

University of Montana

ScholarWorks at University of Montana

Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, &
Professional Papers

Graduate School

2009

The Politics of the Real: Jazz, Hip Hop, and Satire - Conceptions of Consciousness in the Twentieth Century African American Novel

Peter Thomas Clavin

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd>

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Clavin, Peter Thomas, "The Politics of the Real: Jazz, Hip Hop, and Satire - Conceptions of Consciousness in the Twentieth Century African American Novel" (2009). *Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers*. 10823.

<https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd/10823>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.

THE POLITICS OF THE REAL: JAZZ, HIP HOP, AND SATIRE – CONCEPTIONS OF
CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY AFRICAN AMERICAN NOVEL

By

PETER THOMAS CLAVIN

B.A., Bloomsburg University, Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania, 2001

Thesis

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Master of Arts

The University of Montana
Missoula, MT

Official Graduation Date (August 2009)

Approved by:

Perry Brown, Associate Provost for Graduate Education
Graduate School

Dr. Kathleen Kane, Chair
English

Dr. Robert Baker
English

Dr. Jeff Wiltse
History

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to acknowledge and thank first and foremost Dr. Bob Baker, Dr. David Witzling and Dr. Katie Kane for their guidance, illumination and support throughout my time here in the University of Montana Graduate English Literature program. I would also like to thank my friends and family for supporting me throughout these past three years. Lastly, I would like to thank Betty V. for being by my side for nearly every word I have written during these past three years. It takes a village and I cannot express my gratitude well enough to all of these important people in my life. Thank you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....4
Chapter One.....7
Chapter Two.....39
Chapter Three.....69
Conclusion.....99
Works Cited.....104

Jazz, Hip Hop, and Satire: Conceptions of the Twentieth Century African American novel

I remember one night I was jamming in a chili house on Seventh Avenue between 139th and 140th. It was December, 1939...I'd been getting bored with the stereotyped changes that were being used all the time, all the time, and I kept thinking there's bound to be something else. I could hear it sometimes but I couldn't play it. Well that night, I was working over 'Cherokee,' and, as I did, I found that by using the higher intervals of a chord as a melody line and backing them with appropriately related changes, I could play the thing I'd been hearing. I came alive.

- Charlie Parker, from Ralph Ellison's "Living With Music"

In the African American experience of the twentieth century, cultural modes of expression became the primary outlet for a politics of resistance, a politics of fulfillment, and a politics of transfiguration within the context of a modern Western nation-state that marginalized and discriminated against the African American subject through ideology and cultural hegemony. This collective African American experience is one based on a reality of life-threatening racial violence that has plagued African Americans from the earliest days of the New Republic. Accordingly, African American artists like saxophonist Charlie Parker reiterated these themes and practiced these politics in the subversive guttural cry of an improvising solo and rapper Tupac Shakur through his scathing lyrics criticizing American society. These artists performed in a manner that conveyed a message, one of basic human dignity, which undermined the dominant white western majority of American society. The roots of Parker's, and his fellow bebop contemporaries' subversion grew out of a segregated wartime American era that witnessed massive political and social upheaval but ultimately failed to answer the hopes and dreams of African American citizens. The result of these failings would become evident some twenty years later after Parker's first musical and political awakening as the boiling cauldron of racial discrimination and violence would be dragged out into the American public psyche by African American leaders, most notably Malcolm X and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Yet for all the growth that

developed in the civil rights movement and all the tangible progress made through the federal implementation of desegregation and affirmative action, these developments still fell far short of the proverbial finish line of American racial equality. This project and march towards human rights undertaken by the historically subjugated African American subject would transform but continue to develop culturally and politically in the second half of the twentieth century lead by rappers like Shakur and Christopher Wallace, and this subversion to mainstream subjugation would become the hallmark of the African American subject's very condition, that of improvisation in order to create a space within the historically discriminating narrative of American culture and society.

Jazz, as I will show later in Chapter 2, through a reading of *Mumbo Jumbo*, became a counterculture to modernity yet simultaneously tied to its core concepts. As modernism was succeeded by postmodernism, jazz as a popular form faded and gave way to a new musical idiom that would follow in the subversive syncopated drumbeats of bebop. By 1956, Charlie Parker was dead and the impact of bebop had waned, giving way to experiments in the cool, hard bop and free jazz movements of the late 1950s and 1960s. These movements marked a change towards a new epoch in world cultural history that corresponded with the civil rights movement. Following the the abolition of segregation, the most dramatic result of a remarkable civil rights movement, American history shifted into a new era of postmodernism characterized by a subjective fragmentation or decentering, and a profound loss of the optimistic sense of humanity that had earlier been linked to the the modern ideal of human progress through scientific reason. The modern conception suffered severe blows including the debilitating scars of two world wars, the holocaust, and the American introduction of nuclear bombs into modern warfare. In its American context, postmodernism became symbolically aligned with the African American subject and its experience of bitter suffering and tragic injuries at the hands of a post war coalition that designed new and more subtly effective ways to discriminate, which were wholly realized with Ronald Reagan's presidential nomination in 1980.

The African American experience of the post civil rights/postmodern era betrayed the hopes of greater progress that had been born in the late 1960s. Both Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X did not live to see the fruits of their labors; they were assassinated, and the empowerment they had represented was stunted by a new wave of American public and private policy that once again defined the African American subject as second class. Despite the early momentum of the civil rights movement, and as I will examine more closely in Chapter 1, federal policies would lead to further disillusionment and displacement for the African American. As private practices promoted white flight from urban city centers, impoverished African Americans remained unable to move into white suburban neighborhood, owing to racist red-lining policies that disqualified blacks from living in newly constructed and affluent suburban areas. The fallout of these federal policies left the impoverished class of African Americans in ignored neighborhoods that soon degenerated into ghettos where success, often through criminal means, became the only perceived chance to survive. To speak out against these crimes of neglect and discrimination, the new musical idiom of hip hop emerged from New York in the 1970s, and its MC's / rappers would pick up on the legacy of bebop to speak out against the injustices that the larger African American population suffered.

Hip hop gained momentum on a populist message of music made universal. The relative ease in which to access cheaper methods and standards appealed to African American citizens who often did not have the financial resources to buy instruments to form a traditional band, relying instead on the cheaper alternative of sampling previously recorded albums. This drawing on the sources of, and the appropriation of, all materials relevant to popular culture gave hip hop a unique post modern sensibility that mimicked the African American experience just as jazz had done decades before. However, unlike the often unspeakable dimension of jazz, hip hop offers with its emphasis on musical instruments over the human voice, hip hop relied on a sonic assault of reshaped beats, hooks, and loops set to the rapper's prose and served to literally give voice to the voiceless, a voice to the margins of American

society that had been discarded in the national conscious as the country as a whole experienced new levels of wealth.

The African American experience of the post civil rights/postmodern America found its voice in the graphically violent and subversive rhymes and verses of gangster rappers and often mirrored the similar tactics of the African American writers and musicians of the earlier modernist era. Rappers such as the Notorious B.I.G. and Tupac Shakur symbolized the “me against the world” mantra of the hip hop devotee; their violent deaths symbolized and reinforced the often similarly tragic fate of young African-American men residing in the urban ghettos of New York and Los Angeles. This new brand of music and the accompanying verbal assaults on American society of the gangster rapper mirrored the musical militancy of bebop and the subversive spirit of the zoot suited hipsters of the World War II era. The project of political fulfillment, or the acquisition of civil rights and in a larger ideological and cultural context universal human rights, through subversive resistance in hip hop also found itself aligned with other cultural outlets. Just as jazz was championed in the literary realm of Hughes, Ellison, and Reed, hip hop would find its voice through the satirical novels of Paul Beatty, who, taking the cue from the African American canon, extended the sometimes incomplete critique of hip hop into the African American novel. Beatty's novel serves as a distinctly postmodern expression of the African American experience which struggled with finding of meaning in a society where racial progress occurred but was often stifled simultaneously by institutional measures. This sometimes indiscernible juxtaposition led to a hip hop culture that has been, at the very least, caught idolizing the profits of western capitalism when it wasn't vilifying the American establishment directly responsible for the marginalization of its African American subjects.

In this project, I will examine these connections between jazz and hip hop, specifically the sub-genres of bebop and gangster rap, as well as the connections made between the musical artists and the African American authors who sought to reshape American society in a way that would reverse the

racist discrimination of American society. I will specifically examine two satirical novelists, Ishmael Reed and Paul Beatty, who have incorporated the modernist mode of jazz and the postmodernist mode of hip hop into their own novels. Beginning in the opening chapter, I will analyze the social, political, and economic milieus of New York and Los Angeles from the Harlem Renaissance to the post civil rights/postmodern/post-industrial 1970s and its earliest conceptions of hip hop leading up to the L.A. Uprisings of 1992. After establishing this historical grounding, I will look closely at the role of jazz and specifically bebop in the first half of the twentieth century and compare and contrast its rise with that of the rise of hip hop and specifically gangster rap. This comparison will explore the issues these musicians and artists sought to address and will set the foundation for examining the two novels that deal with these musical forms within the respective metropolitan areas of New York City and Los Angeles. With this in mind, chapter two will look closely at Ishmael Reed's second novel, *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972), and its incorporation of the jazz aesthetic into the African American experience leading up to the civil rights movement. Exploring the relationships between modernity, jazz, and Jim Crow segregation that made up a large part of the African American experience in the first half of the twentieth century, I will argue that the African American satirical novel performs a similar role in American culture in its attempts to redress institutional wrongdoings against the racialized Other.

The third and final chapter will examine Paul Beatty's first novel, *The White Boy Shuffle* (1996), and how it interprets the African American experience in the post modern/post civil rights era localized within Los Angeles. I will argue that Beatty's use of hip hop, while affirming the redeeming aspects of a subculture that stands up to both overt and subtle racial discrimination, also criticizes the limits of this subculture that is reactionary (and often times self-defeating) in its adoption of values taught within an institutionally disadvantaging society. Ultimately, Beatty and Reed argue for a new politics based on a revolution of values that counteracts the ugly American history of racial segregation, discrimination, and lethal force. This project will follow the history of the twentieth century African American

experience in a manner designed to illuminate the moves these authors make to state their cases to revise, redress, and move beyond this historical legacy of subjugation and move into a new era in American society and culture where the Constitutional proclamation for equal rights is rightly and fairly observed.

—Folwell University, California University

The entrance of African American marginalization in both the modern and postmodern eras has been a catalyst in the construction of a distinct artistic form. The popular musical forms of jazz and hip hop have been instrumental in reimagining the African American experience within the United States of America. The narrative of the African American experience, from the transatlantic slave trade to emancipation, through the Civil Rights movement and the civil rights movement, remains incomplete without acknowledgment given to this cultural expression. The emergence of black popular music reflects a larger cultural outgrowth that challenges the prevailing norms of Western ideology and its racist manifestations (slavery, segregation, discrimination and violence). The resistance to the ideological normal of cultural consciousness foregrounds the similarities between the modern jazz era and the current postmodern hip hop era. When jazz hip hop specifically is the juxtaposition of bebop and gangster rap, these musical forms' shared emphasis on participatory improvisation, stylistic innovation, and substantially African American rhythmic and vernacular traditions serves to challenge and question (and seek to revise) the prevailing sociocultural ideological norms of Western society.

The use of jazz as a popular musical form, a modern jazz movement, which started in New Orleans region of the 1890s, reached its peak during the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s due to the combination of social, economic, and political factors represented in the First World War, the Great Migration and passing of the Volstead Act. While socio-historical narratives place the emphasis in the story of jazz spreading through the South Coast as a result of the closing of the New Orleans Territory

Jazz and Hip Hop in the twentieth century African American experience

It is nothing new to declare that for us music, gesture, dance are forms of communication, just as important as the gift of speech. This is how we first managed to emerge from the plantation: aesthetic forms in our cultures must be shaped from these oral structures

-Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*

The response of African American marginalization in both the modern and postmodern eras has been a catalyst in the construction of a distinct artistic form. The popular musical forms of jazz and hip hop have been instrumental in reshaping the African American experience within the United States of America. The narrative of the African American experience, from the transatlantic slave trade to emancipation, through Jim Crow segregation and the civil rights movement, remains incomplete without consideration given to this cultural expression. This emergence of black popular music reflects a larger cultural outgrowth that challenges the prevailing norms of Western ideology and its racist manifestations (slavery, segregation, discrimination and violence). This resistance on the ideological terrain of cultural consciousness foregrounds the similarities between the modern jazz era and the current postmodern hip hop era. When looking specifically at the juxtaposition of bebop and gangster rap, these musical forms' shared emphasis on participatory improvisation, stylistic innovation, and authentically African American rhythmic and vernacular traditions serves to challenge and question (and seek to revise) the prevailing social and ideological norms of Western society.

The rise of jazz as a popular musical form, a modern jazz movement, while rooted in New Orleans ragtime of the 1890s, reached its peak during the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s due to the combination of social, economical, and political factors represented in the First World War, the Great Migration and passing of the Volstead Act. While some historical narratives place the emphasis in the story of jazz spreading through northern cities as a result of the closing of the New Orleans Storyville

district in 1917, jazz spread regardless as African Americans migrated north to fill wartime production positions vacated by whites who served in Europe as well as to fill positions created by Industrialists who hired newly migrated African Americans in their desire to keep labor cost down and break unions. The fleeing of Jim Crow discrimination in pursuit of social and economical freedom created tension often resulting in violence.¹ From out of this tension, jazz as a popular form emerged and became alternately both an inclusive and exclusive force for black and white Americans alike. This inclusion and exclusion, as we will see, would manifest itself in jazz clubs that were integrated and inclusive far beyond the social mores of the early twentieth century. Yet also exclusive in the reactions of the African American jazz musicians who sought to ply their craft in sheltered environments free from the trendy white crowds who sought a carefree and pleasant evenings listening. The exclusive arena of the after-hours jam spot would come to represent the artist's true ingenuity and trade.

The popularity and pervasiveness of the jazz movement also coincided with a robust wartime economy that boosted industrial production and saw the United States gross national product rise 40%. The upswing in economy linked to increased industrial production led to a new consumer economy that saw greater availability of products ranging from "automobiles" to "electrical appliances, radios, and telephones," all of which demonstrated the emerging "importance of consumer spending" (Ogren, 5). This new market for consumer products and resulting newfound American reliance on a consumer economy enabled jazz musicians to reach their audiences outside of solely live performances and influence American culture in ways that did not exist previously for Scott Joplin, Sidney Bechet and other fellow New Orleans ragtime musicians.

The modern jazz movement was also aided by the passing of the Volstead Act in 1919:

¹ Tensions reached an apex in 1917 when white servicemen returned home and a series of urban riots took place "stretching from East St. Louis in July 1917 through Charleston, S.C., Texas, Washington, D.C., and Chicago" (Ogren, 4). In all of these examples cited, "racial violence was fueled by the competition for jobs between returning war veterans and black workers who had replaced them during the war" (Ogren, 4). The Great Migration of blacks from rural southern towns to urban northern cities was spurred by the desire to escape "rural poverty and political repression" (Ogren, 4).

legislation that criminalized the sale and manufacture of alcoholic beverages. The newly legislated prohibition pushed the escape from conservative mainstream American society into the “nightclub and entertainment venues” which “were common locations for jazz performance” (Ogren, 5). As a result, jazz became a new powerful force “embraced by American youth in revolt against what they saw as stuffy prewar society” and who found the music to be “an antidote for repressive industrial society” (Ogren, 6-7). For the countercultural followers of jazz, the music symbolized sweeping economical and moral change that expressed and captured the essence of the modern industrial society.² Ultimately this theme of counterculture is one that is tied into the African American experience in the United States and is a symbolic shift in sensibilities and consciousness of a new popular culture that was embraced by both black and white American citizens.

The idea of the black experience as counterculture to modernity is one raised by Paul Gilroy in his work *The Black Atlantic* and suggests that blacks, within the cultural field of the Atlantic (or transatlantic, resembling the transatlantic slave trade routes and ranging from Africa to Europe to the Caribbean and North America), suffer from an Other status in terms of their relation to Western civilization and its ideology of Enlightenment. Gilroy draws on W.E.B. Du Bois’ work *The Souls of Black Folk*, in particular his concept of double consciousness: “One ever feels his twoness, -an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (Du Bois, 3). This doubling of thoughts and strivings leads to an identity struggle for blacks living simultaneously inside and outside of Western society. Gilroy argues that the tradition of the Enlightenment “lost its exclusive claim to rationality partly through the way that slavery became internal to western civilization and through the

² Conductor Leopold Stokowski hailed jazz as “an expression of the times, of the breathless, energetic, superactive time in which we are living” (Ogren, 7) and noted the role African Americans played in this expression of change. He hailed “the Negro musicians of America” who “are playing a great part in this change. The jazz players make their instruments do entirely new things, things finished musicians are taught to avoid. They are pathfinders into new realms” (Ogren, 7).

obvious complicity which both plantation slavery and colonial regimes revealed between rationality and the practice of racial terror” (Gilroy, 39). As a result of this terror, Gilroy explains the “history and utility of black music” as a “subculture” which is an “elementary historical acquisition produced from the viscera of an alternative body of cultural and political expression” (Gilroy, 36). This expression of the Black Atlantic representing double consciousness, a black consciousness both inside and outside of the dominant white consciousness of Western society, leads to Gilroy’s contention that “black musical expression has played a role in reproducing...a distinctive counterculture of modernity” (Gilroy, 36). Jazz comes to exemplify problems blacks face within their own lives and helps to explain the alternative body of cultural and political expression that African American music came to embody.

Nowhere else was this counterculture more present than in Harlem during the Roaring Twenties and the Harlem Renaissance. Within Harlem, the modern jazz movement was increasingly introduced in more and more cultural contact zones.³ The significance of the expansion of entertainment venues was its impact on jazz musicians and their newfound upward economic ability to earn a living once unthinkable to those who migrated from the Jim Crow south.⁴ African-American poets, playwrights, and jazz musicians alike all contributed to the Harlem scene but were also working within a framework of a dominant white society that profited from their labors. The prolific output of African-American

³ New York, during the 1920s, “granted 800 licenses for cabarets and 500 for dance halls” and as a result “jazz...was introduced to theatres, ballrooms, and scores of other establishments patronized by whites as well as blacks” (Ogren, 84). In Arnold Shaw’s *Jazz Age*, Shaw notes a booklet accompanying *The Sounds of Harlem* album that “lists and pictures almost one hundred twenty-five entertainment spots clustered in the dense area between 125th and 135th streets, and between Lenox and Seventh Avenues” (Shaw, 59). There were also “forty or more clubs, whose clientele was basically white, seventeen or more cafes, speakeasies, chicken shacks, cellars, lounges, taverns, rib joints, supper clubs, and bars and grills,—all involved with music and musicians—there were ten theatres and eight ballrooms” (Shaw, 59).

⁴ These venues created opportunities for performance and were hailed by the likes of Duke Ellington, poet Langston Hughes and writer James Weldon Johnson. Upon arriving in Harlem in 1921, “Hughes wrote ‘I can never put on paper the thrill of the underground ride to Harlem...At every station I kept watching for the sign: 135th Street. When I saw it, I held my breath...I went up the steps and out into the bright September sunlight. Harlem! I stood there, dropped my bags, took a deep breath and felt happy again’” (Shaw, 57). Similarly, Duke Ellington proclaimed it “The world’s most glamorous atmosphere!” when he first visited in 1923. Meanwhile, James Weldon Johnson labeled Harlem as “the recognized Negro capital. Indeed, it is the Mecca for the sightseer, the pleasure seeker, the curious, the adventurous, the enterprising, the ambitious, and the talented of the world; for the lure of it has reached down to every island of the Carib Sea and penetrated even into Africa.” (Shaw, 59).

artistic expression emphasizes the significance of the Harlem Renaissance for American culture and also reveals the integrated, if only limited, cultural scene that existed during Harlem in the 1920s.⁵ As jazz music reached more venues and spread as a form of African American culture it was unable to escape the white influence on African American society. Simultaneously however, the influence of jazz music was challenging prevailing middle-class sensibilities that existed within white American culture.

The shift in white American sensibilities was encouraged by music venues that catered to white audiences designed to increase higher profit margins. The owners of clubs and restaurants began experimenting “with seating, floor design, and decoration aimed at creating relaxed performance atmosphere, as well as marketing gimmicks” (Ogren, 85). These “action environments” aimed to lure white middle-class audiences into their clubs during leisure time by offering an “escape from many of the limitations and controls of nineteenth century society, cultural and institutional identity” (Ogren, 85). This counterculture that the white audiences were participating in was however limited.⁶ While clubs like the Panama and Jungles Casino represented an authentic African-American jazz club experience, other clubs catering to whites offered “fantasy worlds of pirates, plantations, and bohemian Paris” which may have fabricated the authentic smaller jazz cabaret experience and often left white patrons participating in larger ballrooms out of touch with the authentic African American jazz nightclub scene.⁷ This scenario was indicative of modern America in the 1920s that despite the increased integration between black and white Americans in social settings like the jazz club, there was

⁵ The Harlem Renaissance produced a “roster of twenty-six novels, ten volumes of poetry, five Broadway plays, innumerable short stories and essays” along with “two or three performed ballets and concerti” (Lewis, 121).

⁶ Throughout Harlem “white patrons danced and watched the floor shows and revues typical of these cabarets, but remained safe and sheltered from the unrestricted nightlife of the Panama or the Jungles Casino” (85, JR).

⁷ As Kathy Ogren argues, the gap between the Jungles Casino and Smalls was a gap “more than racial—it was a gulf separating a participatory culture and a counterfeit one” (85, JA). Whereas larger “cabarets and ballrooms promised variety and stimulation to their clientele... smaller cabarets and clubs enabled people to eat, drink, dance, and mingle in sensuous, intimate, and womblike environs” (85, JR). Both of these styles of nightclubs reinforced the participatory nature of jazz but “for whites, the participatory tradition posed a challenge... either it was something new and exotic and new, to be experienced to the extent possible, or it was—in minds of its enemies—a threat to conventional morality” (86, JR).

seemingly very little sharing of experiences between the two groups.

The notion of counterfeit culture and white appropriation of the authentic African American experience during the Harlem Renaissance is evident when examining the recording of jazz musicians as technology and consumer culture developed simultaneously. Kathy Ogren points out that “jazz historians and critics agree that as jazz reached a larger audience, the tempos slowed down and larger jazz orchestras replaced the smaller bands and combos, make the music more standardized and palatable to middle-class white tastes” (Ogren, 87). While it is true that the expansion of Harlem clubs had increased the influence of the African American musicians, the effect of recording on jazz had the opposite effect. Instead of elevating the African American musician, middle class and conservative Euro American tastes demanded a market for a softer and less offensive jazz. Like the black dances that had to be “cleaned up” for popular consumption, jazz as well was “cleaned up” in order for it to be successfully marketed to a white middle class audience.

To white audiences syncopated beats and improvisation were animalistic and unrefined. They favored the style of Paul Whiteman, then known as “The King of Jazz,” for his de-emphasizing the African American roots of jazz. Whiteman advised against the use of syncopation because it “gives a sense to the ignorant of participation in the world’s scientific knowledge” and adding that “Syncopation no longer rules American music...as we use it in the United States [it] is an African inheritance...but to-day it is no longer a necessary thing. It has been retained much as an ornament” (Shaw, 159). Whiteman's dismissal of syncopation while displaying his own ignorance was ultimately demonstrated to be true in terms of his target audience.⁸ It should be pointed out here that it is only fitting that the white appropriation of jazz music was ultimately characterized by Paul “The King of Jazz” Whiteman.

The Paul Whiteman example remains indicative of the white appropriation evidenced within

⁸ In a 1962 study, *Jazz and the White Americans* (1962), Neil Leonard illustrates “white audiences embraced the Paul Whiteman style of symphonic jazz at the expense of more improvisational and rhythmically interesting jazz played primarily by blacks” (Shaw, 154).

jazz music and also represents the political and economic failures of the Harlem Renaissance at large. Following the stock market crash of 1929, the United States fell into the Great Depression which saw poverty reach every area of the country and Harlem remained no exception. Harlem nightclubs during the 1930s “were visibly in decline” and after riots in 1935, Harlem was seen as “a dangerous slum” (as opposed to the previous “center of exotic nightlife”) (DeVeaux, 229).⁹ Like the clubs and the deteriorating economic conditions, now the vibrancy of jazz was also fading. A reliance on “commercial formulas and musically conservative white tastes dominated jazz performance by the 1930s” resulted in “costing jazz its vitality” (Ogren, 88). Jazz was now in a crisis, and a new form of jazz would seek to restore its artistic interests and reassert its African American roots.

While Bebop has its roots in New York during World War II, Scott Deveaux argues in *Birth of Bebop* that the newest jazz form was a response to a range of factors, from anti-commercialization and white appropriation, to the popular swing jazz form, to racial discrimination, and economic frustration:

Entrenched patterns of segregation, both in the music industry and in society at large, automatically gave white musicians a nearly insuperable advantage in the mainstream market, blunting black ambition and forcing it into new channels. Bebop was a response to this impasse, an attempt to reconstitute jazz—or more precisely, the specialized idiom of the improvising virtuoso—in such a way as to give its black creators the greatest professional autonomy *within* the marketplace. Bop was the twin child of optimism and frustration, of ingenuity and despair (DeVeaux, 27).

Beat poet LeRoi Jones turned African nationalist Amiri Baraka terms bebop “the reemphasis of the non-western tradition” (Baraka, 79). This reemphasis was most evident during jam sessions which

⁹ Malcolm X points out that “it was terrible for the night-life people, and for those hustlers whose main income had been the white man’s money. The 1935 riot had left only a relative trickle of the money which had poured into Harlem during the 1920s. And now this new riot ended even that trickle” (X, 125). Malcolm X’s observation explains the economic downturn pervading Harlem in the 1930s while swing as a form was becoming stale and the closing of the Cotton Club where Cab Calloway performed is symbolic of both the artistic failings of swing jazz but also of Harlem’s economic degeneration.

featured improvisation and encouraged participation between all sitting musicians within the session.¹⁰ The jam session had always been part of jazz performance since the days of ragtime, but Bebop's incorporation of the jam session represented participation, stylistic innovation and subversion like never before. The most influential jam sessions took place in Harlem at Minton's Playhouse where saxophonist Charlie Parker, trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie, and pianist Thelonius Monk played. Located on 118th street and dubbed the "Showplace of Harlem," Minton's was a haven for jazz musicians who, after leaving their regular gigs with other bands, would come to Minton's and jam until 4 a.m. closing time and sometimes even later. It was also conveniently located in the Hotel Cecil which was "a frequent temporary residence of musicians passing through New York" (DeVeaux, 219). The freedom of an after hours club like Minton's lent musicians "space to refine new and unusual techniques and the opportunity to parade these skills before his peers nightly" (DeVeaux, 220).

Author Ralph Ellison noted that Minton's was "most important to the development of modern jazz" and that the jam session was the "jazzman's true academy." To this end, Minton's can be seen as an institution of higher learning for the developers of bebop. DeVeaux echoes Ellison when the latter stresses the concept of creative black autonomy within the form during these jam sessions. Ellison writes of the jazz musician within the jam session "It is here where he learns tradition, group techniques and style" and from there "he must then 'find himself', must be reborn, must find, as it were, his soul" (Ellison, 245). Ellison further explains that the jazz musician, by "achieving that subtle identification between his instrument and his deepest drives which will allow him to express his own unique ideas and his own unique voice. He must achieve, in short, his self-determined identity" (Ellison, 245). This self-determining of the identity of bebop was in stark contrast to what Baraka

¹⁰ Baraka notes during the Swing era: "the arranger, not the soloist was the most important man in jazz" (Baraka, 22). Within this new emphasis on the solo performer, the emphasis of notation was also declining. Notation up until the bebop era imposed "upon music the idea of a permanent text to which authorship can be safely ascribed and ownership securely established. Such fixity is a necessary precursor to commodification" (DeVeaux, 10). The emphasis on improvisation and the jam session in bebop symbolized a resistance against this commodification.

characterizes in swing jazz where “the arrangement wore the soloist like a Bellevue sport coat” (Baraka, 23). Baraka also argues that bebop was an assertion of the musicians who no longer wanted “to be thought of as ‘performers’...but as musicians” (Baraka, 23). This explanation conveys the newfound defiance of the black musicians towards their own audience and it represented an intense artistic drive that was more about the form and content of the art as opposed to its public reception. As Baraka notes, the phrase or credo of the outspoken bebop musician was “if you don’t like it, don’t listen.”

This defiant attitude of the bebop musician also represented social protest and symbolic violence in the face of racial inequality and discrimination. Ellison describes further the jam session environment where even the most respected musician’s status is always in question. For Ellison “the health of jazz and the unceasing attraction which it holds for the musicians themselves lies in the ceaseless warfare for mastery and recognition—not among the general public, through commercial success is not spurned, but among their artistic peers” (246, Ellison). As a result, even the greatest of musicians “can never rest on past accomplishments, for, as with the fast guns of the Old West, there is always someone waiting in a jam session to blow him literally, not only down, but into shame and discouragement” (246, Ellison). This theme of gun violence is pervasive throughout accounts of bebop artists and in particular Charlie Parker.

Charlie “Yardbird” Parker today remains the seminal figure of the bebop movement in jazz that began in 1939. He held a strong cultural appeal to both black and white writers and musicians during the Beat era and the subsequent Black Arts movement which coincided with the civil rights movement. Parker’s appropriation of white popular form’s chord structure into his own hit song “Koko” symbolizes bebop musicians attempt to reclaim autonomy within the creative form of music but also in the marketplace. Cherokee was originally written in 1939 by a white British musician Ray Noble and tells the story of a white man falling in love with a Cherokee woman. Considering at face value a black

man appropriating a white man's song about a white man's love for a Cherokee woman reasserts the notion of jazz extending beyond national boundaries and the cultural exchange that takes place more frequently in today's climate of political, economical, and social globalization. It is here we view jazz as counterculture to prevailing notions of western society that systematically privileges white men over women and minorities and leads to responding musical forms that stylishly subverted dominant society if only at a cultural level.

This theme of subversive cultural violence by the saxophonist was not an uncommon thought among jazz musicians either. While speaking on the social and political situation of the Civil Rights 1960s, violinist Billy Bang felt that African-American jazz artists "could pick up an instrument and it was like they were picking up an AK47...they just started honking and screaming and the statements sounded like machine gun fire" (Grandt, 68). Bang's assertion reinforces the perceived symbolic acts of violence that Charlie Parker and other beboppers were committing at this time in American history. The saxophone was used as an axe against contemporary popular song (i.e. swing) as well as the political and social establishment of the United States during World War II. To further assert Parker as a musical match to the political rhetoric Malcolm X employed years later, Amiri Baraka employs Parker in his 1963 play *Dutchman* where Parker runs "down Fifth Avenue killing scores of white people" (Grandt, 68).

The militancy of bebop, however futile in overcoming World War II era discrimination, was a cultural movement nonetheless that spoke to the hopes of its times. Eric Lott argues that "bebop was about making disciplined imagination alive and answerable to the social change of its time" (Lott, 457). Using the example of Parker's "Ko-Ko," Lott suggests "that jazz was a struggle which pitted mind against the perversity of circumstance, and that in this struggle blinding virtuosity was the best weapon" (Lott, 457). This was a time where some real social change was occurring for African

Americans and coincided with the rise of bebop as a popular jazz form.¹¹ These moments of black acceptance into mainstream American economy reflect some of the hopes of African Americans asserting their civil rights in an era when they had few and the Double V represented victories for African Americans abroad and at home.

The hope of the Double V during the bebop generation gained momentum despite constant racial discrimination in both Los Angeles and New York. In June 1941, returning and “rampaging servicemen hunted down zoot-suit-wearing *Pachucos* to beat them, strip them, and destroy their elaborate Cab Calloway-style finery” (DeVeaux, 387). The ‘zoot-suit riots’ spreading through Los Angeles served as an attack on the zoot suit, or the self-fashioned wardrobe of subversion espoused by the followers of bebop.¹² The ensuing riots represented the brutality of racial discrimination that racial minorities were subject to and it was the musical form of Bebop that symbolized the militant resistance to such abuse. These zoot suited hipsters (a young Malcolm X among them) across America chose bebop as their music of choice for its many significations of resistance to mainstream white American Culture.

A byproduct of World War II-era violence, the followers of bebop sported zoot suits and an attitude that tuned into an aggressive demand for equality and civil rights that represented an organic and uniquely American mode of black militancy. As Eric Lott points out, “Militancy and music were undergirded by the same social facts; the music attempted to resolve at the level of style what the militancy fought out in the streets. If bebop did not offer a call to arms, it at least acknowledged the call had been made” (Lott, 459). This brand of musical militancy would come home to roost in the

¹¹ In 1941, African American Ford workers went on strike in effort to unionize the preeminent American car company. In 1943, “defense plants were finally desegregated under pressure from labor and civil-rights leader A. Phillip Randolph and his march on Washington movement” (Lott, 458).

¹² On August 1, 1943, “Harlem exploded—word was that a white cop had shot and killed a black officer in a scuffle involving a blackwoman” (the soldier actually survived). As a result, “the inequity of a black military man gunned down by the white Uncle he had protected overseas hit hard, and Harlem hit back, looting businesses and trashing cars to the tune of several millions”. (Lott, 458).

form of Black Nationalism led by, among others, Malcolm X and Amiri Baraka and Civil Rights and Black Arts Movements of the 1960s. These two men would take the lessons learned from the spirit of the bebop movement (and jazz in a broader context) and transform themselves into outspoken critics of an oppressive white American majority. Malcolm X's emergence from the Black Muslim movement to lead a campaign against the perceived "white devils" that prevented America from becoming a fair and equitable society for all of its citizens served as a stark contrast to the more often sympathetic figure of Martin Luther King, Jr. who fashioned his form of resistance after that of Mahatma Gandhi and was perceived as the champion of African American pride and dignity. Baraka's own championing of the Black Arts Repertory Theatre/School (part of the larger Black Arts Movement) in New York during the 1960s and 1970s, was a direct response to Malcolm X's assassination. It was also cultivated from the autonomous creative momentum garnered in the bebop era which sought a separate arena where African Americans could pursue their artistic pursuits outside of the corrupting and corrosive force of a segregated and racially oppressive United States of America.

The bebop movement was relatively short-lived, and gave way to the "cool" movement of the 1950s, and the hard bop and free jazz movements of the 1960s and 1970s. With Charlie Parker's death in 1955, the last symbolic shred of bebop expired, but its significance in the history of the African American experience in the twentieth century still resonates today. For African Americans, their struggles with American segregation continued through the end of the century despite the hope that their acceptance as fully equal citizens under the law in the United States of America was realized during the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. The ideals of the Civil Rights Movement brought about significant social and political change for African Americans in terms of desegregation but ultimately, many of these political gains were jeopardized by economic and political movements that mitigated their success.

From this struggle, a new musical art form arrived that would serve a similar role that jazz

played in the first half of the twentieth century. Hip hop would be born in New York in the late 1970s, but its greatest cultural impact occurred in Los Angeles during the 1980s when gangster rap became a popular form. Under similar economic and social conditions that led to its rise, hip hop - and gangster rap specifically - would serve the African American experience as jazz and the bebop form had done nearly a half century earlier. Hip hop and gangster rap relies on a formula of participatory improvisation focused on lyrics instead of instruments, innovation through modern technology, and a reliance on an authentic African American vernacular tradition instead of focusing solely on instrumental rhythm in effort to specifically address, highlight, and fundamentally change the shortcomings of an institutionally racist post civil rights United States of America.

The roots of hip hop culture are based in the African American experience of the second half of the twentieth century, or more exactly the post-Civil Rights/postmodern era. Within the context of what he describes as the “hidden history of post war racial politics,” Jon Panish argues that this era “witnessed the recovery of a dominant, separate white U.S. society with such mechanisms as the government-funded rise of the racially segregated suburbs in the government-sponsored exclusionary practices of the labor unions” (Panish, xii).¹³ These politics would lead to a segregation enforced through public policy and its subtle effects as opposed to the more overt Jim Crow version that existed up until 1964. The problem of segregation and inequality would continue within the African American

¹³ Looking back at New Deal programs in the 1930s as necessary prehistory, Panish argues that the Social Security Act “provided old-age insurance and employment compensation to industrial workers, but not to farm workers and domestic servants—two categories of employment disproportionately filled by racial minority workers” (Panish, 5). Panish also highlights the Wagner Act (or National Labor Relations Act) that gave rights to workers to organize and collectively bargain but ultimately “permitted labor organizations to exclude African Americans, denied the status of ‘employee’ to black workers engaged in strike breaking, and permitted the establishment of separate racially segregated unions” (Panish, 5). Panish also identifies is the National Housing Acts of 1934 and 1937 which would set a precedent for a postwar increase in segregation. These bills established the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) “which guaranteed private lenders against home buyers’ loan defaults” (Panish, 5). This federal program ultimately “enabled many Americans to become home buyers for the first time. However, the FHA’s policies were thoroughly racist”. The *Underwriting Manual* contained “the warning that property values deteriorate when Negroes move into predominantly white neighborhoods” and as a result, the FHA red-lined or prohibited loans “in areas of the cities considered risky for economic or racial reasons”. As a result, the FHA refused to “guarantee mortgages on homes African Americans bought in white neighborhoods; and it built public housing projects with rental apartments ‘in racially segregated neighborhoods and selected tenants by race” (Panish, 5).

experience in post civil rights New York and Los Angeles.

This immediate postwar experience of racially segregated neighborhoods and inhumane housing projects are echoed by James Baldwin in his essay "Fifth Avenue, Uptown." Baldwin describes his former childhood home in 1961 as a "wide, filthy Fifth Avenue, facing that project which hangs over the avenue like a monument to the folly, and the cowardice, of good intentions." Baldwin goes on to describe Harlem's attitude towards the projects:

Harlem got its first private project, Riverton—which is now, naturally, a slum— about twelve years ago because at the time Negroes were not allowed to live in Stuyvesant town. Harlem watched Riverton go up, therefore, in the most violent bitterness of spirit, and hated it long before the builders arrived. They began hating it at about the time people began moving out of their condemned houses to make room for this additional proof of how thoroughly the white world despised them.

Baldwin's portrayal of the white world's betrayal of African Americans in Harlem during the 1950s symbolizes the project experience that would permeate American society and disproportionately adversely affect African American throughout the second half of the twentieth century (Baldwin, 58-64).

George Lipsitz, using the term 'the possessive investment in whiteness' in his book of the same title, also addresses the inequalities that have been perpetrated by the federally enacted system of suburbanization. The fallout of the process of suburbanization documented by Baldwin resulted in what Lipsitz terms "the FHA and private lenders after World War II" aiding and abetting "segregation in U.S. residential neighborhoods" (Lipsitz, 6). This possessive investment in whiteness meant that discrimination persisted in various manifestations of public policy.¹⁴ These discriminatory federal

¹⁴ FHA loans and federal highway building projects "subsidized the growth of segregated suburbs" simultaneously "urban renewal programs in cities throughout the country devastated minority neighborhoods. During the 1950s and 1960s,

programs newly introduced (as well as those dating back to the New Deal) would continue to hamstring and marginalize African Americans in the post civil rights era.

Disparities also appeared in the criminal justice system that targets and unfairly imprisons and sentences African Americans. Lipsitz references a 1990 study by the National Institute on Drug abuse which “revealed that while only 15 percent of the thirteen million habitual drug users in the United States were black and 77 percent were white, African Americans were four times more likely to be arrested on drug charges than whites in the nation as a whole” (Lipsitz, 10). The significance of this disparity in punishments also reflects the sordid history of cocaine in twentieth century American history. Originally popular in white suburbs during the 1970s and 1980s, it was soon “driven into the inner city by escalating enforcement pressures in wealthy white communities” and as a result “ghettos and barrios became distribution centers for the sale of drugs to white suburbanites” (Lipsitz, 11). As a result of the transformation of a neighborhood into a drug distribution center also left the black ghetto drug dealer conducting business on the street corner an easy target for law enforcement and this dealer was also more likely to be prosecuted, jailed, and held longer than his white drug dealing counterpart in the suburbs.

Urban renewal as a federally subsidized social program directly contributed to the ghettos and slums that were popping up as whites moved out and blacks moved in. In the developing postwar era “urban renewal helped construct a new ‘white’ identity in the suburbs by helping to destroy ethnically specific European American urban inner-city neighborhoods.” The physical result demonstrated as “increasing numbers of racial minorities moved into cities, increasing numbers of European American ethnics moved out.” The mental effect demonstrated “ethnic differences among whites became a less

federally assisted urban renewal projects destroyed 20 percent of the central-city housing units occupied by blacks, as opposed to only 10 percent of those inhabited by whites” (Lipsitz, 6). The FHA and Veterans Administration also financed “more than \$120 billion worth of new housing between 1934 and 1962, but less than 2 percent of this real estate was available to nonwhite families—and most of that small amount was located in segregated areas” (Lipsitz,6).

important dividing line in U.S. Culture, while race became more important.” The significance of this new white identity and the possessive investment in it would be evident in the Reagan administration of the 1980s. (Lipsitz, 7)

Ronald Reagan’s election simultaneously signaled a victorious revolution for the conservative right and alternately represented defeat for the civil rights movement. As Michael Omi and Howard Winant highlight, “Reagan’s record on racial policy was not a particularly enlightened one. Since his emergence as a Republican leader, Reagan had opposed every major civil rights measure considered by Congress”. He first “opposed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, denouncing it as a ‘bad piece of legislation’, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, opining that ‘the Constitution very specifically reserves control of voting to local governments. Additional legislation is unnecessary.” In light of these head-in-the-sand comments, the legacy of the Reagan Revolution resulted in more of the same institutionalized subjugation and discrimination in terms of the African American experience. (Omi & Winant, 133)

The effect of the Reagan Revolution on the African American population can be seen in the L.A. Uprisings of 1992. Lipsitz argues that “the policies of neoconservatives in the Reagan and Bush administrations during the 1980s and 1990s greatly exacerbated the racialized aspects of more than fifty years of these social welfare policies.” They sponsored “regressive policies that cut federal aid to education and refused to challenge segregated education, housing, and hiring” and strengthened the conservative Republican base by cultivating “an anti-black consensus through attacks on affirmative action and voting rights legislation clearly reinforced possessive investments in whiteness” (Lipsitz, 15). The fallout of the possessive investment in whiteness was the political, economical, and social disenfranchisement that ultimately sparked the L.A. Uprising of 1992. In response to five Los Angeles Police Department officers acquittal in the highly publicized Rodney King Trial where videotape evidence showed King beaten mercilessly by at least those five police officers, thousands of racial

minorities burned and looted local businesses in a desperate attempt to strike back against the system of racial domination. Without the surrounding political and economic public policies that discriminated against African Americans and caused their bitter frustration, the L.A. Uprisings may very well have never occurred.

One of the largest measures that led to African American disenfranchisement in Los Angeles during the 1980s is evidenced by the Proposition 13 measure that was passed by California voters in 1978. The measure lowered "property taxes by 60 percent" and was a larger sign of "the ascendance of tax-cutting conservatism that disavowed the interdependency of social groups and instead promoted self-interest as a primary goal of political struggle." The fallout of this drastic reduction in property taxes "came at the expense of public services such as schools, libraries, and police and fire protection, services that racial minorities have been increasingly forced to rely on." In this sense, Proposition 13 "continued the privatization of social life that began during the postwar period and widened the spatial and racial divide" among black and white Americans (Avila, 232-233). Lastly, the impact of Proposition 13 and its effect on African Americans and other minorities residing in California remains another example of the possessive investment in whiteness.

George Lipsitz explains this relationship of public services and the racial minorities that have grown increasingly reliant upon them. Lipsitz notes that "compared to white Americans, people of color, more likely to be poor or working class, suffer disproportionately from these changes as taxpayers, as workers, and as tenants."¹⁵ He concludes that "as groups overrepresented among the poor, minorities have been forced to subsidize the tax breaks given to the wealthy." Lipsitz demonstrates the economic harm to racial minorities when "holding property tax assessments for businesses and some home owners to about half of their market value, California's Proposition 13

¹⁵ "A study by the Citizens for Tax Justice found that wealthy Californians spend less than eleven cents in taxes for every dollar earned, while poor residents of the state pay fourteen cents out of every dollar in taxes" (Lipsitz, 17).

deprived cities and counties of \$13 billion a year in taxes” (Lipsitz, 17). When the measure passed and the proverbial smoke cleared, African Americans residing in Los Angeles had been exposed to a form of institutional racism spearheaded by the postwar neoconservative consensus that culminated politically in the Reagan presidency and was emblemized socially and culturally when Rodney King’s white assailants were protected by the state that had systematically abused African Americans and other minorities in every conceivable aspect of the Los Angeles ghetto experience.

The fallout of this “hidden” public policy resulted in the ghettoization of cities across America. The rise of drugs, crimes and gangsterism increased and the witnesses to this blight would learn to express themselves through the new musical idiom of hip hop. Hip hop was born out of the frustration and despair that African Americans experienced growing up in the ghettos from Harlem to Los Angeles, and its reliance on participation, improvisation, and societal subversion is a hallmark that reflects the bitter collective experience of African Americans who once hoped for Double V during the bebop era in the 1940s and through the civil rights and Black Arts Movement of the 1960s. Hip hop, through the specific gangster rap form, arose much like bebop, as a proverbial middle finger to the white establishment and ultimately repeated what Thelonius Monk had said nearly forty years earlier, “if you don’t like it, don’t listen”. Its emphasis on participation, improvisation and societal subversion mirrors the significance of the culture contained within the modern jazz movement. Despite these similarities, hip hop is a distinctly post civil rights, postmodern cultural movement rooted in and reflective of the African American experience during the second half of the twentieth century. As we will see, hip hop was born out of patterns of entrenched segregation, ignorance and neglect of the African American urban population. This unique and innovative musical idiom resulted directly out of the post civil rights and postmodern milieu of the late twentieth century and led to an emergent group of rappers, who like West African griots, shouted for all to be heard of the unspoken crimes committed against the urban African American population. These rappers however, also represented the best and

worst of a postmodern American society reliant on technology, blending of popular and high culture, and sometimes actively participated in a criminal ghetto culture that undermined the value of their loftier messages.

Hip hop's beginnings are rooted in the graffiti culture that began in the south Bronx in the 1970s.¹⁶ While the fad for tagging did not last long into the 1980s, its mindset would be a precursor to the dance and musical forms that followed. Hip hop's next step forward in self-expression was the art of break dancing, or breaking.¹⁷ The lasting impact of break dancing was its participation on dance floors while DJs spun records, and the clothing they wore which emphasized comfort as the essential utility to hip hop dress.¹⁸ The relationship between dancing and hip hop fashion would be a long-lasting legacy in hip hop culture.

The earliest hip hop pioneers introduced the styles that are now synonymous with hip hop today; breaks or break-beats, MCs, scratching, punch phrasing and the beat box. DJ Kool Herc was one of the first innovators of hip hop and rap soon after moving to the Bronx from Jamaica. Educated in the Jamaican sound system scene, Herc brought his own innovations to hip hop in the form of breaks and MCs that sprung from his own Jamaican tradition.¹⁹ Herc is credited with introducing MCs to the

¹⁶ Nelson George characterizes the setting: "after World War II, when the country was putting a squeaky clean face on its history and architecture, contemporary graffiti began its career as a formal civic nuisance" and "a modest urban irritant until a Bronx-inspired explosion in the '70s allowed graffiti artists to refine themselves as artists" (George, 11). The form of resistance represented through graffiti was just the first phase in establishing the subversive consciousness of the hip hop movement. Graffiti, as the earliest sign of hip hop culture, represented subversion and was for some a "last grasp for public defiance before the '60s spirit completely died" (George, 12).

¹⁷ The first break dancers "were street gang members who danced upright...and were overwhelmingly African-American". These pioneers used breaking to "pass at the time" not spearhead a cultural movement. The influence of Puerto Ricans in break dancing raised the stakes however and "made breaking competitive". Breaking crews descending from the tradition of urban gangs "challenged other dancers to meet them in a specific playground, street corner, or subway platform. Armed with cardboard instead of knives or guns, "they formed a circle where, two at a time, breakers dueled each other, move matching move, until one of the crews was acknowledged victorious" (George, 15). Breaking was a physical sport and the soft loose-fitting clothing the breakers wore would mark the beginning the hip hop fashion.

¹⁸ As Grandmaster Flash noted, breakers introduced wearing a baseball style hat with the front and bill to the back that would become another symbol resistance to the mainstream. "When dancers actually starting making contact, like doing jump kicks and kicking people on the floor, that's when the hat started going sideways. It was like 'I ain't dancing with you, I'm gonna try to hurt you'" (George, 16).

¹⁹ When "he began dee-jaying at house parties he found that the New York black crowd would not dance to reggae. So he began talking over the Latin-tinged funk that he knew *would* appeal". This talking consisted of simple lines to provoke

hip hop club scene and rap would remain an integral part of hip hop style. As “switching decks got faster and more complicated” it required more concentration and as a result Herc hired two MCs, “Coke-la-Rock and Clark Kent, to do the rapping for him. The MCs would put on a show for the crowd, dancing in front of the decks and bouncing lines off each other.” The introduction of MCs, or rappers, to the hip hop club scene was a move that came to define the music and the culture. Soon thereafter, DJ Theodor pioneered the technique “scratching” which “involves spinning a record backwards and forwards very fast while the needle is in the groove” and thus served as another way of simulating percussion and the technique served to further reinforce the beats. Hip hop’s fledgling identity in the late 1970s and early 1980s would soon solidify itself with the help of another Bronx DJ.

Grandmaster Flash has been considered the Godfather of Hip Hop because of his influence on rap and hip hop within these early days of the era when it was still defining itself. Flash pushed the innovation of the musical style but also used lyrical and performance style to bring hip hop to the forefront of post-civil rights/post modern popular culture.²⁰ Flash made his mark in hip hop with his rapping ability which was most famously employed in his 1983 song ‘The Message’. ‘The Message’ marks the beginning of the politics of resistance within the rap form. The lyrics of hip hop culture during the early days of MC’ing were not naturally subversive; most often they were used as simply party fodder merely complementing the beats and rarely delivering overarching social critique.

Released in 1983, ‘The Message’ marked the movement in hip hop that vocalized social and cultural

the crowd to keep dancing like “This is the joint!” (Hebdige, 225) and “to the beat ya’ll!” (George, 18). Herc soon developed a style “that was so popular that he began buying records for the instrumental breaks rather than the whole track.” Breaks focused on “the lead guitar or bass riff or sequence of drumming that he wanted” which “might only last fifteen seconds” and “rather than play the whole record straight through he would play this same part several times over, cutting from one record deck to the other as he talked in the microphone” (Hebdige, 224).

²⁰ Flash is credited with introducing “punch phrasing” which meant “playing a quick burst from a record on one turntable while it continues on the other” as well as “break spinning” which consisted of “alternately spinning both records backward to repeat the same phrase over and over” (George, 19). Flash also engineered or prefigured the drum machine, or what he termed a “beat box” by converting a Vox drum into a “device that allowed him to add additional percussion to the musical mix”. Flash also is regarded as hip hop’s first showman known for introducing such crowd pleasing tricks “as spinning with his back to the turntables and using his feet to mix” (George, 19).

protest and resistance to life in the ghetto. The opening stanza reads:

Broken glass everywhere
People pissin' on the stairs, you know they just don't care
I can't take the smell, can't take the noise
Got no money to move out, I guess I got no choice
Rats in the front room, roaches in the back
Junkies in the alley with a baseball bat
I tried to get away but I couldn't get far
'cuz a man with a tow truck repossessed my car

These words reflect the deprived conditions of African Americans living in the ghettos during Reagan's America of the 1980s. Flash's diagnosis reflects the social and economic conditions that existed in Flash's Bronx neighborhood, a neighborhood marked by rampant unemployment, unsanitary project tenements, and drug abuse.

Flash's song is an exploration of ghetto life in 1983 New York for its predominately African American residents:

You'll grow in the ghetto livin' second-rate
And your eyes will sing a song called deep hate
The places you play and where you stay
Looks like one great big alleyway
You'll admire all the number-book takers
Thugs, pimps and pushers and the big money-makers
Drivin' big cars, spendin' twenties and tens
And you'll wanna grow up to be just like them, huh
Smugglers, scramblers, burglars, gamblers
Pickpocket peddlers, even panhandlers
You say I'm cool, huh, I'm no fool
But then you wind up droppin' outta high school
Now you're unemployed, all non-void
Walkin' round like you're Pretty Boy Floyd
Turned stick-up kid, but look what you done did
Got sent up for a eight-year bid

Flash's depiction reinforces the position African American and other racial minorities occupied in 1980s America as second-class citizens and portrays the problems inherent in an environment where jobs are scarce and public aid for housing and schools have been scaled back dramatically, leaving a culture that increasingly glorifies gangster-style capitalism as the only means to maintaining self-

respect and survival. 'The Message's chorus reads: "Don't push me 'cuz I'm close to the edge/ I'm trying not to lose my head/ It's like a jungle sometimes/ It makes me wonder how I keep from goin' under" (sing365.com). The twofold significance of this song stands in its preaching about the problems poor blacks living in urban ghettos are experiencing and in its expression as a reminder to the American public at large that there are very real problems taking place within America despite the relative prosperity the country as a whole experienced during the 1980s. 'The Message' serves as an exercise in spreading awareness of a grave problem. It is also the first song to be described as "reality rap" and would soon lead to "gangster rap". These interrelated forms would become increasingly prevalent as the 1980s wore on.

Flash's version of reality rap contained in 'The Message' is ultimately meant to uplift and reaffirms what African American University Professor and American cultural critic at-large Michael Eric Dyson characterizes as the rap artist representing "urban griots dispensing social and cultural critique" and "verbal shamans exorcising the demons of cultural amnesia" (Dyson, 66). The term griot, refers to the West African members of society whose origins and roles in that society are often referred to as "praise-singers" but moreover, "griots and griottes actually contribute to their own societies in so many other ways that 'praise-singer becomes a far too limited description. For example, they are also historians, genealogists, advisors, spokespersons, diplomats, interpreters, musicians, composers, poets, teachers, exhorters, town criers, reporters, and masters of or contributors to a variety of ceremonies (naming, initiation, weddings, installations of chiefs, and so on)" (Hale, 250-251). With this definition in mind, Dyson employs the term to link the observing, recording, and critiquing performed by griots in the African tradition to the rap artist such as Shakur and Grandmaster Flash who perform as town criers. These town criers speak, sing, and shout loudly, making it impossible for fellow members of society to ignore their message.

With this in mind, Grandmaster Flash's 'The Message' fits into this paradigm as he addresses the

'cultural amnesia' of the 1980s where prevailing white wealth and prosperity allowed the ghettoization of cities to go unaddressed until rappers who represented a threat gained popularity and cultural influence. While on some level Dyson's characterization of rappers as "urban griots" is true to a degree, and certainly best-case scenario, rappers and the hip hop movement is also an extremely complex postmodern artistic expression that cannot be tied to one concept or another.

Hip hop music and its culture at large (attitude, style, fashion and language) represents a distinctly postmodern mode of subversion reflective of the African American experience during the second half of the twentieth century. Postmodernism, as Linda Hutcheon defines it, "is a contradictory phenomenon, one that uses and abuses, installs and then subverts, the very concepts it challenges" and applies directly to hip hop (Hutcheon, 3). Hip hop culture is one of essential resistance to the mainstream but its commodified form tends to undermine its own resistance. This installation of defiant resistance as core to the hip hop movement is also paradoxically undermined by the mainstream popular success rappers achieve in a commodified market economy. In this process the politics of resistance become subverted by the politics of commercial appeal and jeopardizes all claims of core authenticity that hip hop itself flouts.

The problem with characterizing rappers as simply "urban griots" is that it only speaks to one facet of rappers in hip hop and ignores the commercialized implications. Within the genre of gangster rap, or reality rap, defined as describing "life in the ghetto from the perspective of a criminal (or liminal, transgressive) figure" and "any rap that undertakes the project of realism" (Krimms, 70), the implications of subversion and commercialization come to a head. For every group that champions militant resistance, such as Public Enemy exhorting their listeners to "Fight the Power" and N.W.A's (Niggaz With Attitude) "Fuck tha police", there are also rappers such as Snoop Dogg who celebrate and glorify the antisocial tendencies of drinking and drug-taking that pervaded and represented the deprived conditions in the ghettos of South Central L.A. (i.e. his song "Gin and Juice"). This schizophrenia is

what Nelson George describes as “hip hop’s major problem as a political movement is that MCs are not social activists by training or inclination. They are entertainers whose visibility and effectiveness as messengers are subject to the whims of the marketplace” (George, 155). George's own career as an author, a musical and cultural critic, and journalist that spans the entire existence of hip hop from its conception up to its present day incarnation leads him to recognize hip hop’s values as inherently contradictory and as mirroring the postmodern society that Hutcheon's work identifies.

These contradictions show up not just in the music but in the cultural manifestations as well. These hip hop values “are by and large fixed—its spirit of rebellion, identification with street culture, materialism, and aggression—it is also an incredibly flexible tool of communication, quite adaptable to any number of messages” (George, 155). While the innovative form of sampling in hip hop represents “an oppositional manner which contests capitalist notions of public and private property by employing previously tabooed modes of citation” (Bartlett, 393), it also becomes a commodity that subverts its original installation. To the former point, sampling in hip hop has been controversial in its employment of popular songs as well as speeches that have often violated copyright laws. These violations of laws through sampling represents another form of hip hop's subversion of mainstream American society (in this case the legal system) by hip hop in its reaction against mainstream culture. Conversely, the latter point is made when viewing examples of pop culture that demonstrate hip hop's identity as schizophrenic. For example, artists such as the Wu Tang Clan and Jay-Z have developed their own clothing lines that ultimately shift the culture of hip hop from one of political resistance to one of fashion; thus subversion becomes represented by the designer clothes one wears. With the rise of music videos that glamorize the artists and the clothes they wear, hip hop is not simply concerned with dispensing cultural critiques which for George then represents the “ultimate capitalist tool” (George, 156).

Nelson George pinpoints the rampant commercialization that subverts the political, economic,

and social critiques that are featured in many of hip hop's most enduring songs. Looking at the June 1997 issue of the *Source*, George finds "of the magazine's sixty-seven full page ads, twenty-nine were from clothing companies" (George, 156). The significance of this commercialization underscores how products and commodities function in post modern capitalist economy of the United States: any product that sells for high profit is ultimately co-opted and on some level drains the original value of its message. An example outside of rap music within hip hop culture is the prevalence of clothes in the 90s coinciding with Spike Lee's film 'X' about the life of Malcolm X. "Originally created as an endorsement for Spike Lee's film about Malcolm X, the letter has become a vulgar post-modern reification of what Jean Baudrillard described as simulation, where signs are detached from all referents and exist simply as signs" (George, 336). These hats, shirts, and jackets emblazoned with the 'X' ultimately subvert the installed political resistance that Malcolm X signified.

This commercialization of hip hop culture and specifically gangster rap is what simultaneously ties it into bebop as well as setting it apart. Gangster rap, like bebop, is built on the musical militancy of style in its representation of subversion of white mainstream culture. Unlike bebop, gangster rap, within the larger framework of hip hop as well, and its inherent politics of resistance is ultimately commodified and reproduced in clothes, video games, and television ads. Nonetheless, subversive elements abound within gangster rap and deserve critical attention in its parallels to the bebop movement of the 1940s. Nowhere is this more evident than in examining the MC Laureate of hip hop, Tupac Shakur.

Tupac Shakur is the ultimate subversive representative of the hip hop movement in his abilities as a writer, performer, actor, and his own self-perpetuated image as a thug. Shakur was born into the black nationalism movement of the 1960s (as the son of a Black Panther Party member) and his artistic life would mirror some aspects of the Civil Right movement but, more than this, he would become a

symbolic martyr in the postmodern image of hip hop gangster.²¹ Shakur symbolized hip hop in his expressions of social and cultural critique and his own schizophrenic attitudes. Shakur's raps convey the ghetto experience of African Americans in the post civil rights/post modern era while also embodying the contradictions inherent in gangster rap. In his 1993 album 'Strictly 4 My N.I.G.G.A.Z.' he featured two songs that contradicted the messages expressed in the other. In his song 'I Get Around' Shakur boasts to his potential girlfriends:

If you wanna see me dial the beeper number baby when you need me
And I'll be there in a jiffy
Don't be picky, just be happy with this quickie
But when you learn, you can't tie me down
Baby doll, check it out, I get around

Conversely, in his song 'Keep Ya Head Up' he offers sympathy to the very women he plans to sleep with and get around on: "I give a holler to my sisters on welfare/ Tupac cares, if don't nobody else care/ And uhh, I know they like to beat ya down a lot...And when he tells you ain't nuttin don't believe him/ And if he can't/ learn to love you should leave him/ Cause sista you don't need him." Finally Shakur concludes that "I think it's time to kill for our women/ Time to heal our women, be real to our women." Shakur's conflicted attitude towards women serves as one example of the contradictions that he embodies. Within the context of gangster rap, the objectification of women is prevalent and Shakur feeds into this objectification when he talks about how he "gets around" but then also describes and sympathizes with the plight of African American women within the context of gangster rap when he says that "its time to heal our women, and be real to our women." The significance of these two diametrically opposed mindsets within the same album is the definitive example of the many contradictions Shakur represents.

Shakur reiterates the themes of 'Keep Ya Head Up' in his song 'White Man's World' which

²¹ His mother, Afeni Shakur, was a member of "the Panther 21—the group arrested and indicted in New York for alleged bomb threats" (Pough, 286).

serves as a larger statement of the perceived struggle of African Americans in the post civil rights era. He offers an apology: "Sister sorry for the pain/ That I caused your heart"; while offering prospects for his own redemption: "I know I'll change/ If ya help me." Ultimately he asks women to "Bear with me, can't you see/ We're under attack/ I never meant to cause drama/ To my sister and Mama/ Will we make it/ To better times/ In this white man's world" (tupac-online.com). This passage is significant in its social commentary of African Americans living in the "white man's world." It also identifies the struggles of African American in the context of the ghetto experience and its negative impact on black family life and its disproportionate hardship it inflicts on women who are often left alone to raise their children without their fathers around. Shakur probes this experience of the African American family in his song 'Papa'z Song'.

The song begins with the absentee father returning home from jail. Shakur replies to his father:
You've been gone a mighty long motherfuckin time
for you to be comin home talkin that 'daddy's home' shit
We been gettin along fine just without you
Me, my brother, and my mother
So if you don't mind, you can step the fuck off, pops.. fuck you!

Naturally resistant to his father re-entering into his family life, the child also prays to "Please send me a pops before puberty/ the things I wouldn't do to see a piece of family unity/ Moms always at work, I barely see her." The child, despite his anger towards his father, wishes to have a father to play catch with but also to enable him to spend more time with his mother who has to work twice as hard without a father in the household. Shakur, through the voice of the child, wonders aloud, "How can I be a man if there's no role model?/ Strivin' to save my soul I stay cold drinkin a forty bottle." Shakur's lament in this passage speaks to the problem of the African American male within the ghettos of the post civil rights era.

The second verse (sung by the rapper Wycked) speaks on behalf of the child of the first verse's brother. He explains that "Moms had to entertain many men/ Didn't wanna do it but it's time to pay the

rent again.” This passage represents the compromising position many single African American women have been subjected to in an era where the African American family within the ghetto was degraded. Yet despite these difficult circumstances, the child recognizes that “Moms was tough cause poppa wasn't man enough/ Couldn't stand up to his own responsibilities/ Instead of takin care of me, he'd rather live lavishly/ That's why I'll never be a father” because “unless you got the time it's a crime don't even bother.” This passage is significant in the expression of fatherhood within the ghetto and the African American experience. At a time during the 1980s when teenage birthrates were increasing, Shakur preaches through this song the importance of commitment to women, children and the African American family.

In the song's final verse, Tupac raps while impersonating the estranged father of this fictional family. The father begins defending himself by explaining he was on the run from the police. He argues that “I never meant to leave but I was wanted” then assumes some blame, “Maybe it's my fault for being a father livin fast/ But livin slow, mean half the dough, and you won't get no ass/ Hindsight shows me it was wrong all along/ I wanted to make some dough so you would grow to be so strong.” Finally the father concludes “It took a little longer than I thought/ I slipped, got caught, and sent to jail by the courts/ Now I'm doin time and I wish you'd understand/ all I ever wanted was for you to be a man/ and grow to be the type you was meant to be/ Keep the war fightin' by the writings that you sent to me, I'm so sorry”. The father's defense may be shallow but serves to represent the domestic problem of African American men within the ghetto. Often raised in a single parent home where a single mother has to work an extra job to compensate for a father who is either incarcerated or “getting around”, the affected young male (and female) children often join gangs, commit petty or serious crimes, and consume alcohol and various other drugs in order escape the grim reality of the urban ghetto. ‘Papa’z Song’s portrayal and exploration of the black family during the gangster rap era of hip hop is indicative of the African American experience of 1980s where exploitative urban renewal

programs, diminished social programs and excessively curbed property taxes all greatly contributed to the deterioration of the African American family within the ghetto experience.

Throughout the scope of all of his work, Shakur embodies those African American men struggling to come to terms with an identity that has been marginalized by white mainstream American society. In his song 'To Live and Die in L.A.', Shakur describes his rapping career as "Makin money off of cuss words, writin' again/ Learn how to think ahead, so I fight with my pen". In the song's second verse Shakur describes his life in Los Angeles:

It's the, City of Angels and constant danger
South Central LA, can't get no stranger
Full of drama like a soap opera, on the curb
Watchin the ghetto bird helicopters, I observe
So many niggaz gettin three strikes, tossed in jail
I swear the pen the right across from hell, I can't cry
Cause it's on now, I'm just a nigga on his own now
Livin life Thug style, so I can't smile

This passage demonstrates Shakur's observational ability to articulate the problems endemic to African Americans through his music. It demonstrates the "constant danger" a resident of the ghetto faced in his/her daily lives. He characterizes the drama inherent in this atmosphere where subjects are in seeming constant surveillance. He also describes the hypocrisy of the Three Strikes legislation that passed during the Reagan administration that gave mandatory sentences to drug offenders after being charged with a third offense. This legislation is inherently discriminatory as it disproportionately targets African Americans as noted previously referencing Lipsitz. Finally, Shakur expresses the hopelessness of "a nigga on his own now" left to live the "Thug style" leaving him unable to find happiness within this marginalized existence.

These passages reassert Michael Eric Dyson's claim that rappers are the "urban griots of their time dispensing social and cultural critiques" and Tupac Shakur is the best example of rapper as social griot, cultural shaman, or liminal and transgressive figure. This is significant because it demonstrates

that what Dyson argues is true but only in a limited sense. While Shakur did reflect the issues that applied to the African American experience of the post civil rights/post modern era, it also remains an incomplete critique. On one hand, Shakur embodied the political and cultural struggle stemming from the Black Panther movement of the 1960s and 1970s that his own mother was a part of. On the other hand, Shakur glamorized and participated in the "Thug Life" culture of gangster rap preaching self-destructive gospels of drug and alcohol use, materialism, and objectification of women. Shakur himself was "charged with assaulting a limousine driver and shooting two off-duty Atlanta police officers" and "was convicted of sodomizing a fan in his hotel room" (Watts, 601). On top of this, Shakur had been the victim of gun violence once before when he was "shot on November 30, 1994, in the lobby of the Times Square's Quad recording studio" (George, 141). Although he survived this attempt on his life, at the age of 25 he was shot and killed by an unknown assailant in Las Vegas on September 7, 1996 following a boxing match at the MGM Grand (George, 142).

In light of the tragic ending of Shakur's life, his legacy through his words embody the era of gangster rap in hip hop that grew out of the adverse social, political, and economic environment of the urban ghetto in places like New York and L.A. In perhaps the most telling anecdote of Shakur's contradictory identity, he was known for his advocacy of "Thug Life" and had it tattooed on his stomach. Yet for Shakur, "Thug Life" also served as an acronym for "The Hate You Give Little Infants Fucks Everyone" (Glassner, 126). Shakur's phrasing here suggests that mainstream America's blindness to the plight of the African American ghetto experience during the 1980s and 1990s witnessed and written about by rappers like Shakur results in a society where these products of the ghetto fall into the cracks of society and are often reduced to gun warfare, drug use, and violence towards women. In this self-fashioned duality of the term, Shakur created space for himself to operate as a criminal, a rapper, and a social griot. His legacy is reflective of his era and his personal tragedy only highlighted the countless other tragedies in New York and L.A. which would go largely unnoticed

by a form of white cultural blindness that ignored the plight of the urban poor.

Yet it is not only music that came to define the African American experience of the twentieth century. The African American comic satirical novel, much like the popular forms of jazz and hip hop, serves to criticize and subvert the prevailing Western ideological and sociological notions of race and power. In his study of African American satire Darryl Dickson-Carr characterizes satire "as a literary genre" whose main goal "is to criticize through humor, irony, caricature, and parody," adding that "satire is nothing if it does not aggressively defy the status quo" (Dickson-Carr, 1). This definition fits into the politics of resistance that the musical forms of bebop jazz and gangster rap advocate. This close relationship between music and literature generally and between African American popular music and the satirical novel specifically places the context of the African American struggle in the twentieth century within the Arts as well as the political arena. These artistic forms help to challenge the status quo of American mainstream consciousness in hopes to advance the African American struggle for political fulfillment within the United States during the post civil rights/postmodern era.

Finally, like the musical forms of jazz and hip hop, the roots of African American satire have common origins. As Dickson-Carr explains "the ontological condition of most African Americans during the era of chattel slavery alone normally precluded the free and direct expression of the black individual's ideas" (Dickson-Carr, 3). Resulting from this restricted expression, African Americans were thus "forced to create various complex coded languages and expressions that allowed for the indirect expression of their frustration." Satire in the African American tradition was born out of this experience and "was as much a part of these codes as any other rhetorical element, written into a language of indirection" which placated the slave owner "even as it stymied them." This coded language reinforces the duality of African American speech in its application of double entendre, humorous irony and slapstick and becomes a vernacular tradition unique to the African American born out of the transatlantic slave trade (Dickson-Carr, 3-5). Dickson-Carr argues that satire's primary

function then through the use of double entendre, irony and slapstick “is to act as an invaluable mode of social and political critique” (Dickson-Carr, 5). The African American comic satirical novelist then acts in a manner akin to the subversive bebop jazz musicians like Charlie Parker as well as the “urban griots” and “verbal shamans” such as Grandmaster Flash and Tupac Shakur of the hip hop genre. A closer look into this novel form will reveal the similarities between the musical rhetoric of jazz and hip hop that serves to place and contest the role of the African American subject as it stood in the twentieth century and more importantly to help redefine their space and place in the future.

Signifyin(g), Embodyin(g), and all that Jazz:
Roots of African American Political Consciousness in Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*

Time is a pendulum. Not a river. More akin to what goes around comes around

-Ishmael Reed, Mumbo Jumbo

Within the context of twentieth-century America, African American cultural expression took various forms of dance, song, literature, paintings, sculptures, and graffiti in order to address wrongs that dominant white society had systematically enacted against African Americans as putative citizens of the nation. While jazz and hip hop are prevailing popular musical forms among this canon of cultural production, prominent among this collection of politically motivated forms of artistic self-expression is the comic satirical novel and the critical role it plays in the African American experience of the twentieth century. African American satire has played the same subversive role that both jazz and hip hop employ. They have in common a basic resistance to white hegemony and a challenge to (and a potential revision of) ideological frameworks constructed to support white hegemony. In this sense, African American comic satirical novelists act then, on one level, as Charlie Parker and Tupac Shakur performed. Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972) is an example of a novel that combines these themes to present a story reclaiming the lost voice of disembodied and dispossessed African cultures and values. Reed's blend of satire, narration, song, dance, and mythology not only gives voice to the abused, discriminated, and marginalized history of blacks in the United States, but does so in the larger context of the Black Atlantic²². *Mumbo Jumbo* also more importantly resists on the ideological terrain of cultural and political consciousness, a legacy of white American hegemony that distorts, subjugates, and abuses the racialized Other of African Americans. Reed's emphasis on improvisation through signification serves to embody and place the disembodied and displaced, and his innovative modal jazz

²² Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* argues that within the context of the Black Atlantic, the triangle stretching from Africa to the United Kingdom to the United States and the Caribbean is the central terrain where Black diaspora identity and counterculture emerges to challenge the dominant white majority and its Enlightenment values.

aesthetic narrative relies on the rhythmic and vernacular African traditions in order to challenge, question, and revise the prevailing hegemonic and ideological construction of Western society. Reed's development of the trope of signification, his narrative style which mimics jazz, along with his employment of jazz music as a mode of social and political resistance, and his use of satiric absurdity to critique people and ideas, all serve his larger goal to challenge the most cherished ideals of Western epistemology.

Reed's novel is centered in New York City during the Harlem Renaissance and the Roaring Twenties. The plot revolves around an epidemic called 'Jes Grew'. This epidemic generally involves its affected hosts feeling enlivened, restless, and frenetic. The novel follows the story of the advancing plague into New York and institutional forces in charge of New York, the Atonists (or the Wallflower Order) who favor temperance and decorum in opposition to the plagues hosts, the Jes Grew Carriers. For the Atonists, Jes Grew represents "a boll weevil eating away at the fabric of our forms our technique our aesthetic integrity" (17, Reed). The Atonists are led by Hinckle Von Vampton, who is in charge of carrying out a plan determined to stamp out the plague and its carriers. As for the Jes Grew Carriers, they are led by the Haitian Voodoo Doctor Pa Pa La Bas, who is determined to find the missing text of Jes Grew, the Book of Thoth, which had been divided into fourteen separate chapters and remains hidden and scattered throughout the United States. The goal of La Bas is to reconfigure the Book of Thoth in its entirety in order to combat and overthrow the Atonist Path, or as the narrator describes "Jes Grew is seeking its words. Its text. For what good is a liturgy without a text?" (Reed, 6). The Atonist Path rules New York City and is conversely consumed with suppressing the text in order to maintain its social and political dominance within the city. Reed's narrative constructs and visual devices offer the reader a cultural criticism through self-referential imagery and intertextual revision. While Reed's strategy is today considered a commonplace postmodern technique, it also dovetails with, and reaches further back upon, the African vernacular tradition of Signifyin(g).

Henry Louis Gates, Jr., in his influential book on literary theory *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*, argues that this postmodern technique of Signifyin(g) serves as the trope of tropes within African American culture. Gates begins by establishing the standard English definition of signification which “denotes the meaning that a term conveys, or is intended to convey” (Gates, 46). Signifyin(g), Gates argues, is a black vernacular tradition which creates a homonymic pun which supplants the “received term's associated concept” and “thereby making its sense of difference from the rest of the English community of speakers. Their complex act of language Signifies upon both formal language use and its conventions” - conventions, most importantly, that have been established “by middle-class white people” (Gates, 47). The homonymic pun that Gates identifies is the essential principle of Signifyin(g). While one word may have two meanings, Signifyin(g) is a play on the alternative meanings of a word. Signifyin(g) then becomes a vernacular and literary strategy where participation, improvisation, and societal subversion meet and creates an authentic “sign of black difference” (Gates, 92).

This sign and signification of black difference asserts black identity within the paradigm of the Black Atlantic. In standard English terms, the word “bad” connotes a negative meaning, but in the context of an improvised jazz solo or a beautiful woman, the meaning of “bad” changes from a negative attribute to a positive one, and one that implies great respect and admiration for the subject the word is attributed to. Another critical example would be the word “nigger” which is historically used in the Western sense to dehumanize and dismiss African American subjects, but when used today by African Americans is meant to convey a unique bond of kinship and fraternity. This linguistic and verbal technique (one that Gates characterizes as a “political offensive”) is at the very core of an authentic African American strategy, to combat the institutional and ideological disadvantaging experienced by Europe's raced Others since the inception of the Enlightenment, and reasserts and complements the African American satirical novelist's approach which relies on the same attitude at the

level of style (in this case Signifyin(g)) that bebop musicians and gangster rappers employ(ed) in their respective musical forms. This sign and signification of black difference amounts to a political offensive by its very contradistinction to the normative connotation of words in Western society. By appropriating the meaning of Western words and installing new meanings, African American vernacular discourse becomes a crucial contestation point of subjective value in a society where the racialized Other has historically been marginalized and decentered from the center of Western social and political discourse.

For Gates, the Signifying Monkey then becomes the trope of tropes in African American vernacular and literary discourse. Gates defines the Signifying Monkey as a descendant of an African and distinctly black tradition:

The Signifying Monkey is a trickster figure, of the order of the trickster figure of Yoruba mythology (*Esu-Elegbara* of Nigeria and *Legba* among the *Fon* in Dahomey), whose New World figurations (*Exu* in Brazil, *Echu-Elegua* in Cuba, *Papa Legba* in the pantheon of the *loa of Vaudou* in Haiti, and *Papa La Bas* in the *loa* of *Hoodoo* in the United States) speak eloquently to the unbroken arc of metaphysical presupposition and patterns of figuration shared through space and time among black cultures in West Africa, South America, the Caribbean, and the United States. These trickster figures, aspects of *Esu*, are primarily mediators: as tricksters they are mediators, and their mediations are tricks. (Gates, 988, *Literary Theory*)

Esu as a trickster in Yoruba culture represents the Yoruba people as well as the Yoruba gods. His dual role is one based on this doubling of roles: he is both of earth and of heaven as well. It is *Esu*'s duality or double-voicedness, both worldly (of this world) as well as other-worldly (from outside of this world), which leads Gates to ascribe this trope as the hallmark of African American literary theory.

Literary theorist M.M. Bakhtin's work on the subject of the writer and his/her relation to the

novel is also instructive for our purposes of examining the play of signification or Signifyin(g). The African American satirical and vernacular traditions employ principles characterized by Bakhtin in his essay, "Discourse in the Novel". Bakhtin's largest contributions to literary theory are the terms heteroglossia and dialogic which describe the relationship between words and meanings throughout various social, cultural, and political contexts. Bakhtin asserts that "all languages of heteroglossia...are specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words, specific world views, each characterized by its own objects, meanings and values" (Bakhtin, 676). Simply put, heteroglossia refers to the different glossaries of terms that various people employ, be they teachers, politicians, parents, children, etc. "As such they may be juxtaposed to one another, mutually supplement one another, contradict one another and be interrelated dialogically" (Bakhtin, 676). The dialogic here then refers to the system or relationship of words to each other, or the ever-changing context of meaning of those words. Bakhtin's importance to understanding African American satire is critical when analyzing the distinctly African American linguistic form of signification. In his book *African American Satire: The Sacredly Profane*, Darryl Dickson-Carr describes Signifyin(g) as a verbal style "used in African American vernacular discursive communities for a number of purposes" which include "verbal jousting consisting of insults and trickery used to create a clever, often subtly devastating critique of a particular person, idea, or object." It is also described by Claudia Mitchell-Kernan as a "way of encoding messages or meanings which involves, in most cases, an element of indirection" (Dickson-Carr, 28).

Gates cites Mikhail Bakhtin and his concept of a "double-voiced" discourse in Bakhtin's essay "Discourse on Typology in Prose" to further illuminate the dual role of the Esu/Signifying Monkey. Within this concept of the double-voiced discourse, the principle of parody emerges as "the theory of Signifying as a metaphor for literary history" (Gates, 110, *Signifying Monkey*). Bakhtin's definition of parody states that "as in stylization, the author employs the speech of another, but in contradistinction

to stylization, he introduces into that other speech an intention which is directly opposed to the original one" (Gates, 110). Parody also "allows considerable variety: one can parody another's style as style, or parody another's socially typical or individually characteristic manner of observing, thinking, and speaking" (Gates, 110). This concept of the double voice and the inherent role for parody within the trickster figure leads Gates to argue that The Signifying Monkey is the trope of tropes within the context of the African American literary and cultural tradition. Gates argues the Signifying Monkey "stands for the rhetorical strategies of which each literary text consists. For the Signifying Monkey exists as the great trope of the Afro-American discourse, and the trope of tropes, his language of Signifying, is his verbal sign in the Afro-American tradition" (Gates, 21). Signification, for Gates, represents within the context of the African American cultural tradition, "an intentional deviation from the ordinary form or syntactical relation of words" (Gates, 80). It is within this figurative creation where African Americans find their own voice living in a Western society that has systematically (physically and ideologically) placed them at the margins of that society.

This play of signification within black English vernacular is then most significant in its authentically African American expression of a righteous self-assertion. This righteousness involves the African American subject asserting his/her political and ideological equality with their fellow white American citizenry. African American Signifyin(g) represents a crucial appropriation of the English language seeking to embody, place, and restore the African American body back within the construct of an American society which has historically and ideologically disadvantaged the racial Other. The African American subject accomplishes this restoration by distinguishing the black subject apart from the racial majority of the United States through the assertion/establishment of black identity, language, and culture defined by the African American subject itself rather than the racial and ideological majority. Signifyin(g), in its giving voice to an ideologically and historically voiceless and disembodied subject, serves to place by differentiating, and thereby restores an African American body

that has long been abused, degraded, and disregarded in conceptions and manifestations of Western society. Gates posits that “given the play of doubles at work in the black appropriation of the English-language term that denotes relations of meaning, the Signifying Monkey and his language of Signifying are extraordinary conventions, with signification standing as the term for black rhetoric, the obscuring of apparent meaning” (Gates, 53). Signifyin(g), as represented through Gates' trope of the Signifying Monkey, is the dominant black rhetorical style responding to the roots of exploitation which began in the African American experience of the transatlantic slave trade.

Lastly, Signifyin(g) provides means for the African American writer, rapper, and jazz musician to combat and revise previously accepted historical notions of white racial supremacy. For Gates, Signifying “is black double-voicedness; because it always entails formal revision and an intertextual relation” (Gates, 51). This double-voicedness, revision and intertextual relation are all employed to question the previously agreed upon notions of the past. In the context of the African American experience of the twentieth century, satire in the form of the novel became one avenue in which African American artists could call into question the racist legacies of Western thought. Like jazz and hip hop music, this artistic self-assertion of African American subjective autonomy through signification, sprung from conditions that describes the ideological plight of the African American experience as a marginalized citizen in the Western world. Signifyin(g) then, rooted in African cultures and the African American experience of slavery, becomes the ultimate expression of cultural difference and political fulfillment developed in the black vernacular tradition and incorporated into the literary tradition of the twentieth century.

The notions of the double-voice and intertextual signification is found in one of the earliest postmodern novels, Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*. Reed's play of doubles and signification begins with the title of *Mumbo Jumbo*, itself an allegory of traditional African culture within its Western ideological conception. Reed defines the term Mumbo Jumbo, within the novel itself, citing from the

American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language as originating in the Mandingo word meaning “magician who makes the troubled spirits of ancestors go away” (Reed, 7). The Oxford English Dictionary defines ‘mumbo jumbo’ as “A god or spirit said to have been worshipped by certain West African peoples; a representation of this; an idol; In extended use: an object of superstitious awe or blind veneration; Obscure or meaningless language or ritual; jargon intended to impress or mystify; nonsense” (OED). Reed’s intertextual Mandingo reference inaugurates his critique of Western society with its dismissal of all non-Western, yet specifically African, cultural traditions and practices as nonsense or gibberish by labeling these traditions and practices as mumbo jumbo. Mumbo jumbo then functions as a dismissal of all things foreign, and/or difficult to comprehend. Gates argues that *Mumbo Jumbo* serves as the “ethnocentric Western designation for the rituals of black religions as well as for black languages themselves” (Gates, 220). This Western designation for African cultural traditions (religions) and practices (language) defines them as empirically unfounded, linguistically difficult to read/pronounce and therefore unintelligible by name and by practice, thus representing an implicitly larger indictment of African traditions. Gates diagnoses this cultural, textual, and ideological slighting as “abusive Western practices of deflation through misnaming” (Gates, 221). Gates’ highlighting of Western practices of deflation through misnaming illustrates Western society’s distortion, subjugation, and abuse of the racialized Other within Western society.

The OED’s second and third definitions reinforce Reed’s thematic argument by defining and rendering the term ‘mumbo jumbo’ as meaningless and superstitious nonsense. The OED cites the etymology of the term as “of unknown origin” thus ignoring the origins that Gates identifies when he notes “any Swahili speaker knows that the phrase derives from the common greeting *jambo* and its plural, *mambo*, which loosely translated mean ‘What’s happening?’” (Gates, 220-221). Here the ignorance of the Oxford English Dictionary of the etymology acquired by Swahili illustrates and reinforces Western society’s indifference to languages and cultures located outside of the Western

tradition. Moreover, Reed's choice of title for his novel itself offers up a critique of Western civilization's privileging its own language, culture, and scholarship at the expense of any culture outside of the "civilized" and "enlightened" modern Western paradigm.

Reed's criticism of Western Civilization's legacy of cultural hegemony flows naturally from the title of his novel to the central narrative, through his construction of the Jes Grew plague which symbolizes not only jazz music, but also the process of African American citizens migrating to northern cities beginning at the outset of the twentieth century (and more generally African American cultural influence on the United States). Reed casts the struggles of African Americans (Jes Grew Carriers) with white mainstream American society (Atonists) through the allegorical secret orders of Set (Western society) and Osiris (African society). The novel takes place in 1920s Harlem where the followers of Set, the Atonist Path, or Wallflower Order fear an Osirian plague spreading north from New Orleans: a plague which threatens New York City. The narrator describes Jes Grew's trajectory:

Pine Bluff and Magnolia Arkansas are hit; Natchez, Meridian and Greenwood Mississippi report cases. Sporadic outbreaks occur in Nashville and Knoxville Tennessee as well as St.

Louis where the bumping and grinding cause the Gov to call up the Guard. A mighty influence, Jes Grew infects all that it touches. (Reed, 13)

This migration of the Jes Grew mirrors the migration of the blues, ragtime and jazz music but also mirrors the migration patterns of African Americans as they moved north from the deep south, fleeing the persecution of Jim Crow discrimination. The narrator characterizes the Jes Grew epidemic as "unlike physical plagues. Actually Jes Grew was anti-plague. Some plagues caused the body to waste away; Jes Grew enlivened the host" adding that Jes Grew "is electric as life and is characterized by ebullience and ecstasy" while "terrible plagues were due to the wrath of God...Jes Grew is the delight of the gods" (Reed, 6). Jes Grew is the protagonist of the novel and introduces Reed's own critique of Western society's emphasis on temperance, decorum and a suppression of the body.

Reed's signification of Jes Grew also represents the threat African Americans posed to white mainstream American society not only ideologically but physically as well. The novel's opening scene is set in a New Orleans hospital where a doctor informs the mayor that they have "decoded this coon mumbo jumbo. We knew that something was Jes Grewing just like the 1890s flair-up" (Reed, 4). Here the doctor alerts the authorities that a Jes Grew phenomenon, akin to the first instance dating back to 1890, is coming back. This passage refers to the 1890's as a time when distinctly African American 'ragtime' music was becoming increasingly popular within white American audiences and Jes Grew is seen as an extension of the previous cultural crisis. This passage, while revealing Jes Grew to be an allegory of jazz, also speaks to the Great Migration of African Americans of the early twentieth century. As David Levering Lewis notes, "Of Manhattan's 60,534 Afro-Americans in 1910, only 14,300 had been born in New York" (Lewis, 27). This passage indicates the physical impact of the Great Migration of African Americans moving into northern cities. From this perspective, "Jes Grew" is an epidemic (a non-Western political counter-discourse) to the Atonist Path (the prevailing dominant white Western society) not merely because of a "heathen" or "pagan" dance but also because it symbolizes the growing number of African Americans populating New York City. These new citizens of New York and their exertion of artistic influence (outside of and beyond the Civil War/Reconstruction era minstrel show) serves as the largest threat to Reed's constructed Atonist Path, an allegory of privileged white male Western society.

Yet as Reed suggests within his allegory of Jes Grew, it is not simply the mere presence of African Americans within Harlem that causes alarm for the dominant white mainstream society. Lewis emphasizes these new Harlem residents "had already conquered New York" dating back to what Reed refers to as that "1890s flair-up" (Reed, 4). Lewis characterizes Ragtime as having symbolically "cakewalked out of the minstrel shows of the late 1880s into Brooklyn's Ambrose Park during the 1894 summer production of *Black America* (the first all-black show)" (Lewis, 29). For Lewis this first all-

black production symbolized African Americans moving “in artistic and financial triumph from vaudeville houses to Broadway” (Lewis, 29). While Lewis’s use of the word ‘conquering’ may seem a bit overstated when considering how little influence African Americans wielded in New York or on the larger political scale of American society, he is accurate in identifying the beginning of the first artistic inroads that African American performers paved. These inroads “from vaudeville houses” in New Orleans “to Broadway” would open the channels that jazz and hip hop would later flow through. (Lewis, 29) While *Mumbo Jumbo* links its narrative to the musical influences and history of ragtime, Reed focuses on the artistic inroads made by the modern jazz movement.

Jes Grew, represents an ideological strain – or black Atlantic political thought – and plays a starring role throughout *Mumbo Jumbo*. The origins of the term itself serve to highlight for the reader Reed's representation of feeling, emotion, and the body that have been subjugated by Western civilization, in this case the Protestant-like Atonist Path. Jes Grew, moreover, symbolizes a larger struggle of African Americans seeking to restore, replace, and embody the African American subject within American society. The narrator proclaims “if the Jazz Age is the year for year the Essences and Symptoms of the times, then Jes Grew is the germ making it rise yeast-like across the the American plain” (Reed, 20). Reed's statement here links the music to the larger political critique that represents the black Atlantic as counterculture to modern Western society which perpetuates, through ideological construction and physical application, white male hegemony. The term Jes Grew derives from James Weldon Johnson’s statement: “The earliest Ragtime song, like Topsy, ‘jes’ grew” (Reed, 11). James Weldon Johnson was a prominent African-American poet and figure during the Harlem Renaissance (he would later become Secretary for the NAACP); the novel's temporal setting is that of the Harlem Renaissance. Reed’s construction of Jes Grew recalls Johnson who coined the phrase but also recalls Topsy, a character from Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, who when asked of the origins of her own conception, responded with “I spect I grow’d. Don’t think nobody never made me” (Stowe,

210). Topsy's response reveals her own ignorance of God (and of her paternal father) and is representative within Johnson's description of ragtime "jes' grew"ing as growing organically, simultaneously both inside and outside, of the traditionally normative Western notions of patriarchal civilization.

Reed's construction of Jes Grew as allegory of jazz but also signifying (recalling, playing to the alternate meaning of the word(s), or what Darryl Dickson-Carr suggests as a "language of indirection") on African American artists (Johnson) and literary figures (Topsy) suggests a growing resistance to slavery, Jim Crow segregation, and newer forms of racism that serve the author in his critique of the United States before, during, and after the civil rights movement. This movement represented African Americans attempt to achieve a fair and equitable society. This movement is captured and intertextualized in Johnson's phrase which Henry Louis Gates argues "characterizes the creative process of black sacred music, *Mumbo Jumbo*, then, Signifies upon Western etymology...and Johnson's specious, albeit persistent, designation of black creativity as anonymous" (Gates, 221). This anonymity is present in the phrase 'mumbo jumbo' and is indicative of Reed's allegory of Jes Grew and its inherent criticism of Western society's systematic disadvantaging and discriminated against the body of the African American symbolized by its characteristic dismissal of these other (non-white) cultural expressions which are reduced to something wholly unintelligible, or mumbo jumbo in the Western sense of the phrase. Reed's allegory of Jes Grew symbolizes larger themes of African American identity and subjectivity within the context of the Black Atlantic.

Paul Gilroy's thesis of black identity as counterculture to modernity through the framing of the black Atlantic is instructive when considering jazz as representative of the alternative form of cultural and political expression it embodies. For Gilroy, the Black Atlantic suggests that black diaspora, all black subjects within the landscape of the Atlantic (or transatlantic, resembling the transatlantic slave trade routes and ranging from Africa to Europe to the Caribbean and North America), suffer from a

degraded Other status in terms of their relation to modernity in its Western conception idealized through its ideology of Enlightenment.

Gilroy begins his critical exploration of the Black Atlantic beginning with W.E.B. Du Bois' work *The Souls of Black Folk* and bases his conception of African American (and black diaspora) identity and subjectivity on Du Bois' conception of double consciousness. Gilroy cites Du Bois' lament that "One ever feels his twoness, -an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (Du Bois, 3). This doubling of thoughts and strivings leads to an identity struggle for blacks living simultaneously inside and outside of Western society.

Gilroy argues for black subjectivity throughout the black Atlantic achieving its rightful place in world civilization through the use of what he terms the "politics of fulfillment" and the "politics of transfiguration". For Gilroy, the politics of fulfillment, or reform in the liberal sense "is mostly content to play occidental rationality at its own game", whereas the politics of transfiguration, or revolution, "necessitates a hermeneutic orientation that can assimilate the semiotic, verbal, and textual" (Gilroy, 38). It is within these two terms that Gilroy seeks to illustrate the struggle that exists between these two strains of consciousness. On one hand, the "politics of fulfillment" represents the practical political reformer seeking change in the liberal sense to achieve social progress, in contrast to the artist (or the slave in Gilroy's historical model) and their "politics of transfiguration" which seeks to transcend and revolutionize the relationships that exist within society, to transfigure them in order to create a wholly new society free from the divisions and downfalls of the legacy of, in this case, American society.

Gilroy then turns conventional modern Western ideology on its head when he argues that the tradition of modernity and the Enlightenment "lost its exclusive claim to rationality partly through the way that slavery became internal to western civilization and through the obvious complicity which both

plantation slavery and colonial regimes revealed between rationality and the practice of racial terror” (Gilroy, 39). Here Gilroy engages critical theorists such as Marshall Berman and Jurgen Habermas, who in their works have highlighted these tensions but ultimately capitulate and resubscribe to the Enlightenment Project. Critical for Gilroy is a rejection of the Hegelian Dialectic of the Enlightenment (or the ship of Enlightenment ideals of science and progress proverbially sailed at the very moment the first literal slave ship set sail). This modern Western ideological indoctrination created a rationalized “practice of racial terror” and as a result, Gilroy explains that the “history and utility of black music,” as a “subculture,” is an “elementary historical acquisition produced from the viscera of an alternative body of cultural and political expression” (Gilroy, 39). This expression of the Black Atlantic representing double consciousness, a black consciousness both inside and outside of the dominant white consciousness of Western society, leads to Gilroy’s contention that “black musical expression has played a role in reproducing...a distinctive counterculture of modernity” (Gilroy, 36). Through Gilroy's lens, jazz comes to engage problems blacks face within their own lives and helps to explain the alternative body of cultural and political expression that African American music came to embody. It is crucial to note that at the center of this embodiment of black political/ideological counter-discourse and black popular musical form as counterculture to mainstream white American aesthetics is the very overt political act of restoring African American identity and subjectivity within American society; this is the central theme at the heart of Gilroy's *Black Atlantic*.

Gilroy’s assertion of black political presence and desire within America through the conception of the Black Atlantic is usefully deployed when considering Ishmael Reed’s allegory of Jes Grew within *Mumbo Jumbo*. Gilroy explains the origins of black music as counterculture to Western conceptions of enlightened modernity when he explains, in that “severely restricted space, sacred or profane” of institutional slavery, “art became the backbone of the slaves’ political cultures and of their cultural history” (Gilroy, 57). Gilroy, then seemingly speaks to Reed's project in *Mumbo Jumbo* when

he argues that “Artistic expression, expanded beyond recognition from the grudging gifts offered by the masters as a token substitute for freedom from bondage, therefore becomes the means toward individual self-fashioning and communal liberation” (Gilroy, 40). As a result, “Poiesis and poetics begin to coexist in novel forms –autobiographical writing, special and uniquely creative ways of manipulating spoken language, and, above all, the music” (Gilroy, 40). This artistic expression and its associated “politics of transfiguration”, is rooted in, and becomes the counter-discourse to, the ideology of the Enlightenment. Yet as much of a role that the politics of transfiguration plays in the expression of African American consciousness in the context of the twentieth century, it is important to note that the “politics of fulfillment” and its focus on what I call a “politics of the real” is ultimately the battleground that African American subjectivity is fought on as it seeks to make progress within society. Nonetheless, Reed's own efforts coming out of the civil rights movement and *Mumbo Jumbo's* illustration and criticism of western society's emphasis on reason, science, and progress, leading to domination and subjugation extant in the United States since its inception ultimately falls back upon a quest for political fulfillment.

This ideological domination and subjugation in modern Western society of its racialized and gendered subjects is illustrated and critiqued through Reed's parody of the militant arms of both Jes Grew and the Atonist Path. In addition to the Jes Grew epidemic sweeping the United States, Mu'tafikah, the militant arm of Jes Grew emerges and is responsible for “looting the museums shipping the plunder back to where it came from. America, Europe's last hope, the protector of the archives of 'mankind's' achievements had come down with bad case of Jes Grew and Mu'tafikah too” (Reed, 15). This passage indicates Mu'tafikah's responsibility in recapturing and returning the artifacts of lost (non-Western) civilizations back to their rightful homes as an act of (re)placing and (re)storing the artifacts of these non-Western traditions which have been dominated, subjugated, and dismissed by modern Western civilization. This form of artistic and cultural robbery is captured in the narrator of *Mumbo*

Jumbo (re)branding Art Museums as “Centers of Art Detention” and “Dungeons for the treasures from Africa, South America, and Asia” (Reed, 15). Reed's (re) naming of Art Museums reasserts his criticism of modern Western society that (re)presents and commodifies non-Western culturally significant artifacts (for a debased, popularized Western mass consumption).

In response to, and with the hopes of defeating, the Mu'tafikah and their siege of Western civilization's art, the Atonist Path's Wallflower Order enlists the Teutonic Knights. The Teutonic Knights, a crusading military order of soldiers, are summoned because “only they could defend the cherished traditions of the West against Jes Grew” (Reed, 15). The enlistment of the Teutonic Knights, historically traditional warriors of Christianity, is deemed necessary because of the proportionate threat Jes Grew symbolizes to the Wallflower Order, a disease that callously knows “no class no race no consciousness” (Reed, 5). This passage reveals the Atonists perception of Jes Grew as wholly indiscriminate in its affects on subjects of any class, race, gender or political philosophy. It also suggests an argument against neoconservative notions of a colorblind society constructed in post industrial, post civil rights, and post modern American society in order to protect the institution of white masculine hegemony that came under attack during the second half of the nineteenth century during the Civil Rights movement.

This depiction of the subplot between the military arms of the Atonist Path (the Wallflower Order) and Jes Grew (Mu'tafikah) indicates both the desperation of the followers of Set, the Atonist Path and the Wallflower Order's willingness to join forces with the Teutonic Knights, but more importantly this alliance signifies further Reed's cultural concerns with the civil rights movement (issues of discriminatory racial segregation) of his own lifetime. The Atonists, belief that “if these treasures got into the 'wrong hands (the countries from which they were stolen) there would be renewed enthusiasms for the Ikons of the aesthetically victimized civilizations” (Reed, 15) indicates a desire to oppress the aesthetic assertions of Jes Grew (not only jazz in Harlem but also all artistic pursuits

undertaken during the Harlem Renaissance and extended to the Black Arts movement of the 1960s) in order to minimize political dissent and thus the threat to their patriarchal and racialized hegemony over New York City (and the United States of America).

These passages drawn from the narrative of *Mumbo Jumbo* all contribute to the alignment of the Atonist Path (the Wallflower Order and the Teutonic Knights) on the side of a Christian-dominated Western civilization, juxtaposed with and acting in concert against the Jes Grew Carriers (along with the Mu'tafikah) on the side of the abused non-Western civilizations which are characterized as pagan believers/practitioners of witchcraft (Voodoo) in need of Western and Christianized civilization to redeem their human (and capital) value. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. notes this distinction when examining the level of Signifyin(g) Reed employs within *Mumbo Jumbo*. Gates first argues that Wallflower Order is a “two term pun on 'Ivy League' while Mu'tafikah puns on “motherfucker”, which signifies chaos” (Gates, 225). This pun is significant in its aligning Jes Grew on the side of chaos and instability versus the orderly decorum of Atonist Path/Wallflower Order. Gates also identifies that “mu' is the twelfth letter of the Greek alphabet, suggesting the dozens, which forms a subdivision of Signifyin(g); the Mu'tafikah play the dozens on Western art museums”. Concerning these allegories and significations that he identifies, Gates concludes that “the Atonists and the Jes Grew Carriers reenact allegorically a primal, recurring battle between the forces of light and the forces of darkness” (Gates, 225). This allegory of the primal, recurring battle that Reed depicts is indicative of the experience of African Americans who have been historically disadvantaged, displaced, disembodied, and dismissed as fully functioning and rights-bearing American citizens.

In addition to guarding the treasures of Western society as well as the stolen treasures from all other ancient and exotic civilizations, the Wallflower Order devises a plan featuring a Talking Android in further attempt to contain Jes Grew. The Wallflower Order's two part plan features the installation of Warren Harding as President and grooming “a Talking Android who will work within the Negro,

who seems to be its classical host; to drive it out, categorize it analyze it expel it slay it, blot Jes Grew” by providing, “[a] speaking scull they can use any way they want, a rapping antibiotic who will abort it from the American womb to which it clings like a stubborn fetus” (Reed, 17). This passage’s significance lies in Reed’s employment of a Talking Android, a robot devoid of feelings, emotions, and ignorant of its own body. This selection of robot as character reveals Reed’s critique of scientific reason and its universal applications including human relations when the speaker notes the desire to “categorize” and “analyze” Jes Grew. These scientific terms intentionally reflect a reliance on empiricism and this reference to science is indicative of Reed’s larger concern with Western civilization’s emphasis on facts and reason and the conquering or displacing of bodily emotions, desires, identity and subjectivity. The last implication to be drawn from this passage is the final desired outcome achieved by the Wallflower Order's deployment of a Talking Android to “expel,” “slay,” and “blot out” Jes Grew. This expelling, slaying, and blotting out once again reiterates Reed’s larger critique of the West’s discarding of emotion, which in its worst manifestation, leads to atrocious acts against humanity, as evidenced by the United States’ enslavement of Africans, federally mandated robbery and murder committed against Native Americans, internment camps for Japanese-Americans and the unleashing of genocidal atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Mumbo Jumbo’s use of Jes Grew to allegorize African American jazz music and, more generally, African American culture, provides the novel's reader with an understanding of the musical form and cultural mode which prides itself on improvisation and authentic African American expression. Reed's own narrative style is representative of the jazz idiom and marks the jazz musicians' autonomous attempts to place themselves within American society. Reed’s narrator alludes to this theme when he marks Charlie Parker’s birth in 1920 and describes him as “the houngan for whom there was no master adept enough to award him the Asson” (Reed, 16). The narrators’ reference to Parker is laden with traditionally African terms such as houngan, or a Vaudou priest, and Asson, which is the

ceremonial staff the Houngan wields as a symbol of their spiritual powers. These terms once again assert Reed's championing of traditional African cultural practices as well as lending credence to newer, hybrid, yet distinctly African American forms of cultural expression. This also emphasizes Charlie Parker's role as the unofficial master of jazz improvisation and unofficial symbol of black resistance to white mainstream American society.

The white mainstream American society that Reed subjects to the critique of signification resists the spread of this cultural expression, and the character in *Mumbo Jumbo* responsible for keeping Jes Grew at bay is Hinckle Von Vampton. Hinckle Von Vampton, "suggests Carl Van Vechten," an author most famously known for *Nigger Heaven*, a book published in 1926 that was controversial in its depictions of African Americans and of the Harlem Renaissance (Gates, 224). A liberal white participant in the Arts movement in Harlem in the 1920s, Van Vechten's novel was also a great source of consternation among African American artists because he was able to profit from the cultural exchanges that made Harlem so popular for liberal white New Yorkers and was able to capitalize on that profit simply because his status as a white male allowed him access to publishers, to a wide-reading audience, in short, to capital. This issue of authenticity in jazz and in all forms of popular music is reflected in Reed's use of the controversial Von Vechten shaping in the character Von Vampton within the novel.

After the installation of Warren Harding fails to curb Jes Grew in the eyes of the Atonist authorities, Von Vampton is left to follow through on the second part of the Atonist plan to curb the spread of Jes Grew. He declares his intention to employ his Talking Android in a new magazine with the intent to lure them with a magazine sympathetic to the surrounding milieu:

Jazz reviewers, cabarets, pornography, social issues, anti-Prohibition, placed between acres of flappers' tits. Here we will feature the Talking Android who will tell the J.G.C.s that Jes Grew is not ready and owes a large debt to Irish theatre. This Talking Android will Wipe That Grin

Off Its Face. He will tell it that it is derivative. (Reed, 69-70)

This passage is significant in its detailing of Von Vampton's plans that seek to portray jazz, the music the Jes Grew carriers were dancing to, as unoriginal. The notion of improvisation and authenticity and the greater emphasis placed on these styles within the jazz form is critical to understanding the depth of demoralization that Von Vampton seeks to inculcate in the Jes Grew community. Improvisation, or deviating from the script or notes, is the hallmark of jazz musicians to this day. The jam session, as Ellison says, is the "jazzman's true academy" (Ellison, 245).²³ This notion of improvisation runs into larger themes of African American vernacular and oral tradition that prize quick wit over methodically planned pieces of music. This notion also feeds into Reed's critique of western society inclined to scientific reason relying on proof through method and citation which, in turn, runs counter to non-Western traditions like African and Caribbean cultures, which emphasize expression and emotion to better engage society.

Just as Jes Grew and its carriers represent jazz and its African American audience, the Atonist Path is an allegory of White, Anglo-Saxon Protestant values. In a conversation between the novel's protagonist Pa Pa La Bas, a Haitian Voodoo priest (representing Gates trope of the Esu/Signifying Monkey figure), and his two friends Herman and Abdul, Abdul warns that "the authorities are already talking about outlawing VooDoo in Harlem" and "a New Generation is coming on the scene" whom he explains "won't use your knowledge.":

[They] must prepare for it. For on that day they will have abandoned the other world they came here with and will have become pragmatists and concretists. They will shout loudly about soul because they will have lost it. (Reed, 39)

The significance of this passage lies in Reed's inherent critique of the Harlem Renaissance.

²³ This form was developed in Harlem in the 1920s with players the likes of Coleman Hawkins, Lester Young and later on more effectively and famously so by beboppers Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonius Monk, and Charlie Parker during the 1940s.

Abdul's concern with a new generation populating Harlem that will ignore La Bas' Voodoo tradition represents a concern that Western society's emphasis on science and reason in lieu of feelings and emotion will ultimately be a defeat for Harlem's developing black cultural forms where jazz/Jes Grew is at the time thriving. Though Abdul's prophesies that this new generation will have no soul, Reed makes an argument against American Protestantism and its emphasis on temperance and restraint and its inherent lack of creativity and critical artistic expression. It is also important to note that Reed's critique, while centered on the Harlem Renaissance era American society, is a larger critique of Reed's own contemporary post civil rights/post modern American society of the 1960s and 70s at the time of *Mumbo Jumbo's* publication. A post civil rights society that undeniably progressed in terms of its cultural attitudes towards legalized racial discrimination yet consequently faced new social issues and challenges like affirmative action and welfare that would cause deep conflict not only among the American body politic but also critically within the African American community. Therefore, Reed's derogatory use of the word pragmatist is another way of criticizing the conservative element of the African American community that continually sought (and seeks) mainstream acceptance into the Westernized white world of the United States of America at the expense of their cultural heritage which for Reed would suggest a healthy and natural resistance to, and independence from, the ideological and cultural hegemony that has historically disadvantaged African Americans.

The notion of Atonists as Protestants and Protestants as taking over Harlem and conquering the followers of Voodoo and Jes Grew is reinforced by Pa Pa La Bas, a Voodoo doctor, who, operating from the Mumbo Jumbo Cathedral, seeks to find the lost fourteen chapters of the Book of Thoth and reconfigure them into its original volume in order to overwhelm the Atonist Path. Reed, through the narrator, describes La Bas as a "noonday HooDoo, fugitive-hermit, obeah-man, botanist, animal impersonator, 2-headed man, You-Name-It is 50 years old and lithe" who "eats heartily and doesn't believe in the emaciated famished Christ-like exhibit of self-denial and flagellation" (Reed, 45). This

passage, revealing La Bas' disdain for the Western conception of Christ, displays both an emphasis on non-Western religion while simultaneously critiquing Western religion and its emphasis on temperance (or denying the self of pleasure). This critique of Christ's emphasis on self-denial and flagellation is evident when viewing Jes Grew as jazz and expanding black Atlantic artistic and political consciousness full of cathartic soulful expression and joy through song and dance in contrast to the aptly named Wallflower Order of the Atonist Path, who disdain dancing, or seemingly any other pleasure.

Pa Pa La Bas represents Henry Louis Gates trope of the Signifying Monkey and the non-Western cultures that are misunderstood because their values do not fit into the larger ideology of Western society. La Bas is described as "contemplative and relaxed, which Atonists confuse with laziness because he is not hard at work drilling, blocking the view of the ocean, destroying the oyster beds or releasing radioactive particles that will give unborn 3-year-olds leukemia and cancer" (Reed, 45). This passage is indicative of stereotypical Western perceptions of non-Christians, who without the proper discipline of the capitalist/Protestant work ethic, are viewed as innately lazy and unproductive. This white Anglo-Saxon Protestant production is self-destructive, from La Bas' point of view, in its leading to the blocking out Nature from casual view, destroying and subjugating Nature and resulting in the poisoning of other humans as a consequence of this work ethic. This juxtaposition of La Bas and Western civilization once again critiques Western society's fixation on Christianity, subjugation of Nature, as well as the domination of Western society's subjects itself.

It is important to note that Reed's critique of Western civilization relies more on the Western mode of life and its emphasis on the ideology of science, reason, and progress pursued rather than one set up solely to critique white America. In other words, for Reed, hegemony and ideology serve as the primary problem for African Americans relating to Western society. With Jes Grew facing hostility from the Atonist establishment, La Bas fears the implications of rebelling against the establishment, in

this case, the United States and Western civilization as a whole. The narrator states La Bas “knew the fate of those who threatened the Atonist Path” and for La Bas it meant that “their writings were banished” because after all “an establishment which has been in operation for 2,000 years had developed some pretty clever techniques” (Reed, 47). These techniques included having “their enemies, apostates and heretics...placed in dungeons, hanged or exiled or ostracized occasionally by their own people who, due to the domination of their senses by Atonism, were robbed of any concerns other than mundane ones” (Reed, 47). This passage levels more direct criticism of Western society and its inclination to discard and/or banish the writings/texts and beliefs of cultures that do not subscribe to its emphasis on science and reason at the expense of humans. It also criticizes the ideals of modernity and the Enlightenment, the hallmark of Western civilization, and its manifestations of science, reason, and self-interest which led to incarceration or death of those peoples that dare oppose it.

Paul Gilroy argues this elevation and exploration of the mundane is the African American artist's way to challenge prevailing notions of modernity and the Enlightenment and seek a political fulfillment which embodies itself outside of the Western Enlightened paradigm of texts and word and finds itself at home in the play of the unsaid, the emotion of the song, the cry, and the dance. Gilroy suggests the “topos of unsayability produced from the slaves' experiences of racial terror...challenge the privileged conceptions of both language and writing as preeminent expressions of human consciousness” (Gilroy, 74). As such, Gilroy concludes that “Black music's obstinate and consistent commitment to the idea of a better future” through the “power of music in developing black struggles by communicating information, organizing consciousness, and testing out or deploying the forms of subjectivity which are required by political agency” (Gilroy, 36). This “politics of fulfillment” refers to “the notion that a future society will be able to realize the social and political promise that present society has left unaccomplished. Reflecting the foundational semantic position of the Bible, this is a discursive mode of communication” that “can be grasped through what is said, shouted, or sung” or

danced. (Gilroy, 37) He concludes “the politics of fulfillment practiced by the descendants of slaves demands...that bourgeois civil society live up to the promises of its own rhetoric” and “creates a medium in which demands for goals like non-racialized justice and rational organization of the productive processes can be expressed. It is immanent within modernity and is no less a valuable element of modernity's counter-discourse for being consistently ignored” (Gilroy, 37). This counter-discourse, which has been largely ignored by Western civilization, is the chord that Reed touches on within his depiction of the ideological and hegemonic struggle between the Wallflower Order and Jes Grew.

Reed's inference of the unsayable resistance inherent in jazz music through his critique of Western civilization's domination of the senses characterized and satirized by Atonism is explored within the Jes Grew-Atonist struggle. What the Atonists/Wallflower Order opposes is emotion, and for that European world-view Jes Grew represents evil in its expression of emotion. The Atonist Path's creed states “Lord, if I can't dance, No one shall” (Reed, 65) and the art of dance represents “the common joy of expression. Those who cannot dance are imprisoned in their own ego and cannot live well with other people and the world. They have lost the tune of life” and “only live in cold thinking” (Reed, 60). This passage explicitly situates the novel's critique of the Protestant-like Atonist Path and Western civilization's denial of joy and expression. Having ‘lost the tune of life’ they are left to ‘cold thinking’ or cold reason and fact, a strict reliance on science, numbers, and progress at the expense of feelings, emotion, and non-linear conceptions of history.

This denial of joy and self-expression, of insistence on cold thinking, is probed further in the novel within Von Vampton's search to find and employ a Talking Android. The Android is not a robot but a role to be filled by an aspiring Harlem resident. Von Vampton's search for a character to fulfill this role leads him to an aspiring newspaper writer Woodrow Wilson Jefferson. In effort to gauge Jefferson's willingness for such a role, he asks him, “Why would you want to include your material in

our magazine but then abhor the same freedom when it occurs among your playwrights"? Jefferson reasons, "If I have to be contradictory using the real 1 time and ideal the other then that's the way I would be. I will use any vehicle at all so I won't have to return to that farm and spend the rest of my life milking cows and distributing feed" (Reed, 80). This passage indicates Reed's multi-layered critique of collaborative conservative African-Americans: ranging from the distant past from slavery-era Uncle Tom or House Negroes, to the Harlem Renaissance era black elites who disclaimed the virtue of the jazz aesthetic and the contemporaries of Reed's time (at the publication of *Mumbo Jumbo*) who disavowed affirmative action and various other social programs that sought to level the playing field of American society. These examples of African Americans who, buried within their own self-interest, act in a manner collusive with Western enlightened hegemony regardless of moral or ethical questions about that very participation. This action of self-interest is what the omniscient narrator will characterize as black pragmatism, an epistemology which leads "the slavemaster" to "learn that he doesn't have to use his offspring mulatto children to curb and refine Jes Grew activity. He can use White talking out of Black", suggesting "A new kind of robot." The narrator, echoing Von Vampton's thoughts as he interviews W.W. Jefferson, suggests "a Black pragmatist could be anything he chose to be. Why that was freedom, wasn't it"? This pragmatism is thus another name for an Uncle Tom, a "sellout" in today's vernacular all encompassed within the figure of the Talking Android. An android is another name for robot, a black subject of Western society who rejects the outer half of Du Bois' double consciousness: a consciousness which, for Reed, represents a black subject out of touch with his/her cultural heritage, devoid of soul, and unable to resist authority, or dance. The example of the Talking Android stands as a figure for Reed's criticism of African Americans who will use any vehicle to succeed in Western society even if it means denigrating their own culture. These passages also begin to illustrate the next major critique Reed poses in this work.

Mumbo Jumbo's second critique is demonstrated through the allegory of Jes Grew and is

reinforced by Reed's narrative style which mocks conventional novel form by mimicking modal jazz in effort to challenge and revise the past and propose a different path for the present and future in order for African Americans to fulfill their political desires in a post civil rights/post modern American society. Reed employs many disorienting narrative techniques: leaving out quotations for characters' speech lines ("What's the situation report, doc? the Mayor asks."); numbers not written out, instead indicated with their respective numerical signs and sentences with a string of verbs not properly separated with the use of commas ("You see, it's not 1 of those germs that break bleed suck gnaw or devour.") [Reed, 4]. These techniques represent a break from traditional Western modes of grammar as well as reproduce, in the case of the string of adjectives, a sped up, syncopated jazz cadence. Keren Omry suggests these allusions to jazz and narration techniques are "most fruitfully aligned with early avant-garde jazz experiments with modality" (Omry, 133). She has in mind Miles Davis's *Milestones*, recorded in 1958, which she describes as "revolutionary" and explores "the use of modes rather than of harmony as a structural guideline for the music". By highlighting this modal structure where "each part relates to the other, but there is no overarching defining relation between the parts: as each moment passes, this relationship changes" (Omry, 133). Modes represented a return to the melody for the improvising jazz soloist as they free-styled over a recurring set of chords. The goal for the soloist then became to create the most dynamic and unrepeatable melody and this innovative practice as a result deemphasized harmony, which leads Omry to rightfully characterize modal jazz as "revolutionary". This changing relationship of modes between parts is evident within *Mumbo Jumbo* and Omry seeks to tie Davis' modal jazz to Reed's modal narration.

Omry defines Reed's employment of five narrative modes which mimic Davis' trumpet. The first mode is that of the "recognizable third-person, omniscient, and dramatic narrative...meticulously defamiliarized through a lack of punctuation, a general absence of narrative explicative tags, and idiosyncratic spelling and dialect" (Omry, 133). The second narrative mode, "depicted in italic fonts, is

a partially omniscient narrative” and the third narrative mode features text acquiring added meaning when “immediately followed not by text but by an image” (Omry, 133). The fourth mode of narration “is repeatedly interjected into the novel as external, nonfictional, quotations that push the narrative forward. Like the visual interjections, these citations cannot be neatly integrated into a conventional textual analysis of *Mumbo Jumbo*” (Omry, 134). Finally, “the fifth mode of narration introduced in the first chapter of the novel is a dry, informative narration that provides explanatory definitions, footnotes, and even a partial bibliography in the end” (Omry, 134). By defining these five narrative modes contained within *Mumbo Jumbo* she argues that Reed’s narrative is indicative of the modal forms Davis employs in “free jazz”. When viewing this link from narrative style to music, Reed’s own storytelling becomes another form of participatory subversion of the variety that marked bebop jazz and the experiments that followed in hard bop, modal, and free jazz pioneered by Miles Davis, Ornette Coleman, and John Coltrane. This authentically hybrid African American vernacular style employed by Reed further reasserts his critique of Western society in relation to the racialized Other of African Americans and furthermore represents a desire for political and cultural fulfillment that has long been denied to African Americans in American history.

Reed’s modal narrative style mimics jazz but also serves as an exploration of and the exercise of revising the historiography of American culture. Omry argues that “Reed does not seek a translation of the visual into the linguistic” but “hopes to add the literally unspeakable dimension of narration into his story.” This story is one of African American history “that is both literally and figuratively unspeakable” (Omry, 133). Omry asserts that this mode of narration forces readers to adopt an entirely new mode of reading and that in order “to gain the full effect of the technique, readers must resist the temptation to either ignore these pictures or to reduce them to a loose verbal translation” (Omry, 133). The effects of these modes “blur the boundaries of the text by introducing preconceived ideas associated with a particular term and to create new meanings for the term in the space of the novel” and

that “these external references display a self-conscious textuality while simultaneously creating a tension between levels of fictionality and non-fictionality of the novel”:

as the novel moves from one narrative mode to another, the authoritative process of textual analysis is contrasted with the surreal world of Jes Grew, the anti-plague, and the human android, for example, as well as with the religious or fantastic realm of voodoo, spirit possession, spells, and curses. (Omry, 134)

Omry’s conclusion is to show that the intent of this modal narration is not to create competition among the modes but:

rather by including all forms of reality and of textuality, Reed stresses the impossibility of single meanings and invokes, instead, an acceptance of plurality with multiple interpretations co-existing simultaneously, or shifting, each one relevant for a different reader at a different moment. (Omry, 134)

This impossibility of single meanings and acceptance of plurality is indicative of Reed’s larger goal to challenge the prevailing hegemonic practices of Western society and to embody and place the African American within American society in such a way that has not yet been achieved. When viewed within the context of Gilroy’s *Black Atlantic*, Reed’s work is instructive in creating space for his own ethnicity and culture to operate freely in a society that has consistently restricted the freedom of the racialized Other.

This theme of plurality and intertextuality, within reality and the text, represents what Henry Louis Gates identifies as *Mumbo Jumbo*’s “play of doubles.” Gates argues this “play of doubles extends from the title...through all sorts of double images scattered in the text, such as the ‘two heads’ of Pa Pa La Bas...all the way to the double ending of the novel implied by its epilogue and ‘Partial Bibliography’.” Gates ultimately asserts “the double beginning and double ending frame the text of *Mumbo Jumbo*, a book of doubles, from its title on” (Gates, 227). Finally, Gates’ judges Reed’s

narrative structure as one designed to express doubles throughout the text and is thus “a doubleness, not just of language, but the idea of a double-image on form”. This theme of doubles recalls Reed’s criticism of Western civilization’s reliance on science and reason which comes at the expense of the subjugated gendered and racialized Other. Moreover, Reed’s double construction serves to challenge, question, and potentially revise the prevailing cultural hegemony that favors the racially homogenized and gendered subject of Enlightenment values. (Gates, 227)

In the end, Jes Grew is never able to reconfigure the Book of Thoth. Abdul burns the text in order to prevent it from getting into Atonist hands and consequently is murdered after he is unable to produce the text for the Wallflower Order. Yet La Bas notes that “Jes Grew has no end and no beginning”, and while “they will try to depress Jes Grew...it will only spring back and prosper. We will make our own future text.” For La Bas it will be up to a “a future generation of young artists” who “will accomplish this” (Reed, 204). For Reed, this bittersweet end for Jes Grew during the Harlem Renaissance era leaves hope for the future of reaching political fulfillment and makes a direct correlation to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, when Reed was just beginning his career as a novelist. Ultimately, Reed’s criticism of ragtime and the Harlem Renaissance lies in its shortcomings in the political realm if only to be celebrated for gains made in the artistic realm. This progress in the arts, in music and in literature, represents an organizing consciousness that first manifested itself in the slave spirituals and continues to this day in newer forms of music and literature, scholarship, and theory.

In conclusion, Ishmael Reed’s *Mumbo Jumbo* criticizes, through satiric absurdity, some of the most cherished ideals of Western epistemology through its depiction of the Jes Grew epidemic and the Atonist Path as they fought for control of Harlem. Yet while many scholars have labeled Reed’s work as criticism of the systematic privileging of Western/white society it seems more accurate to argue, borrowing from Beth McCoy, that “Reed’s ideas about white supremacy were concerned less with essentialist shorthands of racialized identity embraced by some forms of black nationalism and more

with transnational, transhistorical, and, indeed, transracial modes of domination” (McCoy, 606). While Reed attacks Western civilization's ideological origins and white hegemonic manifestations, *Mumbo Jumbo* stands as a book of doubles and a social critique of not only 1920s American but also a signification on the 1960's civil rights era America of which Reed was a contemporary. Reed's mission stems from the problems of identity many blacks have suffered from living within the map of the Enlightenment. His work serves as one of the first postmodern novels in post modern/post civil rights era and this tradition he extends would be followed critically by other African American writers seeking to address similar problems within their own contemporary American society. Most importantly, the African American satirical novelist follows in the footsteps of the same social contestations that jazz embodies in the first half of the twentieth century and would take on new characteristics that would mirror the development of popular hip hop music of the contemporary post modern and post civil rights United States of America.

The White Boy Shuffle: Hip Hop and the African American Experience in Post-Civil Rights Los Angeles

"There is nothing worse than a loud griot, and my mother was the loudest"
– Gunnar Kaufman, *The White Boy Shuffle*

The shape and form of African American satire that developed from Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* reflects the concerns of the immediate post civil rights period, as well as the concerns of the immediate postmodern and post-industrial American society. Paul Beatty's *The White Boy Shuffle* borrows heavily from Reed's innovative work, much as hip hop has borrowed from jazz; yet the differences between these novels' themes parallel the differences between jazz and hip hop. Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*, like jazz music and specifically bebop, is ultimately a reflection of the modernist era while Beatty's novel and his implementation of hip hop vernacular style - depicting hip hop culture at large and gangster rap specifically - is a reflection of the postmodern and post civil rights era United States of America. *The White Boy Shuffle* highlights the issues that hip hop culture responds to, namely the negation of the civil rights ideals of social progress and equality (by institutional racism) and much like Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*, Beatty's hip hop narrative style symbolizes the African American experience in Los Angeles in the post civil rights/postmodern world. The symbolism and significance of Beatty's novel lies in its value as a partially historical and a partially testimonial text that weaves themes of postmodernism into the narrative and traces a broader progression of African American social and political subjectivity during the 20th century from that of a politics of resistance and closer towards a politics of fulfillment.

Paul Beatty's *The White Boy Shuffle* is a distinctly postmodern African American satirical novel borrowing from the tradition of Reed, but ultimately situated in the postmodern environment of Los Angeles during the 1980s and 90s. The African American teenage male protagonist and narrator, Gunnar Kaufman, begins the novel living in Santa Monica with his two sisters and his mother. While describing his familial origins in the opening chapter, Gunnar notes "Unlike the typical bluesy earthy

folksy denim-overalls noble-in the-face-of-cracker-racism aw shucks Pulitzer-Prize-winning protagonist mojo magic black man, I am not the seventh son of a seventh son of a seventh son” (Beatty, 5). He goes on to explain that the “chieftains and queens who sit on top of old Mount Kilimanjaro left me out of their will”, cheating him out of his “mythological inheritance, my aboriginal superpowers.” He laments, “I never possessed the god-given ability to strike down race politic evildoers with a tribal chant, the wave of a beaded whammy stick, and a mean glance” (Beatty, 5). He questions if someone in his family had “pissed off the gods, too much mumbo in the jumbo perhaps, and so the sons must suffer the sins of the father” (Beatty, 5). This passage represents for the protagonist a felt disconnect from what he conceives of as a rich African heritage. Moreover, the way that Gunnar articulates this disconnect recalls Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* in its use of the wording of the phrase, as well as alludes to W.E.B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* where the author likens African heritage to having mythological or supernatural powers:

The Negro is 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. It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. (Du Bois, 3)

This passage aligns Gunnar (and his subjectivity) on the side of W.E.B. Du Bois and his concept of double consciousness, while refuting claims that he might possess any supernatural strength or knowledge, as a result of his connection to an imaginary African homeland.

The White Boy Shuffle liberally incorporates themes presented by Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*. A pair of narrative modes featured in *Mumbo Jumbo* are incorporated into Beatty's novel as well. These narrative modes are what Keren Omry characterizes as Reed's third narrative mode within *Mumbo Jumbo*, a mode which features text that acquires added meaning when “immediately followed not by

text but by an image” (Omry, 133). Evidence of this is found within *The White Boy Shuffle* when Gunnar discusses his experience at Mestizo Mulatto Mongrel Elementary, or what he calls “Santa Monica’s all-white multicultural school” (Beatty, 28). Gunnar details how his third grade teacher, Ms. Cegeny wears a shirt that reads from top to bottom: ~~Black White Red Yellow Brown~~ Human. The image within the text is the shape of a short sleeved t-shirt and depicts visually what otherwise could be described textually. Another example of this visual interjection into the text of the novel appears when Gunnar writes a series of letters to his friends and family from a prestigious basketball camp in Portland, Oregon, and specifically in his letter to friend and fellow basketball player Nick Scoby when Gunnar “signs” his letter with a picture of his sleeveless basketball jersey where his surname Kaufman appears at the top of the back over the number 100 (identifying his rank as a national high school basketball prospect). Lastly, in a letter to newly pregnant wife Yoshiko, Gunnar puts his ink handprint onto the page in order for Yoshiko to symbolically spread his hand over her belly. Once again Beatty employs the visual over the textual, or in conjunction with the textual to break the traditional form of the Western novel, a technique pioneered by Reed within *Mumbo Jumbo*.

The White Boy Shuffle also features what Omry terms as the fourth mode of narration presented within *Mumbo Jumbo*. This mode “repeatedly” surfaces in “the novel as external, nonfictional, quotations that push the narrative forward” (Omry, 134). While Gunnar describes how his mother and two sisters met traditionally for dinner, he notes that his mother is in the *Guinness Book of World Records* for having the loudest swallow. For documentation of such a record, Beatty lists a *Guinness Book of World Records* style-entry that reads:

SWALLOW. Ms. Brenda Kaufman (b. 1955) of Los Angeles recorded unamplified swallows at 47 db (busy street = 70 db, jet engine = 130) while guesting on the David Letterman show drinking New York City tap water of May 3, 1985.

This example reinforces Omry’s definition of the mode put into use by Reed that also relies on

the Western inclination toward citation in order to make scientifically accepted claims. This example echoes Reed's critique of America's reliance on this Western conception of culture runs counter to the spiritual traditions of non-Western cultures, or as Omry concludes "like the visual interjections, these citations cannot be neatly integrated into a conventional textual analysis of *Mumbo Jumbo*" or into a similar reading of *The White Boy Shuffle* (Omry, 134). These examples of narrative modes most significantly mimic and signify upon Reed's narrative style within *Mumbo Jumbo*, a text that employs newspaper headlines, promotional posters, and photographs to deliver its message to the reader and to subvert the traditional form of the novel within the Western genre. While there are many non-African American writers who make these moves as well, Reed and Beatty's approach serves to give voice, through unspeakable (the visual over the textual) representation, to the African American experience in the modern and postmodern eras of American history/society.

The White Boy Shuffle also signifies upon other canonical African American authors who contributed greatly to the field of African American literature before the Civil Rights Era. Specifically, *The White Boy Shuffle*, tropes on Ralph Ellison's *The Invisible Man* (1952), and Beatty's allusion to Ellison's novel represents an act of homage to the canon of African American writers within the modern era. While attending Boston University on a basketball scholarship, Gunnar decides to attend a SWAPO meeting (Spoiled Whities Against Political Obesquiousness) in order to address the University Gala being held to welcome "the South African politician M'm'mofo Gottobelezi, the Zulu puppet of the National Party Rebels" (Beatty, 188). After being briefed on civil disobedience and potential police brutality, Gunnar states:

A stale version of "We Shall Overcome" chased my shivering body through the snowy streets of Boston, catching me near a statue of Abraham Lincoln lightly touching the head of a kneeling slave. The slave's pleading expression seemed to say, 'Free me, boss. You ain't got to free nobody else, just me.' I leaned into the slave's brass ear and whispered, 'Tag, you're it.'

(Beatty, 188)

This passage is an allusion to a scene in Ellison's *Invisible Man*, where the unnamed protagonist recalls:

Then in my mind's eye I see the bronze statue of the college Founder, the cold Father symbol, his hands outstretched in the breathtaking gesture of lifting the veil that flutters in hard, metallic folds above the face of a kneeling slave; and I am standing puzzled, unable to decide whether the veil is really being lifted, or lowered more firmly in place; whether I am witnessing a revelation or a more efficient blinding. (Ellison, 35-36)

These passages both speak to the image of the University's founding father, or Abraham Lincoln, kneeling over a slave and where Ellison's *Invisible Man* questions the progress such a statue would indicate, Beatty's Gunnar Kaufman ultimately absolves himself of the responsibility of being a free black man in the United States of America where African American citizens have been traditionally limited to the margins of society.

The White Boy Shuffle further employs Ellison's *The Invisible Man* as it relates to the margins of the African American experience in the 20th century. In a letter to his wife back home in Los Angeles, Gunnar writes "If I blur my eyes I can see the black strings attached to my joints and stretching to the skies. Ah, the freedom of fatalism. Now I can do what the fuck I want and blame it on the puppet-master" (Beatty, 194). Later on in the letter, Gunnar critiques his friend Nick Scoby by writing that he "sees the strings, but he spends all his time looking for a pair of scissors. Every now and then the puppet-master hands him a pair of wooden scissors – Charlie Parker, Thelonius Monk, Sarah Vaughn, an open jump shot – and Scoby thinks he's free, he's clipped his strings" but for Gunnar "the slack string is just a slack string" (Beatty, 194). This passage is significant in its establishment of the African American experience as predetermined, where subjective autonomy is taken out of the black subjects' hands and left to the will of the dominant white majority of the United States. It is also significant in

its critique of popular culture, identified as jazz and basketball as well, which serves to distract the citizen(s) from the state of his/her discontents, or to appease him/her in that regard.

This metaphor of the black man as a puppet is an important extension of the Sambo marionette scene in *Invisible Man*. Ellison's protagonist encounters a marionette on the street corner of Harlem and observes "a grinning doll of orange-and-black tissue paper with thin flat cardboard disks forming its head and feet and which some mysterious mechanism was causing to move up and down in a loose-jointed, shoulder-shaking, infuriatingly sensuous motion, a dance that was completely detached from the black, mask-like face" (Ellison, 424). Soon the voice behind the stage begins to speak for the doll. "He's Sambo, the dancing doll, ladies and gentleman...He'll make you laugh...He'll make you want to dance, and dance...Shake him, shake him, you cannot break him" with the voice announcing "For he's Sambo, the dancing, Sambo, the prancing, Sambo, the entrancing, Sambo Boogie Woogie Paper doll" (Ellison, 424). These passages speak to the condition of the marginal role, of puppet and puppet-master, African Americans experienced in both Ellison's era and Beatty's contemporary milieu.

These intertextual references to *Invisible Man* are Beatty's way of critiquing, as well paying tribute to, the canon of African American writers. They also establish the connection between the postmodern satirical novel and the distinctively African American vernacular and literary practice of signifying. As Darryl Dickson-Carr notes, Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* and Beatty's *The White Boy Shuffle* require "the reader be able to recognize sometimes obscure literary and pop culture references that are occasionally dated." For Dickson-Carr, "African American *literary* signifying as found in these novels is closely related to postmodernity to the extent that is 'a contradictory phenomenon, one that uses and abuses, installs and then subverts, the very concepts it challenges' and "like its verbal form, literary signifying presumes the reader is conversant with a vast repertoire of discourse of cultural knowledge, then immediately subverts that knowledge" (Dickson-Carr, 30, *African American Satire*). In this example, Beatty installs *Invisible Man* as a reference point for his own narrative but ultimately critiques

the notion of the black autobiography or the coming of age story within the modernist novel, or *Künstlerroman* tale, a generic form that Ellison borrows from James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Beatty's own distinction of authorship (his use of narrative modes in conjunction with innovative hip hop attitude and style), along the line of Reed's postmodern satire featured in *Mumbo Jumbo*, serves to challenge conventional novelistic form and thereby conventional power structures.

Postmodernism, as Dickson-Carr argues, is a style that seeks to revise interpretations of the past in order to make a better understanding today. The modernist novel, Fritz Gysin argues, "is experimental and innovatory in form," foregrounding "the subconscious and unconscious regions of the human mind; it frequently breaks the linearity of plot and often makes use of 'new' strategies of points of view, such as the technique of 'stream of consciousness'" (140). Crucially, the modernist novel, Gysin claims, "usually compensates for such breaches of conventional mimetic writing by establishing unity, closure, and identity, etc. on another (higher or lower) level of discourse" (140-141). The postmodern novel, "is much more radical in these respects, and, above all, it denies or subverts such compensatory measures. For example, it asserts the freedom of autonomy of the literary text while at the same time foregrounding the authors play with language." The postmodern novel is "essentially antimimetic," frequently questions "the linearity of plot structure, confuses time sequences, blends levels of reality and functionality, fragments characters" (Gysin, 141). Paul Beatty's *The White Boy Shuffle*, as we will find, "is thus a testimony to the author's engagement with postmodernism, as a *condition* and as a *mode of writing*" (Gysin, 141). These passages suggest a link between novels and power that connect the poet/rapper/comic satirist to the State through the issue of control as it relates to cultural narrative.

Gysin proceeds to further develop the definition of postmodern as a *condition*. He cites Lyotard's characterization as "the general state of knowledge in time of information technology and the absence of master narrative" (Gysin, 141). For theorist Fredric Jameson, postmodernism represents

“the cultural logic of late capitalism and the loss of historical consciousness,” and for Jean Baudrillard “it has to do with the cultural production of a ‘semiurgic society’ and the substitution of the simulacrum for the real”. Gysin concludes that “the postmodern concept of cultural and literary theory has been claimed by African American scholars such as Henry Louis Gates...or Phillip Brian Harper” and I would include Darryl Dickson-Carr in the discussion as well. Gysin cites Harper’s work as instructive when dealing with marginalized groups’ experience of decenteredness as a distinctly postmodern condition. Harper argues:

if postmodernist fiction foregrounds subjective fragmentation, a similar decenteredness can be identified in US [black] novels written prior to the postmodern era, in which it derives specifically from the socially marginalized and politically disenfranchised status of the populations treated in the works to the extent that such populations have experienced psychic decenteredness long prior to its generalization throughout the culture during the late twentieth century, one might say that the postmodern era’s preoccupation with fragmented subjectivity represents the ‘recentering’ of the culture’s focus on issues that have always concerned marginalized constituencies. (Gysin, 141)

Here Harper argues that “what appears to be new in American fiction is really the marginalizing of those in the center” and suggests that “the fragmented self that is considered a fixture of postmodern fiction is a staple of African American literature” (Jablon, 126). This fragmentation of American society in the postmodern era, or American citizens alienated and marginalized from the center is representative of the African American experience that calls into question the dominant myths of the past and questions them as Dickson-Carr suggests in “Taking the Offensive,” at their very bases” (5).

Darryl Dickson-Carr argues that postmodern techniques are authentically African American and likens African American satire and popular musical forms themselves to similar work done by African American scholars and intellectuals. He suggests that “the sort of maneuvers postmodernism makes in

revising and subverting systems is not all unlike the critical work that traditional African American folk figures have performed for centuries” as well as “what African American intellectuals have done by continually calling for American society to take a revised look at its myths and legends about its greatness that would include the viewpoints of peoples of color as subjects, rather than objects of history” (Dickson-Carr, 5). For Dickson-Carr “theories of postmodernism [are revealed]...as restatements of ideas African Americans have already developed.” This linking of postmodern techniques to an intrinsic African American style and practice lends itself “to describe accurately the prevalence of ironic revision in African American satirical texts,” including Ishmael Reed’s *Mumbo Jumbo* “and Paul Beatty’s *The White Boy Shuffle*” (Dickson-Carr, 5).

These postmodern techniques are also significantly what come to define rap and hip hop in contemporary cultural studies. Eric Shusterman argues that “certain themes and stylistic features are widely recognized as characteristically postmodern,” such as “recycling and appropriation rather than unique and original creation, the eclectic mixing of styles, the enthusiastic embracing of mass-media technology and culture” along with “the challenging of modernist notions of aesthetic autonomy and artistic purity,” and finally “an emphasis on the localized and temporal rather than the putatively universal and eternal” (Shusterman, 460). Shusterman concludes in his analysis of the postmodern style compared to rap that “whether or not we call these features postmodern, rap exemplifies and often subconsciously highlights them, and they are essential to an adequate understanding of rap” (Shusterman, 460). This linking between the post modern condition and the poet/rapper is critical to understanding the role of the poet/rapper within the contemporary postmodern/post civil rights milieu and its relation to *The White Boy Shuffle*'s author and protagonist.

The White Boy Shuffle, while borrowing from Reed (and to a lesser extent Ellison), serves as a distinctive postmodern form which links the African American satirist to hip hop in the form of the rapper and does so while critiquing post civil rights/post modern America. Cultural critic Houston A.

Baker, in his exploration of the role between the poet and state, argues that rap music serves the same role as poetry in seeking to stage contestations against the state. Baker asserts “the exclusion of poets from the republic by Plato is the primary Western site of this contest. In Egypt it is Thoth and the King; in Afro-America it is the Preacher and the Bluesman” (Baker, 95). Baker seeks to characterize this contest “in terms of a tensional resonance between homogeneity and heterogeneity” (Baker, 95). For Baker, this conflict, or tensional resonance, of subject opposition to state begins with the Egyptian Thoth who opposed the King, and the blues musician opposing the state represented by the preacher and lastly and significantly includes the heterogeneous African American subject in opposition to the white European homogeneous state. Accordingly then, it is the poet, the griot, or the rapper who serves to contest and critique the dominant, official, and homogeneous society. Borrowing from classical Greek society, Baker cites Plato, who “argues the necessity of a homogenous state designed to withstand the bluesiness of poets who are always intent on worrying such a line by signifying and troping irreverently on it and continually setting up conditionals” such as ‘What if this?’ and ‘What if that?’ To have a homogenous line, Plato advocates that philosophers effectively eliminate poets” (Baker, 95). Baker continues, “If the state is the site of what linguists call the *constative*, then poetry is an alternative space of the *conditional*. If the state keeps itself in line...through the linear, empty space of homogeneity, then poetry worries this space or line with heterogeneous performance.” Baker concludes, “If the state is a place of reading lines correctly, then poetry is the site of audition, of embodied sounding on state wrongs such as N.W.A’s ‘Fuck the Police,’ or PE’s (Public Enemy) ‘Black Steel in the Hour of Chaos’” (Baker, 95).

Baker draws on the work of Homi Bhabha and Peter Stallybass when considering his argument of the “tensional resonance” between homogeneity and heterogeneity. These two scholars suggest that nationalist or postrevolutionary discourse is always a discourse of the split subject. In order to construct the nation it is necessary to preserve a homogeneity of remembrance (such

as anthems, waving flags, and unifying slogans) in conjunction with an amnesia of heterogeneity. If poetry, like rap, is disruptive performance or, in Homi Bhabha's formulation, an articulation of the melancholia of the people's wounding by and before the emergence of the state line, then poetry can be defined, again like rap, as an audible or sounding space of opposition. Rap is the form of audition in our present era that utterly refuses to sing anthems of, say, STATE homogeneity.

Bhabha's and Stallybass' conception of the split subject represents for Baker the heterogeneous African American subject. Tensional resonance then represents the struggle of the state to retain its homogeneity as well the heterogeneous African American subject's internal division. This split subject is equal to Du Bois's concept of double consciousness (of being both inside and outside of Western society) that Paul Gilroy borrows and expands on within his thesis of the Black Atlantic providing a counterculture to a distinctly white Enlightened European modernity. This introduction to tensional resonance and the split subject is critical to understanding the African American rapper and comic satirist and, moreover, crucial to any consideration of Paul Beatty's *The White Boy Shuffle* and its representations of the African American experience within postmodern Los Angeles, as well as its localized representations of hip hop (Baker, 96).

Baker's conception of "tensional resonance" within the split state of American society, its split African American subjects, represented through its rappers/poets is signified in the examination of *The White Boy Shuffle's* protagonist Gunnar Kaufman. The forename of Beatty's protagonist is a play on Swedish theorist Gunnar Myrdal, director and principal author of the 1944 Carnegie Commission study, *An American Dilemma*, that argued "the 'American Creed' of democracy, equality, and justice had entered into conflict with black inequality, segregation, and racial prejudice" (17, Omi & Winant) and that the dilemma involved is the necessary extension of this creed to black citizens. The surname is a play on Bob Kaufman, the African American poet of the beat generation of Kerouac, Burroughs,

and Baraka, and both names are indicative of the issues of racial equality, African American artistic expression and political enfranchisement, which Beatty seeks to address in his first novel. *The White Boy Shuffle* is the story of Gunnar Kaufman as his life develops from a beach bum to a nerd, to basketball messiah, to poet, and ultimately to a martyr of his race. Growing up in Santa Monica, Gunnar is accustomed to being the lone black person in school and having only white friends. His relocation to the far less affluent Hillside neighborhood in West Los Angeles would prove to be a vastly different experience.

In the opening chapter Gunnar describes the origins of his family and describes himself as “preordained by a set of weak-kneed DNA to shuffle in the footsteps of a long cowardly queue of coons, Uncle Toms, and faithful boogedy-boogedy retainers. I’m the number-one son of a spineless colorstruck son of a bitch who was the third son of an ass-kissing sell-out house Negro” (5). As the descendant of an African American family whose legacy has been to serve the dominant white majority, Gunnar is left to feel the tensional resonance between homo- and heterogeneity within his own family. Further reinforcing this tension is the role of his estranged father who works for the Los Angeles Police Department as a sketch artist. Gunnar’s father’s employment serves to symbolize the Kaufman’s family’s second class/compromised legacy when viewing the LAPD as the sometimes brutal enforcer of the homogeneous (or white) American state.

Beatty represents Baker’s tensional resonance of the split subject through Gunnar’s development growing up a black child in white Santa Monica. At Mestizo Mulatto Mongrel Elementary, Gunnar relates “my early education consisted of two types of multiculturalism: classroom multiculturalism, which reduced race, sexual orientation, and gender to inconsequence,” as opposed to “schoolyard multiculturalism, where the kids who knew the most Polack, queer, and farmer’s daughter jokes ruled” (Beatty, 28). Here Beatty critiques the notion of multiculturalism within a predominantly white community such as Santa Monica where Gunnar declares “the classroom multiculturalism was

contradictory, though its intentions were good” (Beatty, 28). When the school doctor tests Gunnar’s eyesight for colorblindness, he responds that “our teacher says we’re supposed to be colorblind.” The doctor tells Gunnar that his teacher is talking about human color and in response to Gunnar’s “So,” the doctor replies, “So just pretend that you don’t see color. Don’t say things like ‘Black people are lecherous, violent, natural-born criminals’” (Beatty, 32) When Gunnar replies that he is in fact black, the doctor replies “Oh, I hadn’t noticed” (Beatty, 32). This passage explores Gunnar’s lessons in (and reveals a critique of) multiculturalism. The critique follows the fallout of such a program where, despite acknowledging all races and ethnicities, little is done in the way of changing attitudes, and as a result multiculturalism as such merely pushes a politically correct agenda. Within the socially accepted manner of self-censoring racial attitudes, these true (and often prejudiced) attitudes are submerged under the ocean of public discourse and overt racism is transformed into covert racism. This passage also demonstrates America’s predisposition to view a black male youth such as Gunnar as a (typical) lazy, non-educated, violent, black, male youth. This passage also reveals Beatty’s attempts at ironic revision by stating that blacks should not be considered natural-born criminals. Here Beatty seeks to revise the misconception that all African Americans are inherently criminal-minded. This satirical irony suggests to the reader the absurdity of such a stereotype that nonetheless pervades contemporary American society.

Gunnar recognizes his own peculiar status among his peers and the larger Santa Monica community. To those peers and their parents, “I was the funny, cool black guy” and in Santa Monica, “like most predominantly white sanctuaries from urban blight, ‘cool black guy’ is a versatile identifier used to distinguish the harmless black male from the Caucasian juvenile while maintaining politically correct semiotics” (Beatty, 27). Gunnar also observes that he was the “only cool black guy” at Mestizo Mullatto Mongrel Elementary. Once again Beatty’s choice of school names again represents comic irony when describing an all-white school named after mestizos, mullattos and mongrels, terms used to

describe children of mixed racial heritage. While comical on one hand, this naming also suggests a criticism of the very Western naming process of children of mixed racial ancestry used only in the context of non- "white" races. For Beatty, the argument against this discriminatory Western naming practice ignores the mixed ancestry of the white students and reinforces George Lipsitz's notion of the homogenization of the white identity in order to insulate themselves (i.e. German, Italian, Irish) against the discriminated racialized Others with darker skin pigmentation (i.e. African, Chinese, Indian).

Gunnar cannot ignore the racialized aspects of his life in Santa Monica and recounts his perception in terms of black and white when he describes himself split in half. For Gunnar, white is "my language" which consisted of "three-foot swells that broke left to right. 'No waaaay, duuuude. Tuuubular biiitchin' to the max. Tooootallyyy fucking raaad.'" White also represents Gunnar as "a broken-stringed kite leaning into the sea breeze, expertly maneuvering in the gusty gales" (35, Beatty), whereas black for Gunnar represents "an unwanted dog abandoned in the forest who finds its way home by fording flooded rivers and hitchhiking in the beds of pickup trucks and arrives at its destination only to be taken for a car ride to the desert" (Beatty, 35). It also represents "a suffocating bully that tied my mind behind my back and shoved me into a walk-in closet" and "my father on a weekend custody drunken binge, pushing me around as if I were a twelve-year-old, seventy five pound bell-clapper clanging hard against the door, the wall, the shoe tree" (Beatty, 36). Here Gunnar describes the internal confusion that arises during his adolescence, living in an all-white area and attending essentially an all-white school. Yet for Gunnar, whatever ambiguities or preconceived notions of race he held before moving to Hillside would soon be eliminated.

As Gunnar and his family settle into their new home he soon becomes aware of a new set of cultural differences than from what he experienced in Santa Monica. While looking for the local store to buy breakfast for his mom and sisters, he approaches a boy "who wore an immaculately pressed sparkling white T-shirt and khakis and was slowly pacing one slue-footed black croker-sack shoe in

front of the other” (Beatty, 41). Upon asking him for directions to the store, the boy responds, “What the fuck did you say?” After repeating his question, the boy responds, “Damn, cuz. You talk proper like a motherfucker.” To which Gunnar reasons with himself and the audience that “it wasn’t as if I had said, ‘Pardon me, old bean, could you perchance direct a new indigene to the nearest corner emporium.’” As Gunnar then notes, “my guide’s bafflement turned to judgmental indignation at my appearance. ‘Damn fool, what’s up with your loud ass gear? Nigger got on so many colors, look like a walking paint sampler. Did you find the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow? You not even close to matching. Take your jambalaya wardrobe down to Cadillac Street, make a right, and store is at the light” (Beatty, 41). Gunnar proceeds to the store but not after first experiencing disbelief “that some guy who ironed the sleeves on his T-shirt and belted his pants somewhere near his testicles has the nerve to insult me over how I dressed.” These passages represent the cultural differences Gunnar experiences in his new neighborhood. Upon returning home from the corner store, he informs his mother, “Ma, you done fucked up and moved to the ‘hood!” (Beatty, 41). Gunnar’s introduction to the ‘hood of Hillside would become just another life lesson in cultural and race relations in South Central Los Angeles.

Hillside represents the real world Crenshaw neighborhood of Los Angeles and its symbolic (and in Hillside's fictional case, its literal separation) from white mainstream American society. Gunnar notes this division when describing “in the late 1960s, after the bloody but little known I’m-Tired-of-the-White-Man-Fuckin’-with-Us-and-Whatnot riots, the city decided to pave over the neighboring mountainside, surrounding the community with a great concrete wall that spans its entire curved perimeter” (45). He describes further “at the summit of this cement precipice wealthy families live in an upper-middle-class hamlet known as Cheviot Heights. At the bottom of this great wall live hordes of impoverished American Mongols, Hardrock niggers, Latinos, and Asians” (Beatty, 45). This description of impoverished Hillside represents the literal disconnect from mainstream and affluent (or

white) American society.

Beatty also represents the dichotomy of the African American and White experiences in Los Angeles during the 1980s and 90s where vernacular difference represented an African-American assertion of difference. Within a week of his family's arrival, the Los Angeles Police Department make their first appearance at the Kaufman residence and, after quizzing and accusing Gunnar of his gang affiliation, warn him to stay out of trouble. When asked, "who you banging with", Gunnar replies: "You know, it's me, my homegirl Jiang Quang, Wang Hongwen, Zhang Chuqiao, and my nigger even if he don't get no bigger Yao Wenyan. Sheeeeit, we runnin' thangs from Shanghai to Compton" (Beatty, 47). While sarcastically imagining his own Gang of Four, Gunnar notes to his audience that although he had lived in Hillside for only a few days "it was impossible not to pick up a few local catchphrases while running errands for Mother" (Beatty, 47-48). He observes that "language was everywhere. Smoldering embers of charcoal etymology so permeated the air that whenever someone opened his mouth it smelled like smoke." Language, in this case Hillside vernacular, reveals itself to Gunnar when he double-checks the mailbox for letters and it admonishes him: "Dumb-ass motherfucker, have you ever looked and letters were still there? No! Shut the goddamn lid,"; as he presses the crossing button at an intersection and the signal implores him to "Hurry the fuck up!"; and when he calls information and the operators answers "Who dis?" (Beatty, 48). These passages represent the dichotomy of language that exists within the ghetto (and its predominantly marginalized African American experience) opposed to outside of it (the predominant white mainstream experience). The urban dialect Beatty portrays, demonstrates the vernacular difference employed to establish identity within the socially and economically marginalized ghetto environment; the vernacular then becomes a distinctly African American language of difference.

Following the visit from the LAPD, Gunnar further acclimates himself to his ghetto surroundings. Ordered by his mother to take his two sisters out to the nearby park, Gunnar recognizes

Hillside as a “hardscrabble dystopia” (Beatty, 48). When he and his sisters arrive at Reynier Park, Gunnar laments ironically that “she might as well have told us to play in the prison yard at Attica”. After comparing the park to the state prison in upstate New York, he describes Reynier Park as “an overgrown inner-city rainforest” which required “a machete to clear a path to the playground. The sandbox was an uninhabitable breeding ground for tetanus and typhus. Shards of broken glass and spent bullet shells outnumbered grains of sand by a ratio of four to one. Hypodermic needles nosed through this shimmering sinkhole like rusted punji sticks” (Beatty, 49). This passage and the symbolic imagery of both prison and an uninhabitable rainforest demonstrates the stark contrast between what is to be expected of a park in suburbs or in wealthy school districts and that of the playground in south central Los Angeles. A Crenshaw neighbor symbolically walled off (and literally in Beatty’s Hillside) from the outside world and breeding an attitude of anger, frustration, and indignation that would feed into the popular musical form of hip hop and specifically within the genre of gangster rap.

Gunnar’s ghetto education is reinforced at Reynier Park when he and his two sisters, Nicole and Christina, encounter two neighborhood bullies at the park swing. The bullies, two sisters named Betty and Veronica (an allusion to two characters in the *Archie* comic book), stake claim to ownership of the swing, and accost Nicole and Christina. Beset by fear, Gunnar and his sisters freeze and are attacked by Betty and Veronica with their swarm of friends also in attendance. Instead of fighting back, the Kaufman’s begin to cry as a desperate plea to spare them from getting beat up. Ultimately, the crying does not prevent the assault and as Gunnar recalls this confrontation and the lesson learned, he says “since we sobbed like babies, we received a full-scale beatdown designed to toughen us up for the inevitable cataclysmic Italian opera end of black tragedy” (Beatty, 51). This passage serves to represent the difference Gunnar finds between his existence in Santa Monica with that of the deprived Hillside community. It is also the first of the many indictments of the urban African American experience located within this text (the marked hopelessness that is felt in the ghetto and exacerbated

by the local police and their discriminatory practices). Gunnar's initial encounter with the local police and neighborhood regulators foreshadows the larger societal struggle between domination and subjugation that the protagonist encounters throughout the novel.

The next step in the evolution of Gunnar Kaufman involves the school experience he encounters in Hillside. Arriving to Manischewitz Junior High forty-five minutes early for the first day of classes, Gunnar walks into the dean's office to pick up his schedule and with no one else present but the principal's receptionist. Upon asking the receptionist to share the contents of his academic record transferred from his previous school, Gunnar learns that "despite his race," he "possesses remarkable intelligence and excellent reasoning and analytical skills" (Beatty, 61). This remarkable intelligence combined with his social awkwardness in his new surroundings leads to Gunnar being defined as a nerd and in the eyes of the school administration, one who is an "exception" to his race. Here Beatty criticizes the school system for the stereotyping of students based on their race and as a result, any smart or otherwise successful black student is an exception to the stereotypical standard of black intellectual ineptitude. This passage also signifies once again Gunnar's internal struggles growing up: as a black youth in all-white Santa Monica; to a nerd; or educated black child growing up as a teenager in Hillside where he sometimes feels his intellect and his upbringing in Santa Monica alienating him from the other children and inhibiting his ability to make friends and ultimately to fit into Hillside and Manischewitz Junior High.

As Gunnar familiarizes himself with the unfamiliar ghetto life, he begins to ask questions to explain the situation that he and other students inhabit. Gunnar learns "that social norms in Santa Monica were unforgivable breaches of proper Hillside etiquette," (Beatty, 52) and he discovers that "the people of Hillside treat society the way society treats them. Strangers and friends are suspect and guilty until proven innocent" (Beatty, 53). These passages all signify the difficulties Gunnar has with not only making new friends within his new environment but also the societal troubles he finds that lie

beneath, firmly entrenched in the roots of his new surroundings. The latter passage also reveals the bunker mentality that marks Hillside and is representative of the urban American ghetto which is disproportionately dominated in population by African Americans and is marked by economic and racial subjugation.

As Gunnar finally begins to make new acquaintances, the complications of his life increase. In Drama class, Gunnar befriends his acting partner Nicholas Scoby. As it turns out, the boys share more than an interest in jazz: they both play basketball. Gunnar, completely unaware of how to play basketball outside of his few physical education classes, joins Nick for a game one day and discovers his exceptional ability with dunking the basketball. Taking a pass from Nick, Gunnar finds himself near the basket, closes his eyes as he jumps when finally, as he puts it, “[I] opened my eyes and saw that my momentum was hurtling my fragile body toward the basket and the steel rim was closing in on the bridge of my nose” reflexively Gunnar raises his arms “in self-defense and crashed into the basket, the ball slamming through the hoop with an authoritative boom” (Beatty, 74). As Nick and the other boys playing break out in applause and amazement at Gunnar’s newfound ability, it becomes clear that he has found a good friend in Nick and an ability that would at the very least help him to gain acceptance in the Hillside community. Beatty’s linking of Gunnar with Nick and their abilities on the basketball court is also a critical extension of hip hop culture.

Nelson George explains the connection and relationship between basketball and hip hop by examining professional basketball beginning in the 1970s. The incumbent National Basketball Association (NBA), founded in 1946, was based on what George describes as “an establishment game,” whereas the upstart American Basketball Association (ABA), founded in 1967, saw “black street flair...unleashed” and changing “the very nature of the sport” (George, 146). The link between the black street flair of hip hop equals the same flair that was advanced by the improvising bebop jazz musicians within World War Two era American history. George notes this idea of improvisation and

self-expression as critical to basketball's success within the African American community. He argues that "a key reason basketball has become such a repository of black male style is that the game allows individual expression within a team concept. You can go one on one in basketball and still help contribute to the success of the team—as long as it is within the structure" (George, 146). This reliance on improvisation and self-expression within the form of the game lends easy parallels to that of bebop jazz and gangster rap. This is evidenced when George likens the playing style of NBA professional Earl "The Pearl" Monroe "who dribbled and shot as if he'd tuned Thelonius Monk's piano" (George, 146). This linking of basketball to popular African American musical forms and icons within the genre demonstrates the cultural aspects of hip hop (and bebop) that exceed the boundaries of music and flow into dress, dance, and sports.

This linking of hip hop to basketball is evidenced within Gunnar's own narrative. When he first sets foot onto the court with Nick, he is instructed to turn the music on. Gunnar presses "the tape deck's play button and a deep bass line rumbled over the blacktop. The music set the tempo and provided the ballplayers with a groove line around which to improvise" (Beatty, 73). This passage mirrors George's own experience watching the basketball NBA Hall of Famer Julius "Dr. J" Erving. George contends "to watch Dr. J...was to see gravity defied with a funk backbeat" (George, 146). Basketball and the NBA in the 1990s also featured a marriage of sports and entertainment. George notes "the players of the 90s invest in rap production companies and...rap themselves." (George, 150). Players such as Shaquille O'Neal and Allen Iverson were recording rap music (the latter would be the ultimate symbol of the marriage between rap and basketball). After playing against the iconic Michael Jordan, Iverson remarked how he didn't respect anyone on the court that he faced. While the reaction against Iverson from the establishment of NBA fans and players was primarily negative and typical in its denouncing of hip hop as a brand of culture, George argues that "what Iverson meant was that when he stepped on the court, it didn't matter who the competition was." For George, "Iverson wasn't

boasting” but rather “this was how a true hip hop head would view the world. Tradition, hierarchy, and institutions are things ripe to be challenged” (George, 152). “Iverson became the living embodiment of hip hop’s boldness and taste for controlled rebellion” (George, 152). These passages convey basketball’s hip hop attitude (and that of its subversive precursor, bebop jazz, as well) and link it to a politics of resistance and a subversion of conventional social mores which is shared amongst the game’s players/participants, along with the rapper, the producer, and the poet/writer within the African American experience of the post modern era/post civil rights era. Beatty’s linking of basketball to hip hop culture, reinforced through *The White Boy Shuffle*’s narrative style, serves to symbolize the African American experience in post civil rights/postmodern America where a historically marginalized African American subject seeks equal political access yet simultaneously dismisses mainstream society for its numerous transgressions against that subject. This inherent contradiction recalls Du Bois’ notion of black subjectivity through his framing of the double consciousness yet updated culturally within hip hop music through its defiant tone reaching across multiple layers of society from dance, to dress, to music, to literature and to sports.

The linking of rap music and the hip hop style in basketball is evident as Gunnar moves from dunking on the court to coming home and finding his new neighborhood the setting for a rap video featuring the group called the Stoic Undertakers. Gunnar observes the production company “Moribund Videoworks was on safari through the L.A. jungle. A caravan of film trucks and RVs lurched through the streets like sheet-metal elephants swaggering through the ghetto Serengeti” (Beatty, 76). Gunnar describes his street which serves as “soundstage and its machinations of poverty and neglect were Congo cinema verite” (Beatty, 76). These passages reveal Beatty’s imagery of the ghetto as an Amazon-like jungle or the wild plains of Africa, but in an ironic manner meant to sharply criticize the tendency of mainstream white America to stereotype and reduce all ghetto life to another form of savagery. This stereotyping remains consistent and characteristic of Western society’s original

diagnosis of non-white humans as inferior uncivilized savages and featured mistreatment of the racialized Other even after such destructive stereotypes were debunked.

Beatty further employs irony with his cartoon-style depictions of the producers and the rappers responsible for that day's production. First Gunnar learns from the casting director that he would not fit in as an extra because of his studious appearance. As Gunnar stands off to the side to observe the spectacle, the director demands "menacing or despondent" from the extras and quizzes his special effects team: "can you make the flames shoot farther out from the barrel of the Uzi" (Beatty, 76)? On the set, Gunnar describes the scene: "carloads of sybaritic rappers and hired concubines cruised down the street...reciting their lyrics and leaning into the camera with gnarled intimidating scowls" (Beatty, 77). Lastly, Gunnar observes "the curled lips snapped back into watermelon grins like fleshy rubber bands. 'How was that, massa? Menacing enough fo' ya'" (Beatty, 77)? All of these passages employ irony to criticize everything related to hip hop from the recording industry, to the musicians/entertainers, and the fans/consumers. Beatty criticizes both the producers and the rappers/artists/entertainers within the gangster rap genre for cultivating an absurd "Congo cinema verite" as he terms it, that manufactures an artificial ghetto image in order to sell more records and thereby earn more money at the expense of extending cultural stereotypes not only of ghetto life but of all of African American culture as well. Part of these extended cultural stereotypes are revealed in Beatty's use of the term 'cinema verite' which refers to the ethnographic documentaries that made popular (during the early twentieth century) the filming of Africans during routine daily life and was shown to captivated audiences in Europe and the United States curious about the origins and lifestyles of the "uncivilized" Africans. These passages also reveal Beatty's criticism of the rappers who perform similarly in music videos as the scene depicted within *The White Boy Shuffle*, behavior reminiscent of the minstrel or shuck-and-jive performer that was largely popular in America following the Civil War and leading up to the beginnings of the modern jazz movement in Harlem. Ultimately, this scene of the

rap video shoot in Hillside is a critique of the practices of the gangster rap industry (which reached its apex during the early to mid 90s in Los Angeles) and Beatty's use of irony serves the reader in revealing the absurdity of an industry that often times shamelessly caricatures the African American experience and locates the African American subjects like Sambo or an African bushman.

Beatty also satirizes the role of gangs in urban ghettos when Gunnar joins a gang called the Gun Totin' Hooligans (a gang which ironically does not use guns). Gunnar's Hillside neighbor, Pyscho Loco, befriends Gunnar and he soon joins the gang. Gunnar notes the gang's origins: "The Gun Totin' Hooligans started out as a local dance troupe called the Body Eccentric. When Los Angeles's funk music scene was in its heyday, kids from different neighborhoods met at the nightclubs and outdoor jams to dance against one another in 'breakin' or 'poppin' contests" (Beatty, 99). Ultimately, these dance troupes "evolved into gangs" and the Gun Totin' Hooligans "were the bravest but most inept gang in Los Angeles" and suffered "more casualties than the rest of the city combined" (Beatty, 100). These passages represent Beatty's mocking employment of a gang which were prevalent throughout Los Angeles in the 1980s and 90s. These passages also provide reinforcement of the link between Beatty's novel and hip hop as Gunnar notes GTH's origins in dance troupes that "broke" and "popped" while their casual attire became markers of the newfound hip hop style.

Yet Gunnar's talent in another area would ultimately lead his life in another direction from basketball even as he excelled rapidly on the court. Soon after his first dunk, Gunnar anxiously awaits another first. His first poem is entitled "Negro Misappropriation of Greek Mythology or, I know Niggers That'll Kick Hercules's Ass". It begins "I lift the smoggy Los Angeles death shroud searching for ghetto muses" and continues along "Thalia's bloated body floats by, zigzaggin' between Firestone radials finally catching itself on the rusted barbs of a shopping cart seriously lost at sea" (Beatty, 85). These two stanzas reflect on the turmoil that Gunnar experiences not only as a teenage adolescent but also as a black teenager growing up in rough and tumble Hillside. It also hints at Gunnar's despair, or

the tensional resonance of the split subject, more than just a literal dead body seriously lost at sea, but of a boy growing up struggling to come to terms with the community he is now a part of as well as how the larger American society treats it. Moreover, this poem indicates Gunnar's awareness in identifying his situation and crucially being able to cast it in very complex terms. This also presents another theme in *The White Boy Shuffle*: exploring a cultural polyphony that moves past mere depictions of degraded communities and moves forward symbolically towards situating, accepting, and desiring a diversity of cultures in a distinctly postmodern cultural and political climate.

The White Boy Shuffle's representation of cultural polyphony is evidenced in Gunnar's progressing poetic prowess. He gains notoriety after he is asked to recite a poem at the funeral of, and in eulogy for, Pumpkin, a member of the Gun Totin' Hooligans. Its positive reception for Gunnar "signified my unofficial ascension to *poete maudit* for the Gun Totin' Hooligans and by extension the neighborhood" (Beatty, 105). In this role, Gunnar explains that his duties "were similar to those of a Li Po or Lu Chao-lin in the employ of a Tang dynasty warlord: immortalize the rulers and say enough scholarly bullshit to keep from getting my head chopped off" (Beatty, 106). This passage reinforces Houston Baker's argument of the tensional resonance represented within the relationship of the poet to the State, or the heterogeneous to the homogenous. The term *poete maudit* exemplifies this tension as its meaning refers to a poet outside of the mainstream society and, in this case, a term most often associated with nineteenth century French poet Arthur Rimbaud who was historically renowned as a poet lying outside, and critical, of mainstream society.

Baker's argument that the rapper serves the same role as the outsider poet is reinforced in Gunnar Kaufman's poetic exploits. Gunnar describes how, soon after his performed eulogy, "once in a while a poet from another fiefdom seeking to challenge my reputation would swagger into the neighborhood demanding a poetic showdown" (Beatty, 105). Gunnar explains that:

we'd duel in impromptu verse; tankas at seven paces or sestinas at noon, no use of the words

'love', 'heat', or 'soul'. I sent many bards home in shame. Their employers carried them out on stretchers as they frantically thumbed through their rhyming dictionaries wondering how they fucked up a rondeau so badly. (Beatty, 105)

This passage describes a close relationship between the rapper and poet. Richard Shusterman describes the link between the post modern condition and rap linked to the African American verbal tradition that "shows asserting superior social status through verbal prowess is a deeply entrenched black tradition that goes back to the griots in West Africa and has long been sustained in the New World through such conventionalized verbal contests or games as 'signifying' or 'the dozens'" (Shusterman, 460).

Gunnar's role as poet/griot, which is likened to a freestyle rap battle, (borrowing from the African traditions of signifying and the dozens) further reinforces Beatty's narrative hip hop style in *The White Boy Shuffle*.

Gunnar wears this role of *poete maudit* on the basketball court as well. As Gunnar and Nick quickly become stars at school with their performance on the basketball court, Gunnar (along with Nick) becomes increasingly weary of the attention he receives and the stereotype he embodies, that of the caricatured black student-athlete, not a serious student, much less a poet or an articulate person. Gunnar falls into the stereotype of the ghetto street baller, a stereotype that Beatty criticizes implicitly by employing the protagonist of *The White Boy Shuffle* in the dual role of both poet and basketball player. In Beatty's satire we also find criticism of American society and especially the American academic institutions where black student athletes are expected only to be exceptional in talents associated with the sporting arena and not in the talents associated with the classroom. Along with garnering celebrity status among the other students, Gunnar and Nick also receive reprieves on homework from their teachers. To shield himself from such attention, Gunnar takes to working and hanging out in the library, a place where he "could hide from smarmy college basketball recruiters who'd never think to look for a black athlete in the library" (Beatty, 156). This passage reflects a

criticism leveled at academic institutions (in all their many incarnations), from its factory style production of student-athletes that cares little for their well-being, to their priorities, and even less of their graduation rates.

As the adulation showers down on both Gunnar and Nick, they both reject the mantle of high school sports hero. Gunnar does so by focusing more on his poetry and getting into college, while Nick who has the gift of never missing a single shot, stops shooting almost entirely to avoid having to shoulder the burden of success. Gunnar decides to attend Boston University on a basketball scholarship and loses interest in both his high school classes and his basketball performance. As a result, he decides to make an elaborate entrance into the next big game. Coordinating with the announcer to announce him as "Hillside's own Gunnar 'Hambone Hambone, Have You Heard' Kaufman" and donning white gloves and rubbing cold cream on his lips, Gunnar steps onto the court ready to perform in another manner. "I lurched from the sideline, shuffling through the gauntlet of astonished teammates as slowly as I could, my big feet flopping in front of me, my back bent into a drooping question mark" adding the last touch, his "gloved hands slid along the floor, trailing behind like minstrel landing gear" (Beatty, 164). Similar to the criticism contained in his depiction of the Stoic Undertakers video shoot, this passage is significant in that Beatty offers up a criticism of the perception of basketball players often viewed as simply means for entertainment, minstrels or Sambos, in opposition to them being real people with intelligence or depth, not simply mindless athletes who can dunk basketballs. It is this stereotype that Gunnar suffers from and ultimately rejects and that which Beatty satirizes in order to criticize America's shallow acceptance of African American entertainers (as a way to perceive their performance one dimensionally rather than fully exploring complex individuals in effort to better understand them). Lastly, this passage reasserts a long-running trope of African American performer as Sambo, the shuck-and-jive performer, or "Hambone" that reappears through all modes of African American artistic expression (throughout the twentieth century up to present day)

such as the Rza's depiction within his 2003 song 'Bob N'L' where he warns his competition to be careful, or they might "get slapped like a black Sambo, Hambone, Hambone, have you heard?". Beatty's and hip hop's (in this case the Rza and the Wu Tang Clan's) reliance on intertextual references asserts African American subjectivity as distinctly postmodern and is employed to critique, through satiric absurdity, cultural stereotypes that denigrate, dehumanize, and marginalize the African American subject.

Beatty's critique of the perception of African Americans within the United States and the larger African American experience of post modern Los Angeles extends to, and is (re)cast in, his depiction of Rodney King and the acquittal of five LAPD police officers. The 1991 beating of Rodney King, ensuing court trial and social unrest are depicted within *The White Boy Shuffle* as taking place while Gunnar is in high school. The following passage is significant in its depiction of Rodney King as a black Frankenstein, symbolically likening the African American to that of a monster created by a mad scientist, or in this analogy, white America. While discussing the impact of possible innocent or guilty verdicts with Psycho Loco, Gunnar describes his sentiments:

I pictured Rodney King staggering in the Foothill Freeway's breakdown lane like a black Frankenstein, two taser wires running 50,000 volts of electric democracy through his body. I wondered if the battery of the American nigger was being recharged or drained (Beatty, 125).

Beatty's use of Rodney King suggests his greater concern for African American social and political subjectivity that is ultimately situated somewhere between undeniable social and political progress made from the civil rights era movement to that of the Jim Crow status quo (i.e. State-sanctioned violence/police brutality). Gunnar's concern for the African American experience takes on a larger role when he goes away to Boston for college.

At Boston University, Gunnar settles into his new life with his new mail order bride and

discovers east coast followers of his poetry, but more importantly he takes on the role of African American leader. Finding himself in a well-known poet and basketball player in Boston, Gunnar accepts an invitation to speak at a student union rally protesting the University's bestowing an honorary degree on a pro-apartheid African statesman. Gunnar rallies the audience by reciting Martin Luther King, Jr.'s argument that "If a man hasn't discovered something he will die for, he isn't fit to live". Gunnar questions, "So I ask myself, what am I willing to die for? The day when white people treat me with respect and see my life as equally valuable to theirs? No, I ain't willing to die for that, because if they don't know that by now, then they ain't ever going to know it." He continues, "Matter of fact, I ain't ready to die for anything, so I guess I'm just not fit to live. In other words, I'm just ready to die. I'm just ready to die" (Beatty, 200). It is in this scene where we see Gunnar's hopelessness regarding the improvement of black-white relations reach a climax. Inspired by his inability to effect change, he argues that he should just end his life. It is within this form of nihilism that Beatty levels his critiques of African American (hip hop) culture and American culture. This passage, and Beatty's use of the phrase 'Ready to Die', also represents the song title of one of hip hop's most celebrated rappers, Christopher Wallace a.k.a. the Notorious B.I.G., which reinforces once again the link between *The White Boy Shuffle* and hip hop that Beatty maintains throughout his text.

Beatty also directs his criticism at African-American leadership. During Gunnar's speech, he comments:

That's why today's black leadership isn't worth shit, these telegenic niggers not willing to die. Back in the old days. If someone spoke up against the white man, he or she was willing to die... What we need is some new leaders. Leaders who won't apostatize like cowards. Some niggers who are ready to die! (Beatty, 200)

This passage represents a critique of an African American leadership that has lost touch with its constituency or that the "leadership has become alienated from its power base," as Dickson-Carr

suggests (205, AAS). These passages from Gunnar's speech suggest Beatty's two largest critiques within *The White Boy Shuffle*: critiques that focus on the hypocrisy and rampant materialism of hip hop culture and a critique of a leadership vacuum within the African American population.

Following this speech, Gunnar's African American supporters, Nick Scoby among them, begin committing suicide en masse to live up to his words. Yet Gunnar does not commit suicide but rather moves back to Hillside with his mail order wife, Yoshiko, and their newborn baby. From this point on, Gunnar organizes "Black Bacchanalian MiseryFests" at Reynier Park where local poets come to read aloud on an open-mike. As the MiseryFests gain in popularity Gunnar takes precautions "to ensure that Friday nights didn't turn into a trendy happening for whities bold enough to spelunk into the depths of the ghetto" (Beatty, 220). On the two year anniversary of Nick's suicide, Gunnar gives a speech where he attempts to bait the United States Government into dropping their atomic bomb, Svelte Guy, on Hillside; for dramatic flourish Gunnar chops off his pinky finger with a knife. As Gunnar recalls, "That night cemented my status as savior of the blacks" (Beatty, 219) and concomitantly earns him his status as public enemy No. 1 to the United States government. As a result, Gunnar notes, "spiteful black folk and likeminded others from the across the nation continue to immigrate to Hillside, seeking mass martyrdom. They refurbish the abandoned houses and erect tent cities on the vacant lots, transforming the neighborhood into a hospice" (Beatty, 223). As the novel comes to a close, Gunnar notes that Congress has issued Hillside an ultimatum: "rejoin the rest of America or celebrate Kwanzaa in hell. The response was to paint white concentric circles on the roofs of the neighborhood, so that from the air Hillside looks like one big target" (Beatty, 224). All of these passages represent Hillside, led by Gunnar Kaufman, as a bunker for African Americans to hide from the rest of white America. This characterization once again suggests the bunker mentality of the ghetto and lends itself to the righteous self-assertion of some of the rappers of hip hop and reinforces hip hop as "proudly localized as 'ghetto music', thematizing its roots in and commitment to the black urban ghetto and its culture" (463, HHR).

Beatty's portrayal of what Dickson-Carr calls "urban realism" (Dickson-Carr, 203, African American Satire) is inseparable from the history and use value of hip hop and its depictions of the African American urban ghetto experience.

The White Boy Shuffle reflects the issues of American society that hip hop culture responds to as well as highlighting hip hop's shortcomings as a musical form and culture that originally represented a politics of resistance but which finds itself undermined by its own commodification. Beatty's wide-ranging criticism, from America's political establishment and issues of cultural hegemony to hip hop culture and issues of authenticity and its expression of social and political desires, serves as an attempt to revise and revisit past and present ideological conceptions of the African American experience within contemporary postmodern American society. Beatty's critiques seek to restore not only the original subversive spirit of hip hop and its marginalized poetic origins but also the original spirit of the African American civil rights movement, which has been undermined by political movements (Reagan-era neoconservatism) and by African American leadership that has not (until most recently with the rise of election of Barack Obama as President of the United States) inspired nor achieved much since the passing of the Civil Rights Act in 1964. Within *The White Boy Shuffle*, Beatty plays the role of satirist, like Baker's rapper and poet, a role that Darryl Dickson-Carr argues is a "discursive descendant of the griot" (Dickson-Carr, 5). Beatty's numerous critiques challenge the hip hop artists, producers, and devotees, African American political leaders, and white mainstream American society to rise above the absurd ideological divisions (and bloody conflicts) that have marked the history of America. This challenge serves as a thoughtful attempt to create a more peaceful and racially harmonious country in order to finally reach the long sought after goal of its African American citizens, that is to move beyond a politics of resistance (and while even employing his own prose could suggest a politics of transfiguration) while accessing a politics of the real, in hopes of African Americans realizing political fulfillment within the United States of America.

The Restoration of the African American subject in a post civil rights, post-industrial, and post modern United States of America

“As William Faulkner once wrote, 'The past isn't dead and buried. In fact, it isn't even past.' We do not need to recite here the history of racial injustice in this country. But we do need to remind ourselves that so many of the disparities that exist in the African-American community today can be directly traced to inequalities passed on from an earlier generation that suffered under the brutal legacy of slavery and Jim Crow. Segregated schools were, and are, inferior schools; we still haven't fixed them, fifty years after Brown v. Board of Education, and the inferior education they provided, then and now, helps explain the pervasive achievement gap between today's black and white students. Legalized discrimination - where blacks were prevented, often through violence, from owning property, or loans were not granted to African-American business owners, or black homeowners could not access FHA mortgages, or blacks were excluded from unions, or the police force, or fire departments - meant that black families could not amass any meaningful wealth to bequeath to future generations. That history helps explain the wealth and income gap between black and white, and the concentrated pockets of poverty that persists in so many of today's urban and rural communities. A lack of economic opportunity among black men, and the shame and frustration that came from not being able to provide for one's family, contributed to the erosion of black families - a problem that welfare policies for many years may have worsened. And the lack of basic services in so many urban black neighborhoods - parks for kids to play in, police walking the beat, regular garbage pick-up and building code enforcement - all helped create a cycle of violence, blight and neglect that continue to haunt us.”
Democratic Nominee for President Barack Obama, from his 'A More Perfect Union' speech delivered in Philadelphia, March 18, 2008 (<http://my.barackobama.com/page/content/hisownwords>)

These words of Barack Obama, spoken then as the presumptive Democratic nominee running for the office of President, signal an emergent strain of American consciousness that seeks to move beyond divisions of the past in order to bring the United States of America forward into the twenty-first century. Obama's ascendancy to president has been dubbed by some observers as the dawning of a new post-racial day in American society where previous racial divisions, grievances, and moral outrage have been overcome by a new generation of American citizens who have grown accustomed to, and in fact desire, a diversity of racial difference within their lives that runs counter to their parents and grandparents generation of a legalized prohibition of such interaction. Yet any claims made on the behalf of the United States of America having reached a post-racial era are extremely premature and only serve to shortchange and overlook the significance of Barack Obama's election to the White House. The above referenced passage is many ways a restatement of perhaps some of the basic themes

expressed in this project.

From the very first sites of cultural contact in New Orleans, and then leading into Harlem and in all other American cities where jazz performance was spreading, the response to the new musical idiom created unintended consequences for all the parties involved in the production of that music. From the musicians to the club and bar owners to the patrons who faithfully packed smoky clubs in order to hear the "new thing", jazz was a result of a revolution as much as it contributed to its own revolution. Jazz was responsible for desegregation (if only in a cultural sense) during a time in American history where blacks were often forced to avoid eye contact with white people for fear of retribution. As the economy of America bottomed out in the 1930s, so too did the creative juices of jazz bottom out, and as America signed up for World War II only after Hitler had sacked France, so too did jazz experience a resurgence in the newly constituted style of bebop. After the United States helped to defeat the Germans and massacre the Japanese, bebop faded away into relative historical anonymity. Yet during the height of the Cold War, America discovered its conscious and a civil rights movement led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, and others earned a historic victory that desegregated American society and promised a more equal future. Perhaps too at this time, jazz became too artistic, too esoteric, and too highbrow for its popular appeal to stick.

Yet as jazz faded from the American popular music scene and the neoconservative political bloc quietly made tremendous strides in negating the progress made by the civil right movement, it was left to a new style, a new brand of music that would speak to the first generation of American citizens born into a desegregated society but experiencing social realities proved contrary to the fact. Revolting against a bankrupt system that ruthlessly tortures and murders innocent victims on a whim is perhaps easy to understand but revolting against a silent consensus that would prefer not to acknowledge their very existence proved a trickier task than that of the civil rights movement. Fortunately for this new generation, it found its voice in the "new thing" of hip hop, which shouted its complaints and

grievances of post modern society every weekend in the club and with advancing technology, soon enough these grievances were being broadcast on live cable television where millions of people could watch and identify with a movement that carried a chip on its shoulder and demanded recognition from society (something every teenager can appreciate and rally behind).

The history of ideological and hegemonic abuse and discrimination in place in America since its first days has facilitated this politics of resistance within the African American community that did not truly gain its voice in modern western society until the twentieth century through popular music and literature. It should come as no surprise then that a frenzied solo by Charlie Parker would serve symbolically as subversive resistance to the mainstream society that prohibited Bird (as he was known) from eating or sleeping in places where white citizens could. It should come as no surprise then that the lyrics of Tupac Shakur would incite conservative white Americans and compel the recording industry to place parental advisory stickers on albums that contained explicit lyrics which could potentially sow discord among America's youth. It should also come as no surprise that there is no shortage of African American poets, satirists, and novelists who constantly seek to challenge the status quo of an American ideology that has disadvantaged them from the very beginning when it was illegal for slaves to read. From these origins, African Americans and their liberal white American counterparts have fought continually and without interruption for a United States of America to live up to its own ideals; of all men being created as equal and as such, all men as equal under the rules of Constitutional law. It is with all of this in mind that we can come back to then-Senator Obama's remarks made that day in Philadelphia during a speech which, though formally known as a 'A More Perfect Union,' will forever be known as Barack Obama's "Race Speech".

Obama's speech was a landmark for an American presidential candidate. The fact that he "pulled it off" with no American, conservative or liberal, able to attack any misstep or word during the speech (something akin to a man walking a high wire with the wire on fire and surviving) is a testament

to his composure, his oratory skill, and his belief in the ideals he spoke about. Obama's presidency remains historically significant with each passing day as he rewrites traditional American politics, his presence a statement in and of itself. For a Hawaii-born African American Senator from Illinois to have gotten this far a mere forty years after the civil rights movement and forty years after the riots at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago and forty years after perhaps America's last great visionary, Robert F. Kennedy, was assassinated speaks volumes in favor of the progress American society has made culturally, economically, and politically. Yet despite such progress, traditionally western linear conceptions of history have proven naïve and suggests, like Reed in *Mumbo Jumbo*, that "time is pendulum, not a river. More akin to what goes around comes around" (Reed, 218). As the cyclical nature of the world would suggest, there will always be poets who toe the state line of homogeneity whether they prefer to be called bebop sax players, MC's, or satirical novelists. For it will always remain in the hands of the *poet maudit* to question and challenge the prevailing wisdom of society and this role remains a critical role and one that does not become easier once the United States of America elects its first African American president.

Finally, the themes explored in this project center around a politics of resistance that emerged out of the African American experience of the twentieth century but originated with the inception of the transatlantic slave trade. The legacy of jazz in America will always center around music and race and the historical factors such as the Great Migration and prohibition will be merely a footnote. Jazz's ability to bring white and black citizens together, even if only in a limited sense, spoke to the transcendent nature of the music that was being played. As America modernized and popular culture became a key function of its consumer economy, jazz gave way to hip hop and its many incarnations relating to fashion, dance, and multimedia proved enduring some thirty plus years since its origins in the graffiti art of the Bronx in the 1970s. It is with all of this in mind that the work of Reed and Beatty accentuate and rearticulate the African American experience of the twentieth century. Yet perhaps

without a compelling improvisatory backbeat or rhyme, it may never garner the momentum that the modern jazz movement experienced or what the current hip hop culture is working through. As musical tastes ebb and flow, the literature of any given society will always persist to keep the conversation moving forward, the conversation of how best to live and relate amongst one another in any given locale as well as on the larger scale of the national and the international arena of world civilization.

WORKS CITED

- Ammons, Elizabeth, ed. *Uncle Tom's Cabin: A Norton Critical Edition*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1994. 210.
- Avila, Eric. *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004. 232-233.
- Baker Jr., Houston A. *Black Studies, Rap, and the Academy*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993. 95-96.
- Baldwin, James. *Nobody Knows My Name*. New York: Vintage International, 1961. 58-64.
- Baraka, Amiri. *Black Music*. New York: William Morrow Company, Inc., 1967. 22-79.
- Bartlett, Andrew. "Airshafts, Loudspeakers, and the Hip Hop Sample: Contexts and African American Musical Aesthetics." *That's The Joint! The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*. Eds. Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal. New York: Routledge, 2004. 393.
- Beatty, Paul. *White Boy Shuffle*. New York: Picador, Henry Holt and Company, 1996. 5-224.
- Boyd, Todd. "Check Yo Self Before You Wreck Yo Self." *That's The Joint! The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*. Eds. Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal. New York: Routledge, 2004. 336.
- Dickson-Carr, Darryl. *African American Satire: The Sacredly Profane Novel*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001. 1-205.
- , "Taking the Offensive: The Quest for New Politics in Contemporary Black Satire". *Canadian Review of American Studies* 29.3 (1999): 5.
- DeVeaux, Scott. *The Birth of Bebop: A Social and Musical History*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997. 10-387.

- Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: Bantam Books, 1989. 4.
- Dyson, Michael Eric. "The Culture of Hip Hop." *That's The Joint! The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*. Eds. Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal. New York: Routledge, 2004. 66.
- Ellison, Ralph. *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*. Ed. John F. Callahan. New York: Random House, 1994. 246.
- , *Invisible Man*. New York: The Modern Library, 1994. 35-424.
- Gates, Jr., Henry Louis. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988. p. 21-229.
- George, Nelson. *Hip Hop America*. New York: Viking Penguin, 1998. 11-152.
- Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993. p. 38-126.
- Glassner, Barry. *The Culture of Fear: Why Americans Are Afraid of the Wrong Things*. New York: Basic Books, 2006. 126-127.
- Grandt, Jurgen E. *Kinds of Blue: The Jazz Aesthetic in African American Narrative*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2004. 68.
- Gysin, Fritz. "From modernism to postmodernism: black literature at the crossroads." *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Novel*. Ed. Maryemma Graham. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. 140-141.
- Hale, Thomas A. "From the Griot of *Roots* to the Roots of *Griot*: A New Look at the Origins of a Controversial African Term for Bard" *Oral Tradition* 12/2 (1997): 250-251.
- Harper, Phillip Bryan. *Framing the Margins: The Social Logic of Postmodern Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994. 3-4.
- Hebdige, Dick. "Rap and Hip Hop." *That's The Joint! The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*. Eds. Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal. New York: Routledge, 2004. 224-225.

- Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism*. New York: Routledge, 1988. 3.
- Jablon, Madelyn. *Black Metafiction: Self-Consciousness in African American Literature*.
Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997. 126.
- Krims, Adam. *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University
Press, 2000. 70.
- Lewis, David Levering. *When Harlem Was in Vogue*. Oxford: Oxford University
Press, 1979. 3-121
- Lipsitz, George. *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit
from Identity Politics*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006. 6-17.
- Lott, Eric. "Double V, Double-Time: Bebop's Politics of Style." *The Jazz Cadence of
American Culture*. Ed. Robert G. O'Mealley. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.
457-459
- Malcolm X. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X. As told to by Alex Haley*. New York:
Random House, 1992. 125.
- McCoy, Beth. "Paratext, Citation, and Academic Desire in Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo
Jumbo*". *Contemporary Literature* 46.4 (2005): 606.
- "Mumbo Jumbo", Oxford English Dictionary
- Ogren, Kathy. *The Jazz Revolution: Twenties America and the Meaning of Jazz*.
Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989. 4-159.
- Omi, Michael, and Howard Winant. *Racial Formations in the United States: From the
1960s to the 1990s*. New York: Routledge, 1994. 17-133.
- Omry, Keren. "Literary Free Jazz? Mumbo Jumbo and Paradise: Language and
Meaning". *African American Review* 41.1 (2007): 133-134.

- O'Meally, Robert G., ed. *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.
- Panish, Jon. *The Color of Jazz: Race and Representation in American Culture, 1945-1966*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997. xii-5.
- Pough, Gwendolyn D. "Seeds and Legacies." *That's The Joint! The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*. Eds. Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal. New York: Routledge, 2004. 286.
- Reed, Ishmael. *Mumbo Jumbo*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988. p. 4-80.
- Rivkin, Julie and Michael Ryan, ed. *Literary Theory: An Anthology. Second Edition*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004. 60-988.
- Shaw, Arnold. *The Jazz Age: Popular Music in the 1920's*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987. 57-154
- Shusterman, Richard. "Challenging Conventions in the Fine Art of Hip Hop." *That's The Joint! The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*. Eds. Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal. New York: Routledge, 2004. 460-463.
- Watts, Eric K. "An Exploration of Spectacular Consumption." *That's The Joint! The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*. Eds. Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal. New York: Routledge, 2004. 601.
- West, Cornel. *The Cornel West Reader*. New York: Basic Civitas Books, 1999. 476.
- "I Get Around" lyrics. 14 March 2008. www.tupac-online.com
- "Keep Ya Head Up" lyrics. 14 March 2008.
- "The Message" lyrics. 14 March 2008.
- www.lyricsfreak.com/g/grandmaster+flash/the+message_20062225.html
- "White Man'z World" lyrics. 14 March 2008.

“Papa’z Song”

“To Live and Die in L.A.”

“Bob N'L”