labor created a large enough work pool to complete the required tasks, minimized by mechanization. The added benefit of not being required to feed the workers through an unproductive winter made slavery so much more impractical. *Conflict theory* on the other hand states that social stratification is created and maintained through oppression and exploitation. Conflict theory would say that poor people are kept poor and disempowered. The simplest example would be that the minimal privileges of poor people are maintained through a racial divide that makes cooperation difficult or impossible. Both theories have truth. They are just two ways of seeing an event or a circumstance. As racism has kept the poor divided, race has become a cultural and political reality, where white and black have gained function in an American social reality. A mix of the belief in the personal culpability of poverty and negative assumptions about "black culture" feed a distrust of blacks and the poor and diminish a sense of national cohesion. Without poverty there would be no privilege, and thus to maintain privilege, there must remain signs of that privilege as well as

an obviousness of the citizens outside of that privilege. Symbolic privilege maintained poor white support of Jim Crow without economic gains for them. Poverty in social Darwinism, like race in America, is seen as a result of laziness and stupidity as opposed to the control of resources or networks of support.

In a study of four 5th grade classrooms, Jean Anyon found that *“teachers, like parents, emphasize docility and obedience in working class students and stress initiative and personal assertiveness in middle- and upper- class students, reinforcing the values believed to be necessary to succeed in the type of work performed in their social class. Rote learning and an emphasis on obedience prepares children for work that is mechanical and routine, whereas children taught to think independently and analytically are prepared for work as corporate and social leaders.”* (Bidwell and Mey 173) and we all know that schools and extracurricular activities are better in economically strong neighborhoods. Jobs are also easier to come by. Thus rich people have free time and extra money for recreation. America is an ex-colony. Just as any colony, the power structure is in place to placate and control the natives. National belonging rests elsewhere. Because America has no mother country this mentality has found a different loyalty and this is a loyalty to the ideals of unfettered capital, liberal economics and wealth itself. There is no cohesion among Americans.

Race *“is a category of persons who are related by common heredity or ancestry and who are perceived and responded to in terms of [genetically determined] external features or traits”.* (Wilkinson 185) Yet race is about expectations. To have a situation under control one has to know what to expect. Since race is a construct for the purpose of control, it makes sense that race would also have a lot to do with how one acts. The definitions of blackness and whiteness, despite changing through history are labels that not only imply physicality but also action or inaction. Because race was invented to justify slavery, conquest and colonialism, it makes sense that notions of hard-work, intelligence and willpower (action) would describe the dominant people while laziness, stupidity and vice (inaction) would describe the dominated. These definitions have evolved and are still evolving. Today gangster rappers argue about whose ass is the blackest and a recent book about “things white people like” is in many a yuppie’s bathroom. In these two instances blackness has to do with “street-smarts” and whiteness has to do with leisure time. White is ‘have’ and black is ‘have-not.’

There seems to be a pattern of some sort of strange coincidence of interest when whites preach a special doctrine to Negroes. Like the choice of theology when the plantation-owners saw to the Christianization of the slaves. Instead of the doctrines, which produced the rugged aggressively independent and justice-seeking spirit that we associated with Colonial America as the New England Conscience, the slaves were indoctrinated in the most submissive “trust-your-master,” “pie-in-the-sky after-you-die” form of Christianity. (Williams 75)

Race is not simply skin color but a code for social interaction and socio-economic status. Racial expectations are inherited from European aristocratic expectations.

The modern concept of a Caucasian race came from Johann Friedrich Blumenbach of Göttingen, the most influential of his generation of racial scholarship. He divided humans into five races by color — white, yellow, copper, tawny, and tawny-black to jet-black. He was convinced that people of the Caucasus were the paragons of beauty, but also placed residents of North Africa and India into the Caucasian category, sliding into a linguistic analysis based on the common derivation of Indo-European languages. This category became the term for a race known as “white.” *Some great American heroes, notably Thomas Jefferson and Ralph Waldo Emerson, continued the notion of white superiority. They adopted the Saxons as their ideal, imagining Americans (white) as direct and unalloyed descendants of the English, and later, for a time, the Germans. In general, Western labels for racial superiority moved thus: Caucasian → Saxon → Teutonic → Nordic → Aryan → white/Anglo.* (Gordon) This idea of racial superiority and thus American “whiteness,” implies cooperative and active citizenship. “That’s very white of you” still means it is correct, while some black parents can still be overheard telling their children, “act your age not your race.”

Where in a racially homogeneous Europe, at the time of America’s birth, poverty and a family lineage of lowliness was the antithesis to citizenship, in America the visual marker of skin color demonstrated the new hierarchy. Blackness, rooted in slavery was reinvented as the antithesis to active citizenship and whiteness defined universal citizenship in the egalitarian republic. As a European colony, America exhibited the military and economic superiority of Europeans over the southern hemisphere, and this was visible and reconfirmed in the racial divide of the population. Though Europeans developed race to validate imperialism, in America this world play of northern hemisphere against southern hemisphere became internalized, a result of the new world colonial arrangement. For the European ideal of the egalitarian nationalist (and thus white) society to be realized, the position the slave had to be that of non-being. No authentic human relation is possible when violence is the ultimate sanction. As aristocratic Europeans had stripped the poor and the conquered of humanity so in America were “blacks” stripped, marked not only by economics but by skin. Visually and socially removed from egalitarian society, the slave had to be stripped of humanity, reduced to mere property and removed from societal hierarchy of ownership. Thus to be black at America’s birth was not to be American but also not to have the protection of another state, a state of non-citizenship. *“The black is not a man... There is a zone of nonbeing, an extraordinary sterile and arid region, an utterly naked declivity where an authentic upheaval can be born.”* (Fanon 8) As opposed to the “legal free man” the slave is invisible and ignored. The tradition of European hierarchy in relation to property and control of that property was hidden under the social invisibility of the enslaved American humanity. It was necessary for the formation of this country that the slave not be legitimized. Because this country separated itself from the aristocratic divisions of the past and cloaked its existence in a vision directed to the future, to progress and to freedom, it was necessary that its non-free people be ignored and given the social status of non-citizens, a position separate from citizens but also removed from foreigners. Because blacks were not free they did not fit the definition

of what America was and America had to ignore its economic dependence on forced labor to promote its notion of egalitarian citizenry. Blacks were genealogically isolated.

“Formally isolated in his social relations with those who lived, he also was culturally isolated from the social heritage of his ancestors. He had a past, to be sure. But a past is not a heritage. Everything has a history, including sticks and stones. Slaves differed from other human beings in that they were not allowed freely to integrate the experience of their ancestors into their lives, to inform their understanding of social reality with the inherited meaning of their natural forebears, or to anchor the living present in any conscious community of memory. That they reached back for the past, as they reached out for the related living, there can be no doubt. Unlike other persons, doing so meant struggling with and penetrating the iron curtain of the master, his community, his laws, his policemen or patrollers, and his heritage.” (Patterson5)

As property, black were expected to accept both the history and thought process of the master. Unlike archaic slavery, the American slaves could not be completely dominated. They could not be adopted or absorbed into the culture of the conqueror, because their existence was a contradiction to the ideals of society. They had to remain separate. They had to remain permanently invisible, generation after generation, in a state of separation. So as blacks became visible and could no longer be ignored, they had to claim a history. To maintain the purity of superior Euro-American history, this history had to be clean and separated. There must be a “black” history. Blackness and the acceptance of that blackness on one hand proclaimed its identity as a rejection of white dominated history and one-sided “American-ness”, but in this rejection it maintained a separation and thus allowed for a continuation of a separate and pure patriotic “white” history. With the rise of black power, African-American history and now post race society, America has found ways of avoiding to meld its self-praising language and the imperfections of its society past and present. Thus it is possible for white Americans and even black Americans to have a notion of past glory days like the revolutionary times or the 50s, without seeing the whole of the times and the dependence on domination.

It is necessary that power be maintained in some degree. Though we may wish to live free and equal, we must always balance the freedoms of all with security. Where in our past the clearest example of one group losing their freedom and security that another may have heightened freedom and security is slavery, it is not solely the Black, who is not incorporated or is ignored. To be more specific it is not today’s black. Black is a construct but not a constant. It is a term to denote inferiority. Many and perhaps most whites came into this fledgling country as indentured servants who, though not as generationally bound as genealogical slaves, did not control there will and were not an active citizenry. When the Irish first started coming to America they were considered black. In the 30s: *“anarchist or socialist beliefs became a sign of racial inferiority, a premise strengthened by the presence of many immigrants and Jews among early-20th-century radicals. Whiteness thus became a*

method of stigmatizing dissenting ideas, a marker of ideological respectability.” (Gordon) Whiteness also became a matter of political cooperation but also economic participation. In her book The History of White People, Nell Irving Painter cites an estimate of 65,000 sterilized against their will by 1968 in the USA. *“While blacks and American Indians were disproportionately victimized, intelligence testing added many immigrants and others of “inferior stock,” predominantly Appalachian whites, to the rolls of the surgically sterilized.”* (Gordon 2) Appalachian whites, victims to an unregulated mining industry are still blamed for their situation. Look at the hicks in “Deliverance” or “Pulp Fiction.” Race is politics. In the early 20th century practice of ranking bloodlines, German blood was heavily downgraded after World War I. So the first misconception is the solidity of blackness. Blackness like whiteness is fluid. That it is constant is the first misconception. In a way the term “multiracial” ignores or beautifies the ugliness of American racism. By claiming multi-racial ethnicity there is the ability to ignore the polarity of American history. It is ignoring the Haves and Have-nots and claiming to “Have-some”. Now the world is not black and white and there is gray. To recognize this is realistic but to claim it is apathetic.

Another misconception is the blackness of poverty. On average blacks are poorer than whites but that is only because there are comparatively many rich whites compared to blacks. But this tends to hide the fact that there are many more poor whites in America than poor blacks. There is the belief that blacks are at the bottom of the totem pole. There is a belief that welfare is for blacks. Look at the popularity of the movie “Precious.” Although one could see this as an individual account, and one could look through to the quality of the book or film, the racial stereotypes that were displayed in the book are age old and strong. It is a depiction of a young racist black girl. She is uneducated, poor and on welfare. Who is to blame, the black man who sexually assaulted her? It was a moving story I will admit, but one that portrayed black as they have always been portrayed, slovenly, lazy, horny and dumb and black men as predators. As an African-American, *“her racial background represents only a third of welfare recipients nationally, She is an anomaly. Yet, somehow, she fits the image that Americans have of women who receive welfare- an image that is inaccurate.* (Seccombe 3) Yet this is many white peoples notion of welfare. Even if one recognizes the special situation of such a case I have heard people say something similar to: “that is not all blacks but there certainly are quite a few like that.”

The difficulty that I wish to address is one of allegiance and how this impregnates language. If whites praise the 50s then I think that they are reminiscent of a time when they feel Americans (rich and poor white people) stuck together. But the problem is that this was never so. The maintenance of these myths is important for the preservation of power. If the idea of ‘an eternal constant blackness of not having’ is kept intact as well as the whiteness of having, then the conflict of the poor against the poor and their competition for resources, jobs land and goods, will be more easily preserved. When extreme poverty is black then so is welfare. The picture that is painted in White American’s heads is one of American made (and white) tax dollars helping black people. I see a need for the welfare state in a healthy

democratic nation, but disregarding my personal belief I also see it necessary that people in that state recognize that that welfare system is there for people like them and not some undeserving other. That would be truly wonderful if Americans could see blacks or whites as in the same boat. This social flaw combined with an image of black poverty is insidiously harmful to a sense of national cohesion.

Identity Politics and the Tea Party

He is fighting for legalized smoke, a lower voting age, less lip from his generation gap and fucking in the street. Where is my parallel to that? All I want is a good home and a wife and a children and some food to feed them every night. (Scott-Heron, Comment#1)

The late Sixties spelled out a very important time for society. The Civil Rights Movement sought to equalize opportunity regardless of race. With the student revolts of the 1960 and the Hippie movement, the youth of America, the sons and daughters of the leisure class, sought to disavow their ownership. The western hermeneutic sought to ignore its strength and instead became obsessed with poverty, disenfranchisement and blackness. The emancipation of youth culture altered society on multiple levels. The effects on popular culture and individual freedom mark the culmination of European liberal ideals born in the French revolution, hanseatic capitalism, and Franco-German philosophy. In a search for ultimate freedom, the youth of the enfranchised looked to the disenfranchised, seeking to rid itself of the shackles of responsibility and also blame. Here is the constant conflict between freedom and security. Though people search for power and the ability to control their lives they also wish to be released from the culpability of these actions. Black is isolation. Black is the other. Black is struggle, but even more so black, as powerless, represents the inactive or reactive, even today.

The slave... could have no honor because he had no power and no independent social existence, hence no public worth. He had no name of his own to defend. He could only defend his master's worth and his master's name. That the dishonor was a generalized condition must be emphasized, since the free and honorable person, ever alive to slights and insults, occasionally experiences specific acts of dishonor to which, of course, he or she responds by taking appropriate action. The slave, as we shall see, usually stood outside the game of honor." (Patterson11)

So when "the inactive" lets its apathy go and begins to hope and to care, how does the victim demanding recognition and taking action, work into the America's image, and how does the next generation of the powerful deal with this vacuum of the abused? Western colonial thought was turned on its head and white culture sheds its master status or at least its master image. As black Americans strove to be among the Haves, white culture no longer wished to be the sole proprietor of responsibility and blame.

Funny enough America has always loved the underdog. The mythology of America is full of images of the little guy fighting against the big powers, notably, the individual against the system from George Washington vs. the King to Mickey vs. the Giant. So it should have come as no surprise that blacks demanded rights and that whites refused to support a war of imperialism. For whites to identify with their own underdog was perhaps inevitable. With America obsessed with the under-classes, oppression became a symbol of knowledge. Making a political statement had to be backed with sitting in the rain and suffering any way possible, fasting or living in the ghetto. The representation of struggle became a badge of validity.

“Irrespective of the perceived ‘correctness’ of the artwork, when reduced to its essence, community engaged art is most often a process of collectively making meaning via subjectivity that is translated into an aesthetic frame made most often by someone who does not have the exact same experience. The discussion on insider and outsider is of necessity a conversation on risk, privilege, and resources is echoed in all civic discourse. A subtle and often unconscious undercurrent makes discussion painful and evasive in the arts, as if one day someone shared the secret-to be an insider was the only moral way to work as an artist in a field of difference, given the dangers of misrepresentation- and from that day forward we found ourselves justifying our positions as insider of one or more marginalized groups- more black than white, more female than male, more poor than rich- or claiming a validity based on association. (Lacy 6)

The politics of identity is a politics of association. And it is a politics of representation. That said it is also a politics of disassociation. History has always linked to association. As a progression of conflicts nations identify with wins and losses. Thus a nation forms its national identity in relation to its perception of history. But America and its identity as a land of the free needed to reassess its image as large numbers of the ignored claimed voice. Coming through the civil rights movement, America has attempted to maintain its image of glory, incorporating civil rights into the grand narrative of enlightened progress, but the memory of this struggle and the opposition to that change is still fresh. Despite the ultra-Americanism of the Civil Rights’ ideologies, this movement was in conflict with America at large. The need to find a voice in a history that denied that voice, created a parallel history. But once this voice and history were created there is a necessity for dialog, otherwise this voice is nothing. To see American policy from the view of the victimized is a necessity and something that I see as a uniquely American opportunity. As a nation formed from citizens and non-citizens there is a possibility to form a more rounded national identity that does not beautify itself but recognizes wrongs with and as part of the rights.

It may be hip to be disenfranchised, but this claim to be disenfranchised is also a denial of the ownership of repression. I do not wish to praise guilt but I do see a necessity to own history, both good and bad. The danger with America’s specialized history is that it allows for people as groups to assign desired history to their heritage. Is the validity of culture a commodity? Should history be displays of

consumer choice? America is in denial of its reality. It is able to separate history, combine parts into a progressive story and believe it. But history is not made of moral lessons and its progression does not have a direction. History just happens, the good and the bad.

To dissimulate is to pretend not to have what one has. To simulate is to feign to have what one hasn't. One implies a presence, the other an absence. But the matter is more complicated, since to simulate is not to feign: 'someone who feigns an illness can simply go to bed and make believe he is ill. Someone who simulates an illness produces in himself some of the symptoms' (Littre). Thus, feigning or dissimulating leaves the reality principle intact: the difference is always clear, it is only masked; whereas simulation threatens the difference between the 'true' and 'false,' 'real' and 'imaginary.' Since the simulator produces 'true' symptoms, is he ill or not? He can be treated objectively either as ill, or as not ill. (Baudrillard 5)

It was necessary for blacks in America and the world to find black culture and history. After years of European dominance and black invisibility it was necessary to be legitimized and to be legitimized through knowledge of self. But the problem is that by maintaining black culture and history in America, the nation is able to have two histories; the patriotic history of George Washington, the Boston Tea Party, the second World War and even Abraham Lincoln or Martin Luther King, as well as black history; progressing from slavery and Jim Crow, maybe with Nat Turner and lynching, to Civil Rights, Black Pride, and Obama. The problem with this is that it does not realize the necessities of the bad in the good, when one considers the maintenance of power. It does not see lynching or even slavery as fundamentally American, yet slavery and subjugation was vital to the formation of this country. Without slaves this country would today be nothing. Lynching was necessary to the maintenance of power dynamics, by promoting white pride in poor whites, an abundant form of payment in lieu of monetary privilege. I am not saying that these things were good but that they were part of the American hermeneutic and thus way of life leading to and causing the Civil Rights Movement. Although the formation of black culture is necessary for giving colonized blacks equal footing in a cultural discussion, it is also important that the process continues. For America and especially for white Americans it is necessary that America's history, in its entirety, be realized. Historical pride is the beginning of disillusion. History can also be owned without notions of pride or shame but as a lesson in human interaction to not be forgotten. The beautification of history is the continued invisibility of blackness. Because black people, the token of "blackness", are visible to the eye, be it on television and in magazines or be it in the White House or the playing field, some foolish Americans assume that we have reached a post-race era. But "Blackness", the understanding of America's self-righteous image as a contradiction to and cover up of America's internal oppression, remains invisible. Blacks on TV, even Obama, do not represent black thought. Their constant portrayal does not help black people gain voice. Though they are black and I will admit that I too gain joy from seeing black representation, joy is not political power. America has a lot to give the world

in entertainment: film, sports, and music. Today American entertainment has a black face, yet Gobineau, the father of Eugenics, said:

Most certainly the Black element is indispensable in developing a race's artistic genius, for we have seen what a profusion of fire, of flames, of sparks, flights of fancy and a lack of reflection reside in its essence, and how much the imagination, this reflex of sensuality, as well as material appetites enslave themselves to the impressions that create the arts, indeed to a degree of intensity wholly unknown to the other families of humans. This is my point of departure, and if there is nothing more to add, certainly the Negro would appear, as the lyric poet, the musician, the sculptor par excellence. (Wright 48)

American entertainment is in Blackface. Their presence is cosmetic. Black presence acts as a banner for the progress of American thought. America waves the flag of historical progress, claiming emancipation and civil rights as its own, when America as a nation stood in the way of such developments till the last straw. It is good that there is a black man in the White House, but it does not mean that all black people become legitimate active Americans, only that America's self righteous image is legitimized. To make matters worse, whites use this as an example of their oppression. Combined with Affirmative action, blaming of blacks for crime and immigration issues, white extremists are speaking of the need to take their country back. Since they haven't lost it, I wonder about the meaning of this statement. It might well be a claim to the maintenance of the white supremacy of the 50's and the retention of an established power dynamic, which is threatened. The problem is that the oversaturation of black faces by the media when they in reality represent such a minimal power, gives racist whites, a feeling of legitimacy in blaming blacks for their powerlessness or poverty.

"People who have unequal access to economic, political, and social opportunities or who possess characteristics that are defined "inferior" by the dominant group. Notice that the sociological definition of minority group makes no reference to numerical size. As in the case with African Americans in several U.S. cities, a group can be numerically the largest, yet be considered a minority group because of its comparative lack of access to economical, political, and social resources." (Bidwell and Mey)

This is an interesting definition, because it states that minority must not actually be the smallest numerically, as minority would imply. The fluidity of language and the claim of the middle-class interest me. When people point to affirmative action legislation and taxes on the middle-class as a general restriction of freedoms in America, they place mainstream America in the fold of the minority social movement. Social movement theory is, "*a Marxist derived conceptualization of social action that posits direct class or cultural opposition, i.e., conflict or class warfare, as the site of social action and mobilization.*" (Patrick 10) There has been desire among liberal whites since the 60's to take on the aura of subjugation, and to become a minority. If a minority is a social status, then conservative whites too want to take

part in identity politics, become their beloved underdog and own both the status of oppressor and oppressed.

At the forefront is the Tea Party and their claim to oppression under the first Black President, who some claim is not even American? The Tea Party talks about true American-ness. The Tea Party website displays an article about the alienation of black conservatives by “Blacks” upon accessing it. There are black tea party members but they play a similar role in the Tea Party as Obama does for the Nation. Once again I am glad that there are blacks in the Tea Party as I am glad that Obama is in the White House, but I worry about representation as an end and not as a means. The Tea Party uses oppression and the claim of racism to delegitimize black claims of racial discrimination and black organizations, claiming to be beyond race. The issue that I am attacking is that of assumption and representation. There are wealthy blacks in this picture, conservative blacks, poor whites. Wealthy blacks may feel legitimized in priding themselves in their accomplishments. After all they have found success in a nation that defines blackness as poverty. Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas does not think that blacks need handouts and that they should pull themselves up by their own bootstraps. But one cannot escape history nor can you escape your skin. Henry Louis Gates was surprised and upset at being questioned outside of his own house when trying to enter without a key, as if fame and money excluded him from his blackness. He believed that he belonged.

Now that Henry Louis Gates' Jr. has gotten a tiny taste of what “the underclass” undergo each day, do you think that he will go easier on them? Lighten up on the tough love lectures? Even during his encounter with the police, he was given some slack. If a black man in an inner city neighborhood had hesitated to identify himself, or given the police some lip, the police would have called SWAT. When Oscar Grant, an apprentice butcher, talked back to a BART policeman in Oakland, he was shot! (Reed)

Henry Louis Gates has assumptions about wealth. Where whites are given freedom to have varied political and economic affiliations, normal blackness is confined. Having heard Glenn Beck discuss with a collection of conservative blacks, why blacks in America call themselves African American instead of just American, I was struck by Mr. Beck inability to understand not being able to lose the African hyphenated title. He could understand how his Christianity molded and shaped his American-ness but not how blackness could do the same. Glen Beck in essence saw a claim to Christianity as inclusive in American yet a claim to African origin as exclusive from American. The problem is an American tradition, the tradition of black exclusion. I understand that national pride makes it easier to see religious freedom as an American Ideal as opposed to apartheid or slavery. Black and American will always be contradictory until America is able to redefine itself and to recognize that American Racism is older that the Bill of Rights. America must recognize this racism, accept it and change it. Perhaps this is my version of a combined multiculturalism and national pride. I do not want to return to 1776 or to 1865 or to 1968, but I wish that Americans could realize that it is not the races or

the recognition of difference that is the problem, but the assumptions that accompany race and class and the preemptive oppression that ensues. This is the problem of claiming to have reached a Post-Race era simply with the election of a black president. There has been a push to define America as the most progressive nation. Defining itself a true multicultural nation, America wants a new image. It wants to get rid of its history of oppression without dealing with it. It wants blacks to just stop thinking and accept their place. Is Obama the first Black president? What does that mean if we consider that Clinton was also the first black president? America doesn't know what black is and that is the problem. The confusion comes from years of contradictory information always changing to fit a status quo. Is the Tea Party black? If it were, it would not be parading through the streets with loaded guns, at least, not for long.

Culture, Commodity and Babylon

Culture is seen as an intermediate space between a given individual and relevant others, between, say husband and wife, parent and child, the living and the dead, or between past and present. The intermediate function is constituted and expressed primarily via the body as a surface of both separations and contacts. As a self-confined space and one contact, the body allows for the mediation between fusion and separation, corporeality and language, subjective images and shared symbols. Thus, the 'potential space' develops between the infant and its mother on the basis of maternal care, nursing, enveloping sounds and odors, the smile, touch, and embrace, and the alternative presence and absence of the mother. This potentiality gradually becomes the "site of cultural experience". At this interface between inner and outer, body and enveloping cult house, self and others, the patient participates in the cultural heritage, meanwhile satisfying his own needs while making sense out of his affects and memories... (Devisch 49)

Culture is all around us. It is the relations we have: familial, social and economic. Culture seen as a historical progression, implies the ever growing desire on the part of mankind and especially "civilized nations" to better mans condition and to evolve in a direction away from "savagery." The West's portrayal of the other and its portrayal of its evolving relationship from the other, act as a signifier of western culture's view of its superiority and as a marker of the West's rationality and benevolence. The visual arts serve dual purposes. They both entertain people and express a belief. A painting could be pleasing to the eye as an interactive artwork could involve passers by. A photo could highlight an idealized beauty or show the distaste at a historical event. As far as entertainment goes, a work of art will either target your emotions or your opinion. As far as belief, even if art just shows a pretty picture, this is in itself a statement on beauty. From the German's analysis of Greek gods to the representation of blacks in Italian painting, blackness or "otherness" from the European standpoint has always highlighted the status quo by its departure from it. The progress of culture, of which I, as an artist, am an active participant and collaborator, tends to support and solidify this cultural control

hermeneutic. Whereas “otherness” previously acted as a dead cultural mark of the West’s cultural developments away from savagery, today “otherness” is paraded as a part of the whole.

“In all societies, of course, there is a distinction between what is actually going on and the mental structures that attempt to define and explain the reality... It is the difference, for example between the legal codes and the jurisprudence of a culture, and their application to actual legal practice and procedure, The mental structures have some basis in reality, although their explanatory power varies considerably from one culture to another, More important, they not only reflect with varying degrees of accuracy the reality that informs them, but in turn feed back and shape the ordering of that reality” (Patterson19)

Don’t get me wrong, the West has done a lot for the distribution of wealth to its citizens, and for the development of the resources that we now have at hand. But, we are facing a time where resources are becoming scarce and where the access to resources are limited. Liberalization, rationalism and democracy, the corner stones of Western thought, have boosted the growth of western nations. Western thought and their brainchild Western culture have expanded to cover the globe. The supreme operative, progress, is the leader of how nations rise and fall. But if *“we recognize the ideological character of our Enlightenment vocabulary and question the claims made for the secular- that its truths are lucid, rationally demonstrable, and objective- we may begin to conceptualize the hidden (or perhaps the better word is disguised) ritual content of secular ceremonies.”* (Karp/Lavine 90) In America culture is commoditized. The problem with culture today is that it is removed from people. It has become something distant and elite, or it has become something for holidays. Culture is no longer lived. It is experienced. It is entertainment. With the removal of religion as the leading ideology of societies and the progression away from an obvious ruler or ruling class, we have lost a base upon which we may offer change and an obvious force against which to rebel. In a state of progress we are trapped in a certain social liminality. We are constantly in a state of flux, away from what we deem as primitive but without a goal and without steps upon which to rest. We are like initiates in a ritual. We are all like slaves, the Blacks in the new world, ripped from culture and brought over here. As there is a slow push toward equality, all people become more and more controlled through the substances they need (food, water, housing) and the accessories that are not necessary to live but make it more enjoyable. We are all in a position without social standing. As slavery and blackness masked the hierarchy of whites in slavery, the control of people through what they own or don’t own, masks the presence of a stable hierarchy today. Rastafarian belief sees western society as a constant state of slave status. The Babylon slave ship is not simply the mode of travel but the middle passage itself. It is a state of transition. But mostly it is the powerlessness of being in between without a way out except death. We have for the most part accepted the state of slaves, incorporated in society yet only reacting and not being active players. We are reaching equality, for *“the slaves must be equal: without tyranny there has never yet been freedom or equality, but in the herd there is equality...”* (Dostoyevsky 399), but it is equality in powerlessness.

In the Babylon slave ship, culture as opposed to being a lived part of life has become an identifier, and identity. Although it does act as a catalyst for community, this community is often separate from the economic livelihood of the members and thus instable, transient and designated to evenings, holidays, and weekends. In effect, this results in the culture realizing itself as a form of banner waving for the society at-large. It is a form of placing an individual and categorizing that person within the larger society. It has become a commodity. Days of celebration whether religious, ethnic or national are spent with a sense of belonging that goes away the next day when all people are back home or at work. Without the sense of village or community, which should be self-sufficient entities, culture is in essence reminiscent and romanticized. Although the sense of belonging may be very strong, the communities to which culture may belong are for the most part economically neutered. Much like the eunuchs of the harem, culture although being strong and even active is unable to procreate and thus chronologically disempowered. Culture no longer has power. It is a mask, a separation, and a veil. It has become a commodity.

Many People in the US and Europe, for example, criticize 'modern society' for being 'too materialistic', by which they mean that it is a consumer society. Except that most Indians neither use nor define the word 'materialistic', we would say that such a society is extremely non-materialistic. US society abstracts. Objects are not seen as themselves, but are abstracted as symbols. A monetary and/or status value is the only value object can have in that society. Thus a set of car wrenches are not valued because one can use them to build a car which will be valuable for getting from one place to another. The wrench set is valued because one uses them in the 'trade'. They are tools for making money at the 'trade' of working in the corporation's auto plant. Money is valued as a tool for obtaining status and security in an alienating system that finally denies any status and security so that most people will keep reaching for it. The car is also used in the same way, and not as an object for getting from one place to another. Clothes are not valued because they are well made to perform their function and are pleasing to look at, but for their status value. One is not able to consider clothes outside the fashion/identity aspect of status.

So objects, the things that make and sustain our lives (and even food is abstracted) are made to seem to not be objects. One is supposed to use them only to transcend them, and the ultimate result, the ultimate alienation, is that one is made to abstract the 'object' of one's own body, one's self. To transcend 'the flesh' is a Christian and American concept. Our goal is supposed to be to use television sets, cars, tools, food, clothes, houses, as a ladder to escape- to get to heaven." (Durham 17)

Durham in essence is describing Marx's notion of Capitalist Commodity Fetishism. "Relations of dependence are 'disguised under the shape of social relations between the products of labor.' Commodities are seen as autonomous entities, divorced entirely from labor and the unequal relations of laborer and capitalist who produced them.

The power relationship is no longer viewed as a power over persons but as a power over commodities.” (Patterson 19) As Frederic Jameson says, “the market has become a substitute for itself and fully as much a commodity as any of the items it includes within itself” (Schechner 115) Culture too has also become a product in its own right. Progress and evolution are sold to us as the dawn of a new age, be it the Nuclear Age or the Communication Age. In America, belief systems and culture have reached symbolic representation. This comes from the American need to balance ideas of slavery, private property, egalitarianism and individualism.

The prevailing view of ownership, which persists as a fundamental legal concept in continental civil law and is now universally employed as a social concept even in countries such as Britain and America in spite of its irrelevance to common law, is the Roman view that it is a set of absolute rights in “rem”-things, usually tangibles, sometimes intangibles. The whole weight of Anglo-American jurisprudence, as well as the sociology and economics of property, comes down heavily against the validity of such a concept. Why is this? Because first, in sociological and economic terms (as in the view of common law) there can be no relation between a person and a thing. Relations can exist between persons. Second, relations between persons with respect to some object are always relative, never absolute. (Patterson 20)

So it is necessary for the relation between people who are also things and their owners to be possible. Slaves have always been a symbol of ones power. They are a symbol of wealth and power over people, both over slaves and in the community at large. Today objects, like clothing, jewelry, cars, televisions or even partner are symbols of wealth. There is certain equality in the distribution of these symbols, but they must not necessarily be acquired through a power over people. Most commodities are available to all if they are willing to pay regardless of the dent that it places in their finances or the dept that it puts them in.

The Enlightenment notion of freedom holds an interesting definition and the development of this language coincides with the evolution of the modern capitalist democracy. Whereas the clarity of control under slavery was clear when seen as a human (black and white) perspective. When observed from a purely white perspective, where blackness is a state of non-being or property, then this property helps to define the owner within an owner society. Thus, there is the internal white hierarchy, which is built around white relationship to blackness or that non-relationship, i.e.: wealthy landowners compared to the slave-less poor. This creates the illusion of equality, because if blackness is disregarded, which it was, then human interactions of power are performed not by one individual upon another but rather through these individual’s property. The obviousness of black non-being made white poverty bearable. Even though poor whites gained no economic advantages from slavery they gained a notion of belonging, which the slave and its existence created the border to. Freedom isn’t free. I think this phrase epitomizes American Freedom. The notion that freedom has a cost is the notion of American Freedom. If freedom is the freedom of control over ones individual property and not

the notion of rights within the public sphere, then it is clear that there is a hierarchy or gradation of freedom that corresponds with what one owns and controls. That said, our society has reached a state of equality where all men are created equal with equal power. But this power is only on the individual level and only corresponds to what you have. Thus the power itself is the same, but obviously the more that one owns, the amount of affect around you is increased. It is hard for me to grasp, almost profound, but as I understand, by ignoring or moving beyond direct control over people power has become equalized, yet the radiation of that power has become the measure of control. So we are all free but the exercise of that freedom is economically bound. Whereas freedom was the freedom to produce, as it is equalized, it becomes the freedom to consume. Without power over production freedom is becoming the freedom to be apathetic, for all Americans. *To speak of an alienated society is to speak of people robbed of their culture, always so that some political system can exploit them.* (Durham 12)

Control over people is not accepted in the language of enlightenment Europe. With the combined affects of first the Civil Rights Movement and then the identity politics of the 70s there is a switch of the idea of freedom from the ability of individuals to act within the social sphere to the protection of maintaining control over property and information and these are used. Like the Supreme Court decision to allow unlimited spending toward campaign propaganda, is made in the defense of the freedom of speech, freedom is not just the ability to say something but also the amount of times you say it and the decibel level. The only difference is money. Freedom isn't free. Just as America has a definition of race that is not constant and thus cannot be universally defined, so has America's racialized history also been compartmentalized and removed Americans from the debate of national cohesion or combined heritage. America is still in a process of definition. It is in a process of disowning parts of its formation in the pursuit of a glorified self-image.

African Americans never were "immigrants" in the American sense of the word. Blackness in America, defines whiteness or "real" American-ness. In this dichotomy, blackness is an inability or refusal to ignore the long-term socializing effects of a racist past. The use of either "real-America" or "Multicultural" has the same desired reaction. They both will a beautification or gentrification of history and the acceptance of a social control hermeneutic, one through a denial of the realities of past hypocrisy and the other through the denial of present inequalities. If we are to progress only under banners of progress and not in control of resources and communities, then we are trapped in mental slavery, a constant middle passage.

The power relation has three facets. The first is social and involves the use or threat of violence in the control of one person by another. The second is the psychological facet of influence, the capacity to persuade another person to change the way he perceives his interests and his circumstances. And third is the cultural facet of authority, 'the means of transforming force into right and obedience into duty.' ... Rousseau felt that the source of 'legitimate powers' lay in those 'conventions' which today we call culture." (Patterson1-2)

The question is: with the end of slavery, where has the social rung inhabited by the slave gone. If we are to believe that it was not ideological but economic then it is to assume that the same amount of work is still to be done with the same amount of output. *"The problem in a slaveholding society, however, was that it was usually necessary to introduce new persons to the status of slaves because the former slaves either died out or were manumitted. The worker who is fired remains a worker, to be hired elsewhere. The slave who was freed was no longer a slave."* (Patterson 3) I personally see history as active. As we act and speak we are forming history. The invention of us by ourselves is in actuality an extension of our will. As one invents himself he is complementing his will. This is developing a unifying consciousness. It is the definition and conservation of us. It is important that the progress of multiculturalism is not like the incorporation of "primitive art" into the museum. As Ybarra Frausto says of art *"as an ideology (pluralism) makes a peripheral place for new possibilities without allowing them to challenge the central idioms of "Euro-centered art." Most often, this incorporation occurs under "categorizations of 'ethnic art' as primitivistic and folkloric..."* (Karp/Lavine 83) America has a strong culture to which no one really belongs. This is a culture of liminality. Like the state of a slave we have a strong awareness of culture but there is either no power of the individual within the culture or there is no binding power of the culture within the society at large. Culture is reduced to marginal groups, fighting for recognition. As once only slaves were present, without responsibility but also without validity, so too are all Americans entering this liminal stage. In electing Barack Obama, America has joined the echelons of young rich kids joining the fight of the under-classes. Why is someone like Obama so important for America and for the American psyche? Is Barack Obama America's "Che Guevara" T-shirt, while it's in college? It is the appearance of progress. It is the appearance of acceptance. Despite it's appearance American multiculturalism is the negation of blackness.

Power, Art and the Duty of the "Black" Artist

Let's be very clear from the outset. Multiracial categorization is an aggressive defense of white supremacy. Multiracial census categorization, particularly in the era of what some are calling the first Black and multiracial president, is, unintended, the bulked up steroid-induced version of the old sports aphorism that "the best defense is a good offense." By aggressively encouraging younger generations to identify officially as multiracial the national desire to disappear worsening racial divides gets further juice by offering folks a chance to both adopt the illusion of the "post-racial" and to seemingly categorize themselves away from, if not out of, oppression. The beautiful dialectic traditionally developed in this country's form of white supremacy was its built-in inability to be white and forced inclusion into Black which has made Black America, if even to a fault, among the most diverse, open and accepting communities in the world. It also increased the potential that that community would become more threatening to white domination, which has led to the centuries-long development of neocolonial-styled

light-skin privilege as a mechanism of siphoning off some of the more willing participants in an escape from blackness. (Ball)

Culture has both familial and socio-economic aspects. By denying people power over one or both is to make them dependent. *“As Georg Hegel realized, total personal power taken to its extreme contradicts itself by its very existence, for total domination can become a form of extreme dependence on the object of one’s power, and total powerlessness can become the secret path to control of the subject that attempts to exercise such power.”* (Patterson 2) If we look at race relations that developed out of American slavery, on the simplest cultural note we see the crisis that the status quo has come upon in having defined itself in contradiction to itself. As the invisible minority grows in numbers and cultural strength America must also redefine itself to fit the populace that can no longer be squelched. My hope is that colored culture be accepted into the American definition, not simply as a bad part of history or as a stain or as a minority, but as a full part. The building of this nation is indebted to colored people. Their experience, the experience of not belonging and the anger of rejection are also very American. It must be realized that this is not just the black experience but also the American experience. The land is soaked in blood and that will not be washed away. The Ghosts will not sleep and violence will rein till the dead get a proper burial.

The fear that I have is that the fear of the anti-affirmative action conservatives is based on a reality that will not go away. Maybe there is just not enough to go around. It is no doubt that if more people are accepted then less will be there for the taking. This is an old American dilemma. As Sitting Bull said *“If I agree to dispose of any part of our land to the white people I would feel guilty of taking food away from our children’s mouths, and I do not wish to be that mean.”* In the end it comes down to one’s family and tribe. There is a human trait that helps those closest first. This is perhaps the birth of Western thought. There is a human desire to accomplish, to provide and to care. WEB Du Bois said *“for their worlds I longed for, and all their dazzling opportunities, were theirs, not mine, but they should not keep these prizes, I said: some, all, I would wrest from them. Just how I would do it I could never decide: by reading law, by healing the sick, by telling the wonderful tales that swam in my head...”* (Du Bois 8) There is no human flaw with America or with Europe or with Whites. But there is an inherent tribalism. Tribalism has good qualities such as caring, protecting and educating. But when it meets with the other it can be brutal if resources are limited. When times get hard rules change. With hard economic times approaching there is new fears rising. Because this Nation is still divided the hate is close to the surface. I hear my neighbor complain about people on welfare and paying taxes to support it. He feels taken advantage of. He is reminiscent of an earlier time. Companies are spoon fed money to set up shop and don’t bring new jobs here in Buffalo, NY, and he complains about a family on welfare. Maybe he is selfish and doesn’t want to pay taxes. But maybe he is struggling. My biggest fear is that as long as there remains this hate in the populace, there remains apathy to larger problems. There is a constant battle between security and freedom. But in a place where for 400 years people were denied their freedom, there is an automatic

breach in security, the security of the oppressor, if they are granted freedom. Power wielded over them will need to be relinquished or transferred. America has and is experiencing a slow relinquishing and transfer of that power. For the sake of security, it is slow. Americans could accept an all-American human tribalism as a nation and look for the well being of all people here instead of all people that look or think like they do, but maybe we are all riding in the Babylon slave ship. There is the potential that we have all accepted mental-economic slavery without even knowing it. But there is always hope. Gandhi, when asked what he thought of western civilization said, "*I think it would be a good idea.*" (McEvilley 37) Ain't that the truth?

Despite the push to negate blackness through the claim to a multicultural unity, America's blackness is still here and can help America. America must recognize how the wrongs that it has done to blackness is the knife that must be heated up to cauterize the wound. "Nigger", "negro" or "negra" are old terms. They highlight a racist past. They are "uncomfortable" words. I do not propose that we return to this language, yet I am troubled that America has a self-induced amnesia. By solely not talking racism, America is simply continuing the beautification of the past that has fed history for so long. Why was Huckleberry Finn cut from school reading lists? Was it to avoid offending people or was it to hide the nonchalance with which the word Nigger was used by whites. This language and the history of its use should not be forgotten. For Schools to discuss the use of this word and the ramifications of slavery would be more beneficial then ignoring the past racism of whites. It is important that America not clean up this past but recognize it. As many Jews and Germans have committed to never forgetting, Americans must also commit. Because it is a question of forming an American culture, as an artist I recognize my historical role in the Vanguard of this beautification process. My worry is that by jumping to a post race era, "We" are furthering the invisibility of blackness and ignoring the harshness of our past. I don't want to get rid of black and white but create a dialog between black and white however they may be defined. America is a colony and American culture is colonial culture. It is important to not forget where America has come from. It is important that the binary that has created America not be glazed over but act as a catalyst for discussion and redefinition. Although I also see a need for multicultural acceptance, it must not come through the complete annihilation of blackness. To accept Blackness in America is to accept that there is a difference of opinions and a fissure. To accept blackness is to accept active participation of the ignored.

Art and its history have always paid their due in forming ideals, imagery and history of people. "*Art history displaces history, purges it of social and political conflict, and distills it down to a series of triumphs, mostly of individual genius.*" (Karp/Lavine 92) Disregarding historical affiliations, as an artist I am definitely a perpetrator. I have inherited the European art tradition. How could I not? How could I disavow it? Even if I was always drawn to African and Polynesian art, this art, these objects are only there as a symbol. Even if one can praise their craft and the care put into them, these

“exotic objects displayed in museums are there only because of the history of Western imperialism and colonial appropriation, and that the only story such objects can tell is the history of their status as trophies of imperial conquest.” (Karp/Lavine 16) If this is true then we see that in the imperialist mentality inclusion is an act of ownership. Thus to show other cultures is not only an act of respect for craftsmanship but also a realization of this cultures domination and infusion into the cultural hermeneutic of the leading culture.

What is at stake in struggles for control over objects and modes of exhibiting them, finally, is the articulation of identity. Exhibitions represent identity, either directly, through assertion, or indirectly, by implication. When cultural “others” are implicated, exhibitions tell us who we are and, perhaps most significant, who we are not. Exhibitions are privileged arenas for presenting images of self and “other”. (Karp/Lavine 15)

Art’s display and history is a gentrification of history. *“Marzio (Peter) insists upon general European and American art history as the necessary background against which to view these categories (minority and non-western art) of works, although he grants that they may expand the “aesthetic boundaries and definitions of fine art”* (Steven D. Lavine, *Hispanic Art in the United states*, Karp/Lavine 80) I would have to agree to an extent. My opinion is that European and American art history is not a necessary background to view this art but that it would be foolish to try to ignore the influence. The arrival of Europeans to the new world is pivotal to all New World experiences. Let us look for example to the evolution of Hispanic art in the United States of America. The influence on Hispanic America from Spain, very much entrenched in the European art and historical tradition, can hardly be ignored. The importance of U.S. economic power and influence has been pivotal to the economic and governmental developments (or lack there of) in Latin America. What I do find very interesting about Hispanic culture in the USA is because of its place as a minority culture in opposition to the mainstream of the US, it is freed from the image of Euro-domination. Regardless of Latin American politics, Latino culture has an indigenous aura to it. What is the most important thing is for People to define themselves. I think that artistic definition is a start, but the definition must also be economic and political. Somewhere there is path between resistance and assimilation. There is *“A classic pattern in American history of distinct cultures colliding with the mainstream and attempting somehow to reconcile the competing claims of resistance and assimilation. Thus we were not merely representing Hispanic art to the mainstream: we were representing American art to itself, and arguing (as we have in other exhibitions) for a more fluid, more heterodox vision of American culture.”* (Livingston and Beardsley *Poetics and Politics of Hispanic Art* Karp/Lavine 111) Though this author focuses on Hispanic art, I do not see this as a Hispanic problem. The problem lies with the ex-slaveholding colonial mentality of US of A.

As an art scholar I see the art museum as a good example of how the inclusion of cultures, multiculturalism, may be used to entrench a “Leitkultur” and rather than empower dominated, minority or fringe cultures, simply use them as a backdrop or

as a highlight for the dominant power structure's good will and inclusiveness. I like to see America as an experiment. It is an experiment of the Hegelian Triad. The thesis is an intellectual proposition. The antithesis is simply the negation of the thesis, a reaction to the proposition. The synthesis solves the conflict between the thesis and antithesis by reconciling their common truths, and forming a new proposition. True I am of African Heritage. I am an American Negro. I am Black. But this is not my problem. My problem is that of an American. My problem is America's problem not a black problem. Thus I have formed the NRAACP. Perhaps it is so important to me because of my heritage or my upbringing, but I do not own it due to my difference. I own it as one. I own it together with all that are one. Change is going to come.

The Menace of Violence and the Formation of the NRAACP

The vigor of the youth can be channeled into constructive militant actions. It is simply a matter of common sense to have these young Negroes constructively fight racial injustice rather than fight among themselves. (Williams 77)

You can have all the gun control laws in the country, but if you don't enforce them, people are going to find a way to protect themselves. We need to recognize that bad people are doing bad things with these weapons. It's not the law-abiding citizens; it's not the person who uses it as a hobby. (Michael Steele, RNC chair)

In 2008, the Supreme Court struck down the 1976 DC handgun ban as unconstitutional. I was not so sure whether I found this good or bad. On the one hand, I see a need to deal with gun violence in America's cities. On the other hand, considering America's history of racial violence, I was worried that by disarming black urban citizens, the USA would leave its black population at the hands of the authorities and possibly armed white militias. In the USA there are "sensitive issues" controlled by a staunch loyalty to belief, not allowing opposing sides to discuss events and possible resolutions clearly. I see the specter of Madisonian Factionalism looming. "Madison worried that U.S. democracy would degenerate into a condition in which groups or factions blindly pursued their self-interests with no thought to the common good." (Patrick 23) In the time leading up to the election and culminating in the election of the first black president and the less celebrated killing of Oscar Grant by BART (Bay Area Transit Police) officers, I was amazed that Conservatives and Liberals could not talk to each other. Every word was twisted or blown out of proportion. I was shocked at the way a historical view of some black citizens, expressed by Michelle Obama and Reverend Jeremiah Wright, could be not only disagreed with, but neither fathomed nor given legitimacy. Thus I was searching for a forum to get both Black experience with White experience and Conservative ideologies with Liberal ideologues. Seeing the uniqueness of the America's gun laws compared to other industrialized nations, I felt the need to research arms in America. The uniqueness of inner city violence in America that can be compared to Brazil or South Africa is truly devastating.

America is historically a colonial government. Despite recent progress that has been won by the struggle of black people and their white supporters, blacks in America were given the role of the second class citizen for 193 of America's 232 years of existence. America has a violent history. The issues of race that received national attention due to the running of a black-man in the presidential-race, have brought America's troubled history to light. What I see as the cause for unaddressed-history is a polarization of opinions that leaves the other side room only to be insane, uninformed, or evil. Though it is recognized that wrong was done, there is an aversion to fixing economic wrongs and inequities. There is no sense of help for fellow countrymen. This may be part of the legacy of individualism, but it truly separates this country from other industrialized nations. This has more to do with race than anything else. Americans have no problem with help for their neighbors or family but some, maybe many see helping the "poor", as wasting money, because it helps the lazy and thus "un-American" people here. America has immigration problems, but it has a problem with its internal borders and its definition of citizen. It has not yet defined itself. The questions of race and allegiance to America, brought up with Michelle Obama saying "This is the first time in my adult life that I am proud to be an American," are themes that need to be addressed. Why all Americans don't automatically understand that the process of inclusion was a fierce battle that still wages for many is beyond me. The steps that have been made toward equality need to be seen for what they are; not gifts dolled out by the American Governments, but gains fought for and died for to obtain dignity in the face of death and in opposition to the wishes of the American white majority. It is a process that lasted over 100 years after the federal government had given the word but refused the force.

The struggles of the Freedom Riders and the Sit-In Movements have concentrated on a single goal: the right to eat at a lunch counter, the right to sit anywhere on a bus. These are important rights because their denial is a direct personal assault on a Negro's dignity. It is important for the racists to maintain these peripheral forms of segregation. They establish an atmosphere that supports a system. By debasing and demoralizing the black man in small personal matters, the system eats away the sense of dignity and pride, which are necessary to challenge a racist system. But the fundamental core of racism is more than atmosphere- it can be measured in dollars and cents and unemployment percentages. (Williams 38)

The leniency of the Federal government on the traitors after the Civil War and the acceptance of Racial-Apartheid in America imply that the north accepted racism and that the only things proven by the Civil War were that business is better than agriculture and although Americans may bear arms, it is not for the purpose of overthrowing its Government. Not setting an example of the South, laid the ground for the struggle for equality and representation that has made black-Americans such a strong and in some cases independently thinking, intellectual force in America. This experience as hard as it may have been has formed independent thought in this country. *"The Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, - a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. "(Du Bois 8)*

American history has created the black. The struggle of blacks in the 60s and 70s was a struggle to define. It was a struggle to realize, and it was a struggle to fully make a break from whiteness. It was necessary to form Black History. It was necessary because blacks were invisible and robbed of history. Before they laid their claim they were a non-being. But now as we supposedly reach a post race era, what will become of black history? What will become of African-American history? Can America accept its dark side. Can America say: "Yes we are Slavery. Yes we are Jim Crow. Yes, we are colonial conquest and the execution of baby Indians." Can American Pride admit wrong? My hope is that this thought process enter America at large. My hope is that America may accept black dissent as something American-made and American, something that will heal and form the new America. It is vital for this country, for the separation of history into the beautiful white and patriotic history and the dark shameful black history, has allowed racist-white America to hold onto its values, without questioning what American means. To have lived in Germany and to have witnessed the aversion to war and genocide that is a result, I believe to the extreme annihilation of the cities and the people, I feel that there is a benefit to extreme difficulty. After the assault to America's hegemony, with the 911-Attack on the World Trade Center, America has looked inside itself. I will admit that the reactions were not all well thought out, but a wound was opened and I ask, "Is that you America?" It bothered me that the same people who considered Jerry Farwell's Sept 13 address to the 700 club where he blamed America for 911, due to *"the abortionists, pagans, feminists, gays, lesbians, the ACLU, and People for the American Way, as well as the secularization of America,"* as either not a problem or at most an honest mistake, could be so up in arms when the Reverend Jeremiah Wright said *"the Chickens have come home to roost."* Is America the people in it or is it the Foreign policy? I know that language is used to manipulate ideas and to imply without saying. I want to get through this bastardization of language. If language is to communicate, why is it so easy to use it to hide? There was an effort to unify Americans after the World Trade Center bombing, but sadly enough it was unity of hate, that good ol' American unity. I truly had hope that Americans would see the connection between the hypocrisy of spoken freedom and acted repression and America's foreign policy. For black Americans born before 1965, who tasted dictatorship while their county waved the flag of freedom over their head as if in mockery, this connection should be clear.

The NAACP and the NRA are both organizations that address as organized peoples the rights of individuals as written in and protected by the Constitution and it's Amendments. They are both engaged in "defining America". This is a hard and dangerous road to follow. America is in this respect a melting pot and still searches for its meaning and its identity, outside of being an ex-colony. *"Whether from the right or from the left, whether the topic is Panama or Mapplethorpe, criticism in the US must ultimately depend upon the "American"-ness or "un-American"-ness of the project being criticized: it must rely on ideology and state-ism."* (Durham 174) I wanted to take two organizations that are in essence "American." They represent black vs. white and the represent conservative vs. progressive. What is interesting is that when combined, many people think of the National Rifle Association for the

Advancement of Colored People as a violent organization. There is an assumption of violence that accompanies the picture of armed blacks.

The NAACP- This organization was formed in 1909 by a multiracial group of intellectuals who wished to address the denial of rights to blacks in America, and the violence used to maintain their second-class citizenship. It was started in the North by progressive whites and blacks, but soon found its base in the South and especially S. Carolina. Its fundamental role in organizing black people to demand what was already promised them, led this organization to build throughout the first half of the 20th century. After the peak of the civil rights movement and with the dawn of black militancy, the NAACP has lost in importance and popularity. Although still a political force, the organization is now trying to reestablish itself with younger generations in America. With the election of young activist Benjamin Jealous to president, the NAACP is perhaps launching a move into active and perhaps more radical race relation

The NRA- In 1871, the Union military elite formed this organization to address the poor marksmanship displayed by the supposedly armed populace or militias in the Civil War. Today it's sole purpose is defending the uninhibited access of Americans to arms. In the 1970's a leadership change, called the Cincinnati Revolt, set up a new agenda for the organization now fearful of recent gun regulations and pushing for the "devil may care" defense of the 2nd amendment. The defense of the 2nd Amendment is interesting. Though there have been laws that limited the right to bear arms in the broadest interpretation and in limited areas, the defensiveness of the NRA is more akin to a Marxist Leninist social movement. *"While employing a social movement style of mobilization, in many ways NRA retains the institutional structure of the traditional pluralistic special interest group, consistent with its origins under government patronage as an organization to train marksmen for the purpose of military preparedness."* (Patrick 10) They talk as if they are pushed into the corner by their own government and at the same time prepare for battle. What is interesting to me is the way in which the NRA has ignored and perhaps failed the black youth of America. What interests me about RNC Chairman Michael Steele's comment above is that he recognizes violent criminal activity and recognizes that citizens not protected by the police need to be able to protect themselves, yet fails to recognize that America has an image of armed blacks as militants or criminals. His implication is that land-owning citizens should be able to defend themselves from criminals. News coverage supports the notion of the violent and criminal urban black. In the defense of America, its values and the constitution, Pro-Gun Factions do not necessarily reject blacks, but continue to ignore the truths of economics, media representation and old biases. As even the above quote from Michael Steele implies, there is a criminal element in this country which the government and police are unable or unwilling to stop. The problem with a nation that has not defined itself is that the definition of criminal has a wide array of definitions, from blacks to politicians to police.

New Rulers, then, never disarm their subjects; indeed, if they find them unarmed, they always provide them with weapons. For when you arm them, these weapons become your own: those whom you distrusted become loyal, those who were loyal remain so, and subjects are converted into firm adherents. Since it is not possible to provide all your subjects with arms, when you benefit those whom you arm, you will also be able to secure yourself better against the others. Since the former are treated favorably, they will be more attached to you. The latter will excuse your conduct, because they will realize the need to treat more favorably those who carry out more dangerous duties...

...As I have said, then, new rulers of new principalities always arm their subjects. History is full of examples of this. But when a ruler annexes a state, which is joined like a member to his old one, he must then disarm the inhabitants of that state, except those who have helped him to annex it. However, in time, and as opportunity permits, even these must be rendered weak and harmless, and you must arrange matters so that all the arms of your enlarged state are in the hands of your own soldiers, who served under you in your old state. (Machiavelli 72)

The NRAACP

It was coming up to the election of 2008. At the time I had just moved back from eight-years in the Federal Republic of Germany, where I lived with my German wife and children in the Port city of Hamburg. It's a quite beautiful city with a small-feel despite its 2 million inhabitants. I went from full time father to cook to arborist all the time searching for time to do my art. As a light skinned (dolomite white) African-American living as a capitalist American swine in a German city that had its own rich free-market pirate, ethnic code and forced labor history, I considered over and over the parallels between ethnic identity, national coherence and representation. I was not intent on changing the world but I did want to feel comfortable in my skin and I wanted to balance the archrival colleagues, security and freedom.

Back in the US of A, I was working as an arborist for a local construction (sewers, demolition, snow service and trees) company in the panoramic Catskills Region of Eastern New York State. I had the pleasure of gaining the companionship of a strong-minded and fiery, tough love truck driver. She spent her driving time listening to such radio giants as Glenn Beck and Rush Limbaugh. I heard an overarching fear of the loss of freedom, stature and rights from these radio performers, fearful of an imminent Democratic victory. Not to say that Barack Obama was perfect, but he hardly seemed the antichrist, that they portrayed. What's more, compared to the massive changes to privacy law under the Bush Regime, I hardly saw a chance that freedom could be kicked into the dirt much deeper. On the personal level I have to admit that though the McCain/Palin was far from getting my vote, Obama's blackness, and its symbolic importance (I'm such a sucker for identity) did have a role in convincing me to not vote independent as usual. Now the discussion on conservative vs. progressive values did interest me and I had the feeling that there was a deeper meaning to the terms. Having seen from afar that eight years of Bush, which had little to do with lower taxes, fiscal-conservatism or

small/ nonintrusive government, I was very weary of the Palin/McCain small government/big army claims. Although I was aware that Obama had not financed his campaign with numerous twenty-dollar donations, I was comfortable enough with the idea of not adding another war to the list and getting some healthcare up in this joint. Did I mention that he was black?

"When people say that they are opposed to Negroes "resorting to violence" what they really mean is that they are opposed to Negroes defending themselves and challenging the exclusive monopoly of violence practiced by white racists." (Williams 76) The question at hand, when one regards the notion of Black self-defense, is who can be trusted to help? America has a long-standing history of oppressing black people. I will admit that many steps have been made toward the fair treatment of black people, but only with the blood, sweat and tears of black people dedicated to the cause. Nonviolence has played a strong role in the winning of civil rights, but armed confrontation has also played a strong role in the building of organizations and the maintenance of black pride and safety. We look at the work of Nat Turner, Gabriel Prosser, Robert F. Williams, the Deacons for Defense, Malcolm X and the Black Panthers Party for Self-Defense as strong examples of this commitment. I think it would be unwise to instrumentally disarm the black populace of America, without first questioning the history and analyzing how deep that history rests in American today.

"Is there a need for blacks to arm themselves or can they rely on the protection provided by the state," is the prime question in dealing with the issue of guns in the inner city. Gun violence does harm to the black communities of America, but distrust of the authorities in these same communities is also legitimate. We must recognize America's fear. El Hajj Malik El Shabazz (Malcolm X) said about the assassination of President Kennedy and Reverend Jeremiah Wright said about the World Trade Center bombing: *"The chickens have come home to roost."* Perhaps the reason that there is such an outcry among conservatives at these statements made by blacks is precisely the fact that they fear retribution for harsh treatment. There is fear that the chickens will come home to roost. We must recognize a historical, and present, danger to Blacks at the hands of "Americans." Change can be fearful especially when it means that you may have to give up privileges. There is a tradition of battling change that is human and American. Having a family I can understand the base of tribal law: to defend your own and what you have. One problem with Western thought is that it does not try to resolve its innate tribal mentality contradicting its Universalist approach to social structure but simply ignores and hides this contradiction under a cloak of civilization. The NRAACP is not a gun club. We recognize that the policy and history of America is to protect property not rights. We recognize that the "Right to Bear Arms" defends property and that black communities in America are low on the economic totem pole of property distribution. Why mankind continues to believe in the morality of man when it is proven wrong time and time again, I do not understand. Is cooperation possible when economic competition is maintained? I have hope for this place. It has a little to do with the people, legal traditions and national pride, as stupid as it may be.

Mostly, my ancestors are here. I may be somewhere in the middle for a lot of people in this country, but this place is where I am from, it's the only country I have and it is dear to me.

The First Meeting of the NRAACP – in my Head:

The first incarnation of the NRAACP was the installation and meeting titled “The First Meeting of the NRAACP – in my Head”. It consisted of a chronological timeline, a merchandising table, a member’s table and a diorama of figurines. As the whole idea of the NRAACP is bridging the binary polarity of American culture and language, I saw the installation as the moment of transition as this idea that had been brewing inside of me since 2008, suddenly reached out to my community. I saw this as a meeting place of America’s violent past and the unknown future. I seek a present that hopes but never forgets.

The Timeline: The timeline was crowned with a quote from Shirley Chisholm: “I don't measure America by its achievement but by its potential”. It is a collection of historical events that highlight America’s history of racial separation and violent domination, starting with the formation of the NRA, continuing to the formation of the NAACP and ending with the formation of the NRAACP. My intent is to show that as America has made social progress it has continuously crushed dissent. The formation of history is the formation of dominant culture and the consolidation of control and psyche. My wish is that there may be a discussion between the accepted and the unaccepted.

**For the timeline see appendix III:*

The Membership table and the Merchandise table:

Playing off a convention center/gun show atmosphere I wanted to play off the capitalist commoditization of ideas and membership. Despite the tongue in cheek use of the imagery, I recognized the openness of such presentation. Genuinely wanting to initiate discussion, I adopted this method, seeing it as an American phenomenon. The T-shirts played as both advertising for the organization as well as an offer of membership to a political movement through monetary exchange. Though the sarcasm was intended, I sincerely see a necessity to push this discussion. My sarcasm as method comes from my trickster inspiration as an artist and is supported by the almost herculean difficulty to resolving America’s tribal factionalism. It is difficult to erase fears of either continued rejection and oppression or expected retribution, after years of domination and oppression. To use sarcasm and humor I both lighten the topic and highlight the hypocrisy. In creating logos, t-shirts, hats and cards I chose designs that would appeal to the fashion sense of the youth yet also hold a certain nostalgic quality. The implied meaning of the organization’s name for American’s has varied connotations. When combined with the image of an armed black man the club title could imply armed self-defense. When combined with the collectiveness of club mentality, the meaning could range from collective action to mob rule. My wish is that through the varied implication

which raise so wide an array of emotions as hope and fear, people will be willing and desire to discuss their preconceptions and their hopes.

The Figurines: I chose a collection of iconic characters from American history. Angela Davis, Barack Obama, Clarence Thomas, Geronimo, John Brown, John F. Kennedy, Muhammad Ali, Mohandas Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, Patty Hearst, Shirley Chisholm, Thomas Jefferson, Zora Neale Hurston. My main reason for representing these characters was their historical importance in issues of race and/or political power and their connection to the violence/nonviolence theme. What interested me was how their historical representation is wielded as political power. Their iconographic representation almost hides the human being who had lived and instead incorporates an epoch or a movement. Their representation and image, as most would view them today, simplify history and particularly black history or the history of struggle. Through their representation history is meshed with politics. Because of this simplification, I chose recognizable people. I made them miniatures for two reasons. Foremost I wanted to make this serious topic child friendly and maybe entertaining. Secondly I was further playing off the iconographic notion of historical representation. By portraying these members as action figures or even puppets I hint at the use of their image by the media and textbooks of today. I also hint at the ability that we have to interact with historical imagery. By not engaging the figures actively I wanted to leave their actions open to the viewer. I saw this installation as a beginning of action or as an invitation to action. The election of the first black president, although symbolically a great event, does not mean the end of racism in America. Just as Martin Luther King Jr. was not all about love and peace, but realized that there were great inequalities that would not vanish in a day or with a hug, so too is the NRAACP about discussion, change, slow steady realization and the unity, education and uplift of all people. Justice is the goal and not acceptance.

“Some of us listen to ghosts; we can’t help it. These ghosts have an important story to tell. What does it mean to not be seen? We worked to preserve the space where we found them and to tap into what they were saying.”

Reverend Deacon Edgar Hopper
St. Augustine’s Episcopal Church, NYC (Lacy 2)

Appendix:

I NRAACP Manifesto

The National Rifle Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NRAACP) was formed to provide members from the political left and right the opportunity to discuss issues of gun-responsibility, social control, poverty, community building, economic uplift, criminality and freedom in an egalitarian and respectful forum. The NRAACP seeks roads to communication between groups that are separated by race, economics or political culture. The hope is that by bypassing preconceptions we may find a rational yet non-oppressive solution to the harmful effects of gun violence in American colored communities and America at large.

How We Stand:

-Although we recognize that aspects of Gun-Control laws may play a role, there being the sinister specter of “illegal guns” in poor neighborhoods and crime, drugs and communal suicide (genocide) are very real, the dilemma that we face is how communities reach a peace that is self-determined. This requires control of the economic means of a neighborhood. The fear of gun control is that it would further place the lives of colored people in the hands of the police and state. We recognize a historically produced distrust of both institutions on the grounds of white supremacist ideologies. While we do not see gun ownership as the end, we recognized the necessity in a flawed system. As long as colored people do not feel safe in their neighborhoods, either ignored or threatened by authorities, all possibilities for self-determination must remain open.

-America must recognize that all blacks born before 1965 (at the least) were born into a dictatorship. The effects of dictatorships on the citizens of the regime and their adjusting to democracy must be considered. There is a necessity to re-analyze the “black” definition of America and its values, for only through this analysis can America as a whole step beyond its assumptions about race, freedom and national belonging (i.e. national coherence). America must embrace the notions of crime and/or freedom held by the disenfranchised communities within America. America must embrace “black thought.”

Key Points of Address:

-**No one sided disarmament in America:** The recognition of a history of racial subjugation through armed violence must precede any discussion of gun control. As long as there is an armed white supremacist faction within US borders there must remain the ability for the colored populations (i.e.: racially and economically ghettoized populations) of America to defend themselves.

-**Recognize Racist Culture:** Notions of an uncontrolled violent nature and uninhibited sexuality still steer the American Psyche. How do news, advertising, politics, and popular culture reaffirm this cultural hermeneutic? Why are white-supremacist caricatures reinforced by the current gun control discussion?

-**Responsible Gun Ownership:** The armed component of the colored population needs to be self determined and united. As long as the armed colored populace is fighting there can be no self-determination. Only when the colored populace stands on equal footing, can America truly reach a “Post-Race” era.

II Amendments to the Constitution

2nd Amendment:

A well-regulated Militia being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms shall not be infringed.

13th Amendment

Section 1. Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime where of the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.

Section 2. Congress shall have the power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

14th Amendment

Section 1. All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law, which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

Section 2. Representatives shall be apportioned among the several States according to their respective numbers, counting the whole number of persons in each State, excluding Indians not taxed. But when the right to vote at any election for the choice of electors for President and Vice President of the United States, Representatives in Congress, the Executive and Judicial officers of a State, or the members of the Legislature thereof, is denied to any of the male inhabitants of such State, being twenty-one years of age, and citizens of the United States, or in any way abridged, except for participation in rebellion, or other crime, the basis of representation therein shall be reduced in the proportion which the number of such male citizens shall bear to the whole number of male citizens twenty-one years of age in such State.

Section 3. No one shall be a Senator or Representative in Congress, or elector of President and Vice President, or hold any office, civil or military, under the United States, or under any State, who, having previously taken an oath, as a member of Congress, or as an officer of the United States, or as a member of any State legislature, or as an executive or judicial officer of any State, to support the Constitution of the United States, shall have engaged in insurrection or rebellion against the same, or given aid or comfort to the enemies thereof. But Congress may by a vote of two-thirds of each House, remove such disability.

Section 4. The validity of the public debt of the United States, authorized by law, including debts incurred for payment of pensions and bounties for services in suppressing insurrection or rebellion, shall not be questioned. But neither the United States nor any State shall assume or pay any debt or obligation incurred in aid of insurrection or rebellion against the United States, or any claim for the loss or emancipation of any slave; but all such debts, obligations and claims shall be held illegal and void.

Section 5. The Congress shall have power to enforce, by appropriate legislation, the provisions of this article.

III Timeline

1871	NRA formed	1950	McCarthy goes public
1876	Hamburg massacre	1954	Brown vs. the Board of Education
1877	Reconstruction ends	1955	Montgomery Alabama bus boycott
	National Guard Association formed	1956	Robert Williams heads Monroe NAACP
	Crazy Horse assassinated		Armed Black Guard formed
1878	Posse Comitatus Act, ends federal use of civilian militias		COINTELPRO starts
1881	Pres. Garfield fatally shot	1957	Southern Christian Leadership Conference
1887	Dawes Act (General Allotment Act)		McCarthy dies
1890	Wounded Knee Massacre	1963	March on Washington
1891	2 nd Allotment Act		John F Kennedy assassinated
1892	Carnegie Steel Corp. Strike,	1964	Civil Rights Act
1894	Pullman Palace Car Co. strike		Deacons for Self Defense and Justice form
1896	Plessey vs. Ferguson (separate but equal)	1965	Malcolm X assassinated
1898	Spanish American War		Voting Rights Act
1900	NRA receives federal funding to expand beyond military	1966	Black Panther Party for Self Defense formed
1901	Pres. McKinley fatally shot	1968	Martin Luther King Assassinated
1903	Dick Act: National Guard reorganized	1972	J Edgar Hoover dies
1905	Niagara Movement	1973	Wounded Knee Incident
1906	Women admitted to NRA	1975	DC Handgun Ban
1908	NRA moves to Washington D.C.		NRA Institute for Legislative Action formed
1909	Geronimo dies	1976	DC Firearms Control Regulations Act
	NAACP is formed	1977	NRA Cincinnati Revolt
1911	NAACP incorporates	1980	NRA endorses Reagan
1913	Woodrow Wilson federal segregation	1992	Ruby Ridge Incident
1914	WW1 begins	1993	Waco Siege
1915	Booker T. Washington dies	1994	Federal Assault Weapon Ban
	Birth of a Nation: film	1995	Oklahoma City Bombing
1917	US officially enters WW1	1996	Telecommunications Act
1920	Nineteenth Amendment	2001	World Trade Center attack
1924	Hoover heads Bureau of Investigation	2004	Federal Assault Weapon Ban expires
1929	Wall Street crashes	2005	Hurricane Katrina
1933	Banking Act of 1933		San Francisco Proposition H
1934	NRA Legislative Affairs Division	2006	Proposition H found unconstitutional
	FCC formed	2008	1975 DC Handgun Ban found unconstitutional
1935	FBI formed		Barack Obama elected 44 th president
1939	NAACP Legal Defense Fund		NRAACP is formed
1947	Truman Executive Order 9835		
1948	Gandhi assassinated		

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