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by
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Introduction

Over the last several decades, the radical intellectual histories and literatures of the Black Nationalist, Black Power, and Black Arts movements have received increased critical attention among contemporary antiracism activists.¹ Despite falling out of favor in the postmodern academy due to admittedly problematic identity politics, such as their perceived marginalization of sexual minorities, essentializing notions of authentic “blackness,” and masculinist, patriarchal, homophobic, and “reverse-racist” discursive ethos, a considerable critical literature has amassed explicating the intellectual nuances and legacies of this period in black intellectual history and the geo-historical landscape in which it existed. Much of this scholarship has sought to situate black radical thought in relation to the shifting racial orders of the post-World War II period, examining the means whereby “official antiracisms” impede realizations of racial justice in the contemporary world and complicated black radicalism’s mission of group solidarity, positive cultural identities, and self-determined systems of representation during the 1960s and 1970s. Notable works to which this study is indebted include Jodi Melamed’s Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism (2011), Manning Marable’s Living Black History (2006), James Smethurst’s The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s (2005), and Nikhil Pal Singh’s Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy (2004), each of which examine the role of black art and cultural production during the black freedom struggle as a means of challenging shifting “antiracist” power hierarchies, from post-war racial liberalism to neoliberal multiculturalism.² Yet none of this scholarship has adequately examined the potential for recent interdisciplinary research in the cognitive humanities to redefine critical discussions about racial difference in “post-racial”
America and provide theoretical paradigms for utilizing black radical literary readership to elucidate the deeper, psycho-social dynamics and interrelations of racial, gendered, sexual, and class-based oppression—and the various strains of hegemonic nationalism that sustain them—that have surfaced since the Civil Rights Movement.³

Of course, most intellectuals and informed global citizens recognize the psychological and sociological realities behind persistent “other” coded oppression and inequality in America and the globalized world, embodied in systems of economic imperialism, cyclical poverty, minimum-wage slavery, institutional racism, and unequal access to education, healthcare, and other integral social services, phenomena which disproportionately benefit Euro-American and North Asian world powers at the expense of the majority of global citizens, mostly those darker-skinned peoples located in the southern hemisphere. Less well-understood is the relationship between the failure to enact more egalitarian social institutions domestically and internationally and the psycho-cognitive ramifications of ideological saturation in the language, metaphors, and narratives embedded in neoliberal multicultural discourse, which Melamed describes in “The Spirit of Neoliberalism: From Racial Liberalism to Neoliberal Multiculturalism” (2006) as the suturing of free-market capitalism and its globalizing imperatives with a “tolerant,” “progressive,” “officially antiracist” narrative of (inter)national identity (6). Permeating at the level of cultural saturation in hegemonic discourse—its overt political messages in addition to its “deep” narratives, metaphors, and conceptual frames—neoliberal multicultural ideology deploys the nationalistic, historically-laden myth of American exceptionalism and the universality of its democratic-capitalist institutions as a means of rationalizing existing racial orders, privileging “logically white,” middle class normative identities in opposition to non-white, non-Christian, and other implicitly non-normative “others.”
Significant research by George Lakoff, Patrick Colm Hogan, and others bridging the gap between cognitive science and the humanities provide critical methodologies for analyzing the psycho-social affect of cultural saturation in various hegemonic narrative patterns, linguistic signs, and ideological formations, each of which form the basis for cognitive schemas, conceptual prototypes, deep metaphors, and other discursively-mediated structures governing human thought, judgment, and social behavior. Through mass media, education, and other forms of ideological socialization, these hegemonic discourses and the resulting cognitive structures serve to obscure the persistence of racially and “culturally” coded inequalities, creating and maintaining a dominant nationalism, its identity norms and racial orders, through institutional memory—pervasive, mainstream, though not entirely uncontested “collective” understandings and assumptions about history, the past, and their relationship with the objective social realities of the present and “possible worlds” of the future. In *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism* (2011), Melamed explains how the dichotomy, or perhaps dialectic, between the mainstream Eurocentric historical narrative taught to school children in America and the experience of various oppressed “others” is managed through the liberal employment of America as a nation learning from its past wrongs and making “progress” toward a democratic ideal uncritically tied to neoliberal free-market capitalism, a system of cut-throat Social Darwinism that Eldridge Cleaver famously referred to as “the law of the jungle” (56-9). This willful degeneration into “naturalized” free-market governance remains eerily reminiscent of Thomas Hobbes view of human life before the social contract, the hyper-competitive “war of all against all” which makes human life "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.”

As Cleaver and various other black radicals understood, true racial justice could not be realized unless the racial liberal, liberal multicultural, and current neoliberal multicultural
assumptions about racial difference, “progress,” “tolerance,” and the pervasive “logic of whiteness” privileging certain normative identities and capitalistic social institutions were scrutinized, for these ideological assumptions blind individuals to the persistently racialized, gendered, sexual, and classed systems of Anglo-American capitalist supremacy. By drawing upon the insights of cognitive research, humanities scholars can formulate more effective approaches to promoting corrective cognitive processes regarding the relationship between nationalism and racial oppression through literary readership and intersubjective engagement. In “Schema Criticism: Literature, Cognitive Science, and Social Change” (2011) Mark Bracher accurately suggests that without a praxis grounded in theoretical understandings of underlying causes of destructive social behaviors—from those of dominant and marginalized individuals alike, as well as (inter)national acts of violence, oppression, and exploitation—“literary criticism after Foucault still lacks a viable, coherent strategy for facilitating social change, because it still lacks an understanding of how discourse—including literature and literary criticism—can (re)form subjectivity in socially consequential ways” (6-7). Effective social criticism, Bracher goes on to argue, must seek to alter those inadequate cognitive schemas which lead people to support harmful and unjust social policies and institutions (8). As a site wherein the discursive underpinnings of (neo)liberal multicultural hegemony—as well as the more problematic dynamics of black radicalism—are explicated and contested, the black radical literature of the post-Civil Rights period can serve a meaningful corrective function in promoting (1) more comprehensive understandings of the contemporary remnants of social oppression, (2) more transformational empathetic responses to marginalized peoples domestically and internationally, and (3) more critical engagement with the dialect of nationalism, hegemony, social discourse,
and concomitant social, political, and economic behaviors, each prerequisite for legitimate progress toward more just public institutions and interpersonal interactions.⁶

The Narrative Empathy Hypothesis: A Brief Summary

I here outline the basic premises and arguments surrounding what I call the “narrative empathy hypothesis,” which suggests that intersubjective engagement through literary readership can promote more empathetic cognitive responses to “others” and thus promote prosocial behavior. The link between empathy and prosocial behavior has been well-documented by developmental psychologists, and recent research has further attempted to connect empathetic arousal with literary studies and, ultimately, prosocial behavior and cross-racial empathy. In *Empathy and Moral Development: Implications for Caring and Justice* (2007), Martin Hoffman summarizes thirty years of psychological scholarship supporting the theory that empathy, understood “not in terms of outcomes but in terms of the processes underlying the relationship between the observer’s and model’s feelings,” is the foundation for prosocial and moral behavior (30). These processes, however, are complicated by a number of variables, including the perceived similarity of the observer and model, various situational contexts in which the observer and model converge, and the very form and medium whereby the emotional appeal is made. Drawing upon this research, Hoffman concludes that of all “empathy arousal modes,” *role-taking* involves the most developed set of cognitive processes and is thus the most likely to translate into prosocial behavior in light of the aforementioned variables (52-4).

Many champions of the humanities have adopted this line of argument regarding literature’s capacity to promote emotional intelligence and abstract reasoning through literary role-taking. In her recent book *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (2011),
legal scholar and philosopher Martha Nussbaum connects the contemporary utilitarian / economic framings of education and national progress with a concomitant waning support for the humanities which undermines the critical thought and compassion that sustain truly democratic institutions. In her earlier book *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life* (1995), Nussbaum elaborated a theory for the development of empathy and emotional intelligence—integral components of citizenship in truly democratic societies—through the study of literature and narrative, which promote the same cognitive processes involved in Hoffman’s empathetic role-taking:

Novels … construct and speak to an implicit reader who shares with the characters certain hopes, fears, and general human concerns, and who for that reason is able to form bonds of identification and sympathy with them, but who is also situated elsewhere and needs to be informed about the concrete situation of the characters. In this way, the very structure of the interaction between the text and its imagined reader invites the reader to see how the mutable features of society and circumstance bear on the realization of shared hopes and desires. (7)

Nussbaum goes on to connect these literary role-taking processes and abstractions to broader social, legal, and moral circumstances, such as when juries or judges become “judicious spectators” whose “empathetic participation and external assessment are crucial in determining the degree of compassion it is rational to have for the person.” thus supporting the assertion that these skills, developed in the humanities, are necessary for legitimate democratic citizenship (72).
Of interest here is the largely emotional content of these “rational,” “objective” judgments and mediations, embodied and embedded in the narrative accounts presented to the “judicious spectator.” Modern cognitive science has long since debunked the Cartesian division of mind and body, logical thought and emotion, *logos* and *pathos*—what neuroscientist Antonio Damasio in *Descartes Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (1994) criticizes as the fallacious suggestion that “thinking, and awareness of thinking, are the real substrates of being” (248). Writing from an evolutionary perspective, Ellen Spolsky in “Darwin and Derrida: Cognitive Literary Theory as a Species of Post-Structuralism” (2002) demonstrates that emotional influences on reason are “constructed by the interface of our genetic inheritance with the environment into which we are born,” suggesting that the cognitive architecture used to process these emotional responses are both socially-mediated and also that emotive affect on human reasoning contains an important evolutionary functionality (304). In *Philosophy of the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought* (1999) George Lakoff and Mark Johnson call this cognitive architecture the “cognitive unconscious”—the conceptual structures, automatic cognitive processes, and implicit knowledge systems guiding “rational” thought *outside* of consciousness (13-4, emphasis added). This influential study calls for more rigorous critical analysis of the processes structuring unconscious emotional responses to racial appeals and the narrative structures that trigger them.8

The transmission of mental attitudes from narrator to audience through narrative forms—what Katja Mellmann in “Voice and Perception: An Evolutionary Approach to Basic Functions of Narrative” (2010) terms “psycho-poetic effect” (121)—has long been theorized as a means influencing subjectivity, at one extreme manipulating people into compliance / complacency in social violence and at the other engendering more just cognitive schemas and social interactions.
Interestingly, Hoffman points to passages from David Hume and Adam Smith as proponents of the latter, benevolent role of empathy, both of whom are highly influential in neoliberal thought and the concomitant discourses used to obscure the relationship between its ideological underpinnings and social oppression existing under its auspices. Conveying optimism that the cognitive humanities will revitalize and revolutionize literary scholarship and its role in navigating existing routes of social oppression, Spolsky, among others, advocates this cognitive approach to literary studies as a potential means of exposing the use of discourse as unconscious cognitive manipulation and (conversely) the potentialities for positive social action and legitimate progress through scholarship, pedagogy, and literary readership (305).

However, the viability of literary studies in promoting more just cognitive schemas, more empathetic human relationships, and thus prosocial behavior has not gone without needed critical skepticism. Though maintaining optimism, Suzanne Keen’s *Empathy and the Novel* (2007) highlights some of the contemporary difficulties in using cognitive experimentation to corroborate literary studies’ capacity to promote prosocial behavior. Despite fMRI research that could potentially link mirror neuron activation to role-taking during literary readership, Keen demonstrates that our understandings of empathetic functioning in human cognition remains “theoretical speculation,” and conclusive empirical proof of literature’s capacity to stimulate empathy and promote prosocial behavior has yet to be compiled (13-5). Furthermore, Hoffman points to numerous identity-based impediments and variables which render tenuous much empirical cognitive research on empathy, role taking, and intersubjective engagement:

1. existing in-group / out-group identity formations and corresponding prejudices in both the text and the reader;
(2) the potentially undermining influence of emotive overloading and repetition of extreme emotions like guilt and suffering; and

(3) potentially impassible contextual differences between reader and textual historicity.

Admittedly, definitive empirical corroboration for the narrative empathy hypothesis is beyond the present study, yet I will advance the argument that the cognitive processes and methods of critical analysis associated with literary readership can address each of these impediments only if scholarship explicates the role of hegemonic discourse in contributing to each of these variables and impediments to narrative empathy.

The most compelling contributions and refinements to this line of theoretical inquiry come from the Marxist and Postcolonial traditions, which provide the analytical tools to better explicate the dialectic of Cold War hegemonic nationalisms and the identity politics implicit in its “official antiracisms,” each of which rationalize perpetual systems of political, economic, and cultural oppression. The “racial progress” narratives attached to post-war nationalistic hegemonies have contributed to a form of multicultural “tolerance” reminiscent of Herbert Marcuse’s “Repressive Tolerance” (1969), “a partisan goal” bound up in the dominant institutions of power and hegemonic state apparatus; a form of multicultural tolerance which “strengthens the tyranny of the majority” and renders critiques of existing social injustices illegitimate, much like we see in contemporary neoconservative “post-racial” Social Darwinism.

In Represent and Destroy (2011), Melamed adds an enlightening critique of how misguided liberal multicultural pedagogy and literary readership—not to mention social policies—reinforce “racial progress” narratives by leading ideologically-socialized readers to “misrecognize
literature as accomplished social and political transformation” (108). The canonized race novel became site wherein white readers gain knowledge about “other” subjectivities “within a framework that defined racism as primarily a problem of attitude or prejudice” and thus “enabling changes in white attitudes that were presumed to have a leveling effect on racial disparity” (55). In this form, racism could be privatized, located on an individual rather than a social level, further congealing the “official antiracism” and marginalizing legitimate claims of institutional racism and perpetual white privilege. In 2012, this means that if an individual of color expresses grievances over legitimate manifestations of institutional racism, they are quickly dismissed as a “crybaby” and immediately blamed for “not working hard enough”—often with wide applause from conservative audiences. The 26 February 2012 shooting of Florida teen Trayvon Martin reveals the potential for white backlash against charges of institutional racism. The lack of legitimate mediums for contesting the “official antiracism” narrative—outside of academia, at least—allows few opportunities for publics to consider the relationship between objective inequalities and existing social power arrangements.

Black radical literature may be the answer. Despite the many empirical and theoretical issues raised above, Melamed identifies mid-twentieth century black radical literature as a potential site for aesthetic contestation of neoliberal multicultural hegemony. In their race radicalism—“antiracist thinking, struggle, and politics that reckon precisely with those aspects of racialization that liberal antiracisms screen off” (48)—they force readers to engage with the psycho-social dynamics of racial difference in “post-racial” America, which promote corrective cognitive processes, moralize unconscious conceptual systems, and supplement fallacious schemas. Further, In “Cultivating Consciousness Among Black Women: Black Nationalism and
Self-Esteem Revisited” (2010) Sherry C. Eaton, Jonathan N. Livingston, and Harriette Pipes McAdoo offer compelling empirical evidence that the study of black radical intellectual traditions dramatically increases self-esteem among black students, further corroborating its role as a positive social force in navigating the complex identity formations of black life under neoliberal multiculturalism (820). Though the bulk of research in cognitive humanities focuses predominantly on canonical, realist novels—most written by Europeans and Americans from the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, prior to the shift in racial orders—here I explore poetry (Sonia Sanchez’s We a BaddDDD People), postmodern drama (Amiri Baraka’s Dutchman and The Slave), and autobiographical essays (Eldridge Cleaver’s Soul on Ice) as potential mediums for future study in the field and more nuanced comprehension of black subjectivity in “post-racial” America and the structures underlying twenty-first century racial oppression.

Chapter one delves deeper into the processes whereby neoliberal multicultural ideologies become embedded in unconscious cognitive processes and conceptual systems which are ultimately traceable to institutional memory—with its selective whitewashing and limited explanatory capacity—and the concomitant narrative structures deployed to indoctrinate Americans into an unquestioning compliance with the most oppressive dynamics of neoliberal multicultural hegemony. Central to this indoctrination is an “official” narrative of Civil Rights history disjuncted from the Cold War pressures surrounding America’s “progressive” turn. Understanding the ideological and historical contingencies of the official antiracisms following the Second World War provides a necessary framework through which we should interpret black radicalism’s counternarratives and identity politics. Mary Dudziak’s Cold War Civil Rights (2000), a comprehensive historical study of the Cold War political pressures leading to “official
“antiracism” as a nationalistic ideology, suggests that, contrary to the narrative of moral progress embodied in American exceptionalism, the ultimate causal factor for abandoning *de jure* white supremacy was the struggle for Anglo-American capital expansion into the postcolonial world.\(^\text{10}\)

The contradiction between America’s discursive ethos as a democratic nation of free citizens and the realities of segregation and racial violence threatened to delegitimize American global dominance, which relied on maintenance of public perceptions of egalitarian ethics and racial justice in its social institutions. And in the context of the Cold War, when Soviet propaganda perpetually capitalized on American racism as a compelling reason for the postcolonial world to embrace Communism and oppose an American racial politics loosely reminiscent of Nazi Fascism, the shift to racial liberalism became a strategic necessity; it later became (and remains) a rhetorical means of undermining any criticisms of domestic and foreign policy and claims of institutional racism and *de facto* white supremacy / white privilege (21-32). This chapter also elaborates upon the cognitive implications of neoliberal multiculturalism’s discursively-mediated schemas and conceptual systems—information processing routines which govern human behavior. Through such information processing routines, neoliberal multicultural logics become embedded in the cognitive processes of those saturated in mass-mediated webs of political discourse, and the language permeating this discourse—most notably the all-pervasive business ontology which has expanded into all areas of human life—plays a formative yet under-studied role in human thought and behavior. Thus, in order to overturn neoliberal multicultural hegemonies via literary study and promote more nuanced comprehension of institutional racism and the social forces through which it is perpetuated, we must first establish a theoretical basis for locating and addressing impediments to empathetic role-taking and concomitant prosocial behaviors.
The final three chapters will analyze the aforementioned selection of black radical literary texts. Chapter two will examine the ideological formations of Black Nationalism, Black Power, and other strains of black radicalism designed to engender black group solidarity and concomitant systems of political, economic, and cultural empowerment. Here I will re-contextualize mid-century black radicalism, situating it next to both pre-World War II ethnic nationalisms, hegemonic nationalisms, and the rise of various “other” protest groups developing in tandem with or inspired by mid-century black radicalism, such as second and third wave feminisms, LGBT liberation, indigenous American rights groups, and others. Too often viewed in a vacuum and reduced to a divisive hypermasculine ethos, I will use Sonia Sanchez’s *We a BaddDDD People* (1970) as a literary reference point for comprehending the broader black radical critique of American “official antiracism,” its capitalistic institutions and cultural productions, and the misogynistic, hypermasculine, and economically nationalistic black radical ideologies existing in the late 1960s.

Chapter three analyzes two dramatic works by Amiri Baraka, *Dutchman* and *The Slave* (1968), which reveal psychological insights into the identity crises of integrated middle class black masculinity in neoliberal multicultural America (*Dutchman*) and Baraka’s troubled ambivalence regarding separatist black nationalism as a viable means for asserting black cultural dignity and gaining social justice (*The Slave*). Wary of applying a purely psychoanalytic or political-biographical reading—which abound—I will attempt to read Baraka’s plays for their deep ambivalence about “post-racial” “liberal-democratic narratives of nationhood” (Singh 214-5) as well as militant, hypermasculine black radicalism as viable means of establishing positive, self-defined identities for black Americans.
Finally, chapter four will plumb the psychological depths of Eldridge Cleaver’s autobiographical collection of prison essays *Soul on Ice* (1968), a sorely under-studied collection giving voice to a subjectivity among the most marginalized in modern American society: the urban, impoverished, undereducated black convict. This chapter will also focus on the pedagogical implications of using black radical literature as a means of promoting greater awareness of the relationship between American capitalism’s political, economic, and cultural hegemonies and domestic and global systems of “other” coded oppression existing under its auspices. The common thread here is that each of these aesthetic works provide counternarratives that refuse to fit neatly into the stereotypical and inadequate schemas many students possess about radicalism, black intellectual history, racial justice, and the social and psychological traumas experienced by those out-groups outside of the hegemonic American nationalism’s proscriptive normative identities. The study of these literary works—coupled with the appropriate research- and theory-based pedagogy—can promote corrective cognitive schemas, more empathetic responses to trauma, and a greater critical awareness of the oblique machinations of racial injustice—each prerequisite to enacting legitimate social progress on individual and institutional levels.
Chapter 1
On Ideology, the Black Freedom Struggle, and the Cognitive Politics of Neoliberal Multiculturalism

Since the late 1970s, a significant body of Marxist scholarship has amassed explicating the historical, social, and ideological contingencies of neoliberal multiculturalism, understood as the confluence of various hegemonic “officially antiracist” discourses and public policies which have guided American domestic and foreign policy since the late-Civil Rights and Cold War periods.¹ Numerous prominent leftist intellectuals, including David Harvey, Manning Marable, and Jodi Melamed, have noted the broad social, historical, and moral implications of the dominance of neoliberal ideologies—privatization, government minimalism, market deregulation, and global capital expansion—championed under the aegis of “progressive,” liberal-democratic multiculturalism.² Less well researched, however, is the role of these pervasive cultural discourses in influencing individual subjectivity and garnering public consent on a cognitive level. In A Brief History of Neoliberalism (2005), prominent Marxist David Harvey begins to explicate the dialectic whereby public consent to neoliberal social policies—what Antonio Gramsci calls “common sense,” “a sense held in common” traceable to cultural discourses and their concomitant cognitive and conceptual architecture—is “constructed out of long-standing practices of cultural socialization … obfuscating and disguising real problems under cultural prejudices” (39). In “Toward a Cognitive Cultural Hegemony” (2010), Bruce McConachie begins to offer a program for applying cognitive research in reengaging with Gramsci’s hegemony paradox: what social and discursive processes induce working class individuals to support ideologies that bring about their own exploitation? Citing Raymond Williams’ understanding of cultural hegemony as “social and mental manipulation,”
McConachie locates a viable site for critical analysis in hegemonic “cultural models,” the ontological-conceptual systems, “complex mental schemas, and elaborated social practices and rituals … which can be drawn on to understand unfamiliar events” and thus inform judgment about unfamiliar people, things, and future potentialities (139-41).³ A dialectic consideration of these socially and culturally-conditioned components of cognition enriches the Marxist analysis of neoliberal multiculturalism, its identity politics, and the ideological currents informing the complacent political moods and destructive social tendencies of late capitalism.

Perhaps the most notable site of ideological permeation, the postmodern mass-mediated webs of discourse and linguistic saturation shape subjectivity at the cognitive level. Despite the naïve optimism that internet networking is inherently democratizing in its oceanic capacity to represent diverse subjectivities and fields of information, the concentration of mass media influence to a capitalist elite—coupled with the substitution of legitimate journalism for mindless, truncated Associate Press reports, the sensationalist ranting of “news” media personalities, and an increasingly digitalized, privatized, commodified, and socially-networked “information market”—contributes to more uniform, or at least identifiably mainstream cultural models, such as those metaphors, narratives, themes, and symbols which emanate from any given American network news source or bourgeois ideologue. Cynical resignation to the apparent knowledge confirming, but inability to escape, capitalism’s destructive social, economic, and environmental tendencies—what Mark Fisher refers to as “Capitalist Realism” (2009) and what Frederic Jameson in “Utopia as Replication” (2009) cites as a significant impediment to both fictive and “real” utopian social transformation (412-3)—can only begin to explain the relationship between isolated, pessimistic, and psychologically unstable experiences of subjectivity in late capitalism and the cultural models whereby the docility and resignation of
the populace is sustained. Here I will direct my focus to the cognitive implications of the neoliberal business ontology in contemporary discourse and conceptual systems, what Michael Foucault understood as a central strategy for neoliberal ideologies and the capitalist class interests they serve in consolidating power: “the extension of the rationality of the market, the schemes of analysis it proposes, and the decision-making criteria it suggests to areas not exclusively or not primarily economic” (“The Birth of Biopolitics,” 1979, 207).

Using the theories of Foucault, McConachie, and others I will attempt to better theorize the relationship between neoliberalism’s socially mediated “cultural models”—the pervasive business ontology and conception of social justice as “abstract equality” and “market egalitarianism”—and subsequent cognitive impediments to transformative empathy and social behavior. Such a program requires a dialectic approach to analyzing the relationships between neoliberal multicultural hegemonic discourses, normative identity formations, cultural representation, and socially-conditioned cognitive structures, a necessary prerequisite for forming a theory supporting empathetic, intersubjective engagement through literary studies and the humanities. In her recent book Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities (2011), Martha Nussbaum begins to challenge the economic framing of education, which she accurately asserts causes a general devaluation of the humanities as a means of critical engagement with the broad patterns and individual nuances of human experience, an integral component in maintaining a functional representative democracy (21). Yet this theory lacks a more nuanced account of the deeper implications of neoliberal multiculturalism’s cognitive politics, conceptual systems, privileging of “logically white” identities, and atomizing socio-political tendencies. Drawing upon the work of George Lakoff, Mark Johnson, Patrick Colm Hogan, and others studying narrative and discursive affect on cognition, perception, cultural representation, and
identity maintenance, I will supplement the aforementioned Marxist analyses of the neoliberal multicultural condition by explicating (1) the discursive means whereby hegemonic neoliberal multiculturalism simultaneously propagates racially and gender-coded inequalities while obscuring their historical contingencies; (2) how the neoliberal business ontology, ubiquitous “free market” conceptual metaphors, and the resulting atomistic cognitive schemas influence individuals’ cognitive processes and social behaviors; and (3) implications for literary praxis in relation to the “narrative empathy hypothesis”—which suggests that the complex dynamics of aesthetically-induced, intersubjective literary experience can promote transformative, cross-racial empathy, prosocial behavior, and ultimately more just social institutions.

Of course, formulating a theory of social justice presupposes ideological positioning, and neoliberal hegemony indeed champions a brand of multicultural empathy and naturalized, “common sense” market-based social justice. Missing in this formulation is an account of those historical and discursive contingencies whereby neoliberal ideologies and social policies donned their multicultural ethos, prerequisite for comprehending the cognitive roots of those faulty schemas which facilitate hegemonic public consent to destructive social policies. In Represent and Destroy (2011), Melamed examines the immense shift in “racial orders”—from institutionalized white supremacy to hegemonic multiculturalism and its “official antiracism”—occurring in the wake of the Civil Rights laws of 1964-5 and immense domestic and international Cold War pressures. Through institutional memory, this shift toward “post-racial” social life in the United States has yielded the brand of Social Darwinism inextricable from neoliberal multicultural ideologies and discourses, whose cultural models obscure the relationship between market-based social justice and the perpetual institutional racism and oppression existing under its auspices. By delegitimizing claims of systematic inequalities and
instituting a pervasive business ontology and “free-markets-equal-progress” narratives, neoliberal ideologues capitalize on individualistic self-determination, a classical virtue of Western bourgeois philosophy and the normative, in-group “Protestant Work Ethic” implicit in its nationalist ideological framework. In obscuring the historical, social, and economic continuities—and thus impeding cognitive and psychological awareness—of racially-coded oppression, hegemonic discourse continues to frame minorities traumatized by existing power arrangements and institutions as an out-group of inferior beings, flawed individuals devoid of work ethic and thus deserving of their fate. Given the predominance of this viewpoint in mainstream American discourse, proponents of the narrative empathy hypothesis must first formulate theories accounting for those social processes which construct and sustain subjectivity before they begin to make any substantial claim regarding the possibility for literary-induced intersubjectivity. Before individual attitudes and public policies can effectively combat those social and psychological traumas plaguing various oppressed “others,” the destructive impulses of those discursive processes whereby neoliberal multicultural hegemony manipulates unconscious cognition must be made conscious and rigorously scrutinized.

The Ideological and Cognitive Foundations of Neoliberal Multiculturalism

As noted above, the roots of (neo)liberal multiculturalism as a mainstream nationalistic discourse can be traced to the various domestic and international pressures exerted on the United States following the Second World War—historical processes and realities tellingly absent from institutionalized narratives of American history. Following the fascist genocide of Jewish people and rising in tandem with burgeoning networks of global communication, international attention to racial violence and discrimination in the United States threatened the exportability of the country’s social and economic institutions into the newly postcolonial world. As Mary Dudziak
notes in *Cold War Civil Rights* (2000), as early as 1949, political pressure regarding racism—often in the form of Soviet propaganda revealing that “American professions of liberty and equality were a sham” (37)—began coercing the U.S. to adopt racial liberal domestic and foreign policies, such as the desegregation of the military and anti-lynching legislature during the Truman years (81-4); the 1954 case *Brown v. Board of Education* case and the subsequent desegregation of public institutions (89-91); and the momentous 1964-5 Civil Rights laws (153-7). This suturing of liberal, capitalist socio-economic programs with a “progressive,” “official antiracism” in the mainstream nationalist narrative precipitated racial liberalism, the ideological predecessor of neoliberal multiculturalism (Melamed, 2006, 4-6).

One critical difference between post-war racial liberalism and late 1970s neoliberal multiculturalism, as David Harvey explains, is apparent in the epistemological shift in understanding selfhood in relation to one’s democratic government: what were once “rights bearing citizen” under racial liberalism and liberal multiculturalism became “individual consumers / entrepreneurs in a market-based society” under neoliberal multiculturalism (*A Brief History*, 165-8), a shift in metaphoric conceptual systems which provides the fundamental cognitive architecture governing political thought. In a more immediate and directly political sense, racial liberalism and liberal multiculturalism championed government intervention to (theoretically) ensure egalitarian social interactions and regulate economic enterprise, which often coupled with an implied a sense of white liberal paternalism in terms of race relations. Conversely, neoliberal multiculturalism marks an abrupt turn toward privatization, government deregulation, individual accountability, and the expansion of market logics to all areas of life as a means of precipitating social justice and “abstract equality” in an era of “color blind,” “post-racial” multiculturalism. The lynchpin for this market-based egalitarianism has been the progress
narratives indelibly associated with the belief in American exceptionalism and the liberal-democratic “mission” of spreading American institutions (social, economic, political, religious, moral) abroad—a narrative constructed, managed, and exploited as a political tool rationalizing foreign and domestic policy interventions serving business-class interests.

Analyzing *The Negro in American Life* (1950-1), a pamphlet exemplifying post-war racial liberalism published by the United States Information Agency, Dudziak reveals the discursive means whereby then-contemporary egalitarian sentiments and political attitudes were exploited by a hegemonic nationalism and capitalist class interests:

The pamphlet revealed, rather than concealed, the nation’s past failings, and it did so for the purpose of presenting American history as a story of redemption. In this story, democracy as a system of government was the vehicle for national reconciliation. … Democracy, not totalitarian forms of government, it argued, provided a context that made reconciliation and redemption possible. (49)

Unable to any longer contain the reality of state-sanctioned, racially-coded oppression—and faced with a competing world power promising a social, economic, and political alternative to Western capitalism’s observably exploitative social institutions—the transformation and maintenance of America’s public image became a political necessity, deployed through emotionally compelling narratives suturing capitalism to “redemptive racial progress.” Such narrative emplotments, which Patrick Colm Hogan describes in *Understanding Nationalism* (2009) as fundamentally linked to the ways in which humans understand reality, have identifiable beginnings, middles, and ends; contain characters represented as “good” and “evil,” heroes and villains; and generally “end” with a happy resolution that provides closure for the audience (12-3). With their capacity for unconscious emotional affect, these recognizable,
culturally specific narrative patterns draw upon a construction of a fluid yet normative identity, in this case privileging “progressive,” white, liberal subjectivities and representing their ideological position as the dominant, “official” policy on race relations, presenting overt racists, reverse-racists, and various leftist political factions as enemies to Americans’ “common purpose.” The construction and maintenance of nationalistic progress narratives and their identity politics have served to reinforce neoliberal multicultural policies and rhetorics, maintaining public faith in American exceptionalism and the liberal-democratic “mission” while evading sustained public criticism regarding what Harvey identifies as the “Restoration”—seventeenth-century connotations implied—of the capitalist class’s consolidation of power. This further entrenches and presents as “inevitable” the existing systems of global and domestic inequalities under late capitalism (31).

Here we come close to Gramsci’s hegemony paradox: an instance wherein public consent and “common sense” is manipulated to acquire complacency for self and “other” damaging social policies. As exemplified in The Negro in American Life, the deployment of “redemption” and “progress” narratives—echoing popular nationalist appeals to individualistic and antiauthoritarian Enlightenment principles—became an effective means of garnering public consent for racial-liberal policies and ideological permeations, for better or worse. Less well understood are the means whereby the discursive features of these narrative emplotments guide both conscious and unconscious cognitive processes. Citing international and intercultural research, and being mindful of postmodern sensibilities by distinguishing between the methodologies and ontological intentions of “empathetic” and “hegemonic” universals, Patrick Colm Hogan asserts the intellectual and political value of analyzing the social and cognitive functions of “Literary Universals” (2010), fairly consistent cross-cultural literary themes,
symbols, characters, and other linguistic features which provide insights into the fundamental social and cognitive functions of narrative, language, and discourse (41-4). Implied here is the suggestion that structural literary features, in their cultural specificity and inherent social potentialities, offer insights into the relationship between cognition, cultural models, and individual perceptions of selfhood, identity, and one’s relationship with various proximal and distal “others.” This framework is compatible with George Lakoff and Mark Johnson’s influential “embodied realism” theory in Philosophy in the Flesh (1999), which reveals the formative role of metaphor, narrative, and other socially-conditioned linguistic features on the “cognitive unconscious,” the series of socially-determined mental processes, operations, structures, and conceptual systems which play a significant role in governing human thought and action (11-3). In adopting the precepts of recent research in the cognitive humanities, literary theory gains greater analytic depth regarding the hegemonic manipulation of public consent under neoliberal multicultural ideologies, which become embedded in the individual’s cognitive and conceptual systems through “conventionalized, entrenched” social stimuli and cultural models (60).

As has been especially true since the advent of mass media, individuals saturated in cultural models—deep narratives, symbols, images, stereotypes, metaphors, and other linguistic features—absorb formative cognitive messages, fueling inadequate conceptual prototypes, which Mark Bracher describes as abstract knowledge, mental images, and imaginary episodic encounters—often with limited epistemological content—formed through semantic memory which inform both conscious and unconscious cognitive responses, especially when individuals have little lived experience regarding the subject (“Schema Criticism” 10). A common example is when individuals prompted with the linguistic signifier “bird” draw schema-based associations
with “flight” and other reasonable categorical generalizations—which are often fallacious and/or inadequate (such as in the case of flightless birds like penguins and ostriches). Developed through social and experiential interactions with one’s environment, these cognitive schemas—the information processing routines used to inform judgments about unfamiliar persons, situations, and things—possess a highly evolutionary functionality, as Ellen Spolsky has argued in her recent article “Darwin and Derrida: Cognitive Literary Theory as a Species of Post-Structuralism” (2002). In the essay, she demonstrates the complex and fluid influence of emotional and schematic cognitive processes, “constructed by the interface of our genetic inheritance with the environment into which we are born” (304). As previously noted, schemas are those information processing routines individuals use in unfamiliar situations, in which real, “lived” experience cannot adequately inform decision-making and judgments. Thus, if we hope to make a case for the viability of literary readership in encouraging prosocial behavior, as advocates of the narrative empathy hypothesis propose, we must first further develop a theory for explicating the cognitive politics of hegemonic discourses and its inadequate cultural models, which become embedded in individuals’ minds through discursive saturation.

In The Political Mind (2007), psychologist and researcher Drew Westen provides a relevant empirical example indicative of the realities and potential implications of discursively mediated social prejudices under the neoliberal multicultural ideological regime. Synthesizing psychological research conducted by psychologists John Dovidio, Samuel Gaertner, and others, Westen explains the predominance of unconscious racial bias and negative emotive associations that most white Americans—including those with “consciously progressive” values—harbor against people of color. This manifests in various social contexts, from white jury members imposing stiffer penalties on black criminals, white police officers engaging in racial profiling
based on skin color and physical features, and white interviewers preferring “white” names over “black” names when asked to decide between two identical resumes (234-5). A particularly salient example comes from a study by Russell Fazio, Joni Jackson, Bridget Dunton, and Carol Williams (1995), which comparatively measured white Americans’ conscious and unconscious, positive and negative associations when shown pictures of white and black faces. Monitoring neural activation in the amygdala—the site of many fear and apprehension-based emotional processes—revealed that most white subjects, even those professedly non- / anti-racist, showed consistent levels of activation when shown black faces and virtually no activation when shown white faces with similar features and expressions, suggesting the presence of subliminal, racially-coded prejudices transmitted at the level of cultural representation. And perhaps more tellingly, those consciously, non- / anti-racist whites who experienced the unconscious activation in the amygdala when shown black faces during the experiment demonstrated corresponding signs of visible prejudices and apprehensive social behavior in their debriefing with a black research assistant, confirming Westen’s and others’ suspicion that unconscious cognition is a better predictor of behavior than our conscious, stated beliefs (236-7), an especially chilling prospect given the ideological forces shaping our unconscious cognitive processing routines regarding race.

Regardless of the potential objections regarding the source of these apprehensions and prejudices in the aforementioned study—whether we argue that they were conscious (based on lived episodic experiences) all along or indeed unconscious (transmitted at the level of cultural representation)—it becomes apparent that what were once overt prejudices have simply been transmitted to our associative sediments, allowing “plausible deniability” regarding obliquely racialized appeals. Given the persistence of self-segregation on a cultural, social, and geographic
level and thus a scarcity of lived interracial interactions, we might conclude that many of the racially-coded, unconscious attitudes held by individuals are transmitted through various cultural (stereo)types, which may appear to gain epistemological validity through repetition and saturation across various fields of social life. For instance, consider the music and entertainment industry’s popular, marketable depictions of black life, from the minstrel-esque antics of Tyler Perry’s Madea films to the hypermasculine ethos dominating much mainstream hip-hop; the racialized political and legal representation of black and ethnic “delinquents” juxtaposed with white, middle class tax-payers; and the quotidian, paternalistic public conceptualization of black Americans as a “problem people,” a feature of that “double consciousness” which prominent radical intellectual W.E.B. DuBois understood as the primary impediment to psychologically and socially stable black subjectivities in the twentieth century (235). For a middle class Caucasian individual who possesses little or no lived experience upon which to base an understanding of black and minority life and culture—and without an account of history and human experience through the lens of the perpetually traumatized “other”—the infinitely variable, yet at some level discursively consistent confluences of mass-mediated discourses become a primary basis for destructive cognitive schemas, inadequate conceptual prototypes, and prejudiced racial attitudes.

Given this variability of cultural stimuli and considering the oceanic potentialities of subjectivity, an airtight theory of causality explaining the relationship between ideology, discourse, and social behavior is beyond my current explanatory potential. Yet we can begin to move toward understanding those methods whereby racially-coded appeals, which activate unconscious emotive-cognitive responses embedded in cultural models, lead to illogical, fallacious, and often dehumanizing responses to neoliberalism multiculturalism’s destructive and
unjust social policies. In reference to the famous Willie Horton smear ad, a well known example of a racially-coded unconscious prime, Westen explains how

encoded racial appeals present one message consciously and another unconsciously. They provide “plausible deniability” while simultaneously activating unconscious networks that usually work in tandem with the conscious message to ratchet up its emotional power. If you simultaneously activate an unconscious network about scary black men while focusing on a furlough problem for dangerous criminals, you’ll get a very different effect than if you run the furlough appeal without the unconscious prime. (226)

Here we find a common cultural (stereo)type: the urban, violent, “delinquent” black male. Under racial liberalism’s and liberal multiculturalism’s ideological sensibilities, correcting the traumatic social environments which plague black experience as a result of the history of slavery and white supremacy becomes part of the national “mission” to achieve egalitarian social arrangements. Under neoliberal multiculturalism, however, with its discursive and ontological push toward privatization in all areas of life through an official “antiracism” and “post-racial” politics, critiques of racialized and gendered systems of exploitation and oppression are dismissed through some combination of pervasive hegemonic tropes: racial progress narratives, references to “exceptional individuals” “overcoming adversity,” and the dismantling of the “public sphere” and those social institutions which once provided the most basic needs—food, shelter, education, healthcare—for elderly, sick, and impoverished individuals. Similarly, the “War on Drugs” and “War on Poverty”—each guided by limiting, counterproductive conceptual metaphors—have gained clearly racial dynamics, as each have served to build the prison-industrial complex and further demonize and rationalize institutional violence against countless impoverished minorities despite the ostensibly “progressive” and antiracist narratives attached to such policies.
Another example of a racially-coded appeal transmitted into a pervasive conceptual prototype is Ronald Reagan’s Welfare Queen, triggering (often unconscious) emotive-cognitive associations with lazy black women exploiting the liberal “welfare state”—even though most recipients of welfare are white children, and very few (if any) individuals on welfare would pass up a good job if there were one available—in juxtaposition with “hard-working tax-payers,” an equally unstable conceptual prototype common to those more populist branches of neoliberal multiculturalism as well as overtly racist ideological denominations. The connections between these ideologies and the market-based conceptual structures they champion is the implicit “logic of whiteness,” which Nikhil Pal Singh (2004) sees as a common, under-examined impediment to social justice under all major historical configurations of American race relations—overt white supremacy, racial liberalism, liberal multiculturalism and neoliberal multiculturalism—each of which maintain an uncritical faith in “American Universalism” and the moral imperative implied in our “liberal-democratic narrative of nationhood” (214-15).

The post-war “official antiracism” ideology, then, began to transform longstanding categories of racial stigmatization into categories of “cultural” stigmatization, in which one’s (private) success is equated with one’s adoption of liberal, middle class, individualistic, market-based “logics of whiteness” and the hegemony of those capitalist class interests served by this ideologically constructed and discursively emploted normative in-group identity. In “The Spirit of Neoliberalism” (2006), Jodi Melamed informs us that this “sea change in racial epistemology and politics” occurring under racial liberalism and liberal multiculturalism and further evolving under neoliberal multiculturalism “recognizes racial inequality” yet manages its perpetuation through ideological appeals to “abstract individualism, market-based social justice, and inclusive civic nationalism” (2). This shift from “racial” to “cultural” determinants of social prestige and
power, Melamed continues, provided immense “flexibility into racial categories … stigmatiz[ing] some forms of personhood which seem to conflict with neoliberal subjectivity,” a relevant example being how “cultural blackness” has assumed those underlying stigmas historically associated with “racial blackness” (16-7). As David Harvey understood in Justice, Nature, and the Geography of Difference (1996), “[a] mere change of words does little if the connotations and associations build back into identical configurations of meaning” (89), engendering Singh’s demand for a new method for understanding the “technology of race as something more than skin color and biophysical essence,” accounting for those shifts in “cultural, spatial, and signifying systems that stigmatize and depreciate one form of humanity for the purpose of another’s health, development, safety, profit, or pleasure” (223). I will now begin to examine the pervasive business ontology as one common site for ideological manipulation of those “cultural, spatial, and signifying systems” which impact unconscious cognitive functioning through cultural models and complex networks ideological saturation.

The Neoliberal Business Ontology as Conceptual System

As Foucault understood in his 1979 lectures at the Collège de France, the year many Marxist scholars consider the beginning of the established neoliberal hegemony, the imposition of the business ontology as the conceptual framework for understanding all social relationships became a basis for garnering consent for capitalist power consolidation and its destructive social policies, facilitated through growing media networks, discursive saturation, and concomitant socially-embedded cultural models. Of express interest here is the cognitive dynamics of “the market” as conceptual metaphor, blurring the lines between economic and non-economic areas of life. In Metaphors We Live By (1980), Lakoff’s elaboration on the dynamic relationship
between conceptual metaphor and cognition, he explains *ontological metaphors*, the socially-contingent “ways of viewing events, activities, emotions, ideas, etc., as entities and substances” (23-4). Here we begin to approach the cognitive politics of the neoliberal business ontology, the imposition of “the market” as the guiding metaphor and logic of reality, and the implications of economically quantifying all areas of life. In an institutional context, this engendered the neoliberal assault on what Harvey terms “embedded liberalism,” the remnants of the interventionist public policies of the post-war period scapegoated for economic stagflation in the late 1970s (*A Brief History* 11-2).

Central to this discursive assault on government interventionism is the rarely challenged assumption about the inherent capacity for “the free market” to deliver just social interactions, which simply cannot be the case given the dramatic polarization of global and domestic wealth, capital, and power which has occurred since the Reagan / Thatcher era and the expansive embedding of the neoliberal business ontology into our social, cognitive, and conceptual systems. As previously noted, these ontological metaphors and conceptual systems are understood as socially conditioned and historically contingent phenomena; for instance, the ontological metaphor “time is money” can be traced to the social practice of measuring labor in relation to clock time. As this certainly enabled the capitalist class to exploit wage laborers in early capitalism, so too does the pervasive business ontology enable late capitalism’s expansion into new markets at the expense of non-capitalist class interests. As Lakoff notes, these ontological metaphors “are so natural and so pervasive in our thought that they are usually taken as self-evident, direct descriptions of mental phenomena” (28), revealing the need for critical analysis regarding the cognitive, political, social, and moral implications of the neoliberal
business ontology and those mediums of cultural saturation and public discourse whereby they are transmitted and sustained.

Of course, the cognitive and mental phenomena engendered through these conceptual systems inevitably influence social behavior. As a prospective scholar in the humanities, I am concerned about the bleak job market, and am encouraged by advisors to make myself marketable by demonstrating academic productivity and my potentially valuable intellectual proficiencies. These market-based linguistic and conceptual frames invariably impact the associative systems, cognitive schemas, and the related thought processes I will (or will not) use in determining my actions in preparing to enter the academic profession. Imagine the alternate conception of academic and intellectual work as collective, cooperative, and publicly rewarding rather than individualizing, competitive, and self-serving (in terms of gaining tenure, tenure-track positions, publications, and other professional advancements)! Regardless of who / what are to be understood as the consumers, products, and entrepreneurs in the “education market,” the neoliberal framing of education, healthcare, and other public institutions superimposes market logic and its hegemonic end game—reproduction of labor and debt commodities and thus the continual process of surplus value extraction—on social institutions and endeavors whose organization, methodologies, and broader social functions are undermined in the process.

This begins to explain the perceived irrelevance of the humanities in public consciousness and the vanishing of the public intellectual from cultural prominence, with their social “value” difficult to quantify and / or qualify under neoliberalism’s economic-utilitarian business ontology. A further, more optimistic possibility is that the humanities and the rigorous, historically and theoretically grounded analysis they promote pose a significant threat to the contradictory logics and strained discursive networks maintaining public consent to hegemonic
ideologies, necessitating the marginalization of their discursive powers through the
decentralization of public discourse and a prevailing mood of populist anti-intellectualism. This
lack of a viable public counterforce to hegemony—save perhaps the international, extra-
ideological, cooperative fervor embodied in Occupy Wall Street and related protests—may be
the source of docility and complacency. Unlike the Great Depression, the “Great Recession”
inaugurated by the 2008 financial meltdown has yet to diminish widespread faith in the prospects
of economic justice delivered through unchecked free market capitalism, lending credence to
Harvey’s suspicion regarding ideological management by the capitalist class powers which
organize and continue to benefit from neoliberal hegemony (26-7). With the pervasiveness of the
business ontology in mainstream American public and political discourse (circa 2012), an urgent
need remains for sustained analysis of the broader implications of basing many social and
institutional relationships and organizations on market logics—with all of their contradictory
impulses and divisive, destabilizing, and ultimately destructive tendencies—and the seemingly
“common sense” assumption that “the market” is the ideal means of facilitating social justice.

Of course, critiques of the Enlightenment conceptualization of “the market” as the arbiter
of social justice are at least as old as Marx, who in *Capital Volume One* writes:

> The sphere of circulation or commodity exchange, within whose boundaries the sale and
purchase of labour-power goes on, is in fact a very Eden of the innate rights of man. It is
the exclusive realm of Freedom, Equality, Property and Bentham. Freedom, because both
buyer and seller of a commodity, let us say of labour-power, are determined only by their
own free will. They contract as free persons who are equal before the law. Their contract
is the final result in which their joint will finds a common legal expression. Equality,
because each enters into relation with the other, as with a simple owner of commodities,
and they exchange equivalent for equivalent. Property, because each disposes only of what is his own. And Bentham, because each looks only to his own advantage. The only force bringing them together and putting them into relation with each other is the selfishness, the gain and the private interest of each. Each pays heed to himself only, and no one worries about the others. And precisely for that reason, either in accordance with the pre-established harmony of things, or under the auspices of an omniscient providence, they all work together to their mutual advantage, for the common weal, and in the common interest.” (280)

In this satiric “indictment of … liberal bourgeois constitutionality and market law” (Harvey, Companion 107) and its utilitarian assumptions about human psychology and social behavior, we see all the familiar liberal bourgeois tropes which have continued to influence contemporary, mainstream ideological moods toward free market capitalism and its pervasive and limiting business ontology. Of course, under rigorous and critically engaged analysis, the belief that the commodity exchange relationship provides for equal power in transaction processes quickly evaporates, revealing only a contradictory state of “abstract equality,” the ideological presupposition of boundless individual potentialities and the inherent capacity for economic, moral, and social justice under a market-based ontological system. Explicating some of these dynamics, Debra Satz’s recent book Why Some Things Should not Be for Sale: The Moral Limits of Markets (2010) provides a balanced analysis of the philosophical assumptions and theories of market-based social justice, from its arguably prosocial benefits (technological innovation, self-determination) to its destructive ramifications (limiting collaboration, economic exploitation). Of express interest in Satz is her extended analysis and contextualization of the Enlightenment assumptions upon which neoliberal market morality is founded, revealing numerous sites of
moralized obfuscation regarding the structural racial, gendered, and class-based inequalities existing under its auspices (74).

Regarding these very Enlightenment theories, Harvey, in *Justice, Nature, and the Geography of Difference*, applies postmodern methodologies to reveal the flaws in the Enlightenment and bourgeois economists “universal” theories of market-based social justice. Understanding “social justice” as an abstraction ultimately grounded in “‘situatedness’, ‘otherness’, and ‘positionality’” allows us to understand how these features of subjectivity and identity become “crucial elements in defining how particular differentiated discourses arise and how such discourses are put to use as part of the play of power.” “The task of deconstruction and of postmodern criticism,” he continues, “is to reveal how all discourses about social justice hide power relations” (342, emphasis in original). The neoliberal assumption and hegemonic imposition of market-based social justice as the ideal, “common sense,” “universal” conceptual structure for all areas of social life implies that “[t]here is no need for explicit theoretical, political, or social argument over what is or is not socially just because social justice is whatever is delivered by the market” (343). If the counterintuitive, anti-intellectual implications of this logic are not troubling enough, it also provides the ideological and cognitive grounds for assigning stigmatizing labels to “private individuals” who fail to succeed in a supposedly “fair” social field, often those same individuals whose impoverished condition make possible existing systems of late-capitalist financial exploitation. Of course, the various “Willie Hortons” and “Welfare Queen” we have internalized as racialized and gendered conceptual prototypes are at work here, but the deployment of multiculturalism and its various progress narratives, in all of their various social and discursive manifestations, mask and / or rationalize systemic inequalities; the promised “colorblindness,” “fairness,” “market egalitarianism,” and “abstract equality”
guaranteed under neoliberal multicultural hegemony makes possible the formation of those atomizing cognitive schemas and inadequate conceptual systems which support the belief that character flaws, not structural systems of inequality and poverty, are the sole source of one’s socio-economic life outcomes, ideological positions contested by the black radical literature under review in the remaining chapters.

Here again is evidence of the defining break in the racial epistemology between racial liberalism—which Melamed shows based its ethos and public policy on an acknowledged social responsibility (however politically coerced and strategically insufficient) for past injustices (5)—and neoliberal multiculturalism—which takes individual success stories and the expansion of the black middle and capitalist classes as definitive evidence of market-generated racial egalitarianism. Yet, as Dean Robinson points out, this limited extension of capitalist prosperity to some middle and upper class black Americans did virtually nothing to address the historically conditioned realities of systematic intellectual, economic, and cultural impoverishment affecting the majority of black and various “other” Americans (209). Under its multicultural egalitarianism aegis, neoliberal hegemony has been able to manipulate racial liberalism’s push toward “symbolic representation,” the inclusion of minorities in highly visual social institutions and practices. As Manning Marable notes in Beyond Black and White (2009), this system of symbolic representation ultimately provides the discursive foundation for neoliberal opposition to broader corrective and redistributive social practices, detracting attention from and delegitimizing critiques of entrenched institutional prejudices and systematic remnants of racial, classed, and gender-based oppression and exploitation (126-7). It thus becomes clear that maintaining the perception of neoliberal market egalitarianism requires the deployment and/or emplotment of multiculturalism as an official antiracism serving the same political function as that adopted by
racial liberalism—to provide discursive and schematic leverage in bolstering public faith in the exceptionalism and “post-racial” nature of the dominant capitalist institutions. Without this linchpin, the shaky ground upon which the “free-market-equals-social-justice” narrative stands quickly shifts, laying bare structural deficiencies and sweeping ideological inconsistencies which have become the greatest impediment to publicly and collectively defining and maintaining social justice, the great, unfulfilled promise of democratic civilization.

The Black Freedom Struggle in Context

August 2011 saw the inauguration of the Martin Luther King Jr. monument in Washington D.C., a new symbolic landmark of racial progress, justice, and the exceptionalism of American liberal-democratic institutions. By definition “of limiting epistemological depth,” the hegemonic nationalist myth regarding King’s life contains telling and selective omissions and spin, revealing what Tim Lake (2006) criticizes as classical bourgeois historicism’s compliance in the discursive, cultural, and political manipulation of Civil Rights history and its “meaning” in institutional memory (308-9). This phenomenon is most evident in the highly reductive Martin / integration vs. Malcolm / separatism binary. As Ronald Murray has recently pointed out, King’s legacy has been co-opted to propagate neoliberal multicultural narratives and ideals among many (black) conservative leaders, which have corroded “the principles of the Great Society—racial justice and redistributive economic polic[ies] … to endorse business, religious fundamentalism, and world imperialism” (926). But the Civil Rights narrative willfully neglects acknowledging the complex relationship between King, black radicalism, and the government which has with so much fanfare elevated him to national hero status. Late in life—after the 1964-5 Civil Rights legislature—King was under intensive surveillance by the FBI, labeled a communist and
“enemy” of the United States (Fairclough, 2007, 184). Seeing the failure of federal law in significantly altering racial power arrangements, King understood, as Singh has noted, that “obtaining Civil Rights for black individuals [is] an inadequate framework for combating the economic consequences and cultural legacies of white supremacy” (3).

As such, his posthumous elevation to national hero status—indelibly bound up in the institutionalized Civil Rights narrative in which he is ever-emplotted—is a subject in much need of rigorous theoretical analysis. In the public consciousness and dominant cultural models, the “victory” of King and his palatable brand of Civil Rights integrationism signifies a “legal” (i.e. objective, “real”) end to racially-coded difference, thus enabling the discursive maintenance of public faith in market-based egalitarianism and the perception of social justice delivered under it auspices. In Living Black History (2007), Manning Marable examines the implications of this “Civil Rights laws equal the end of racial difference” narrative in our institutional memory, suggesting the corrective use of “black freedom struggle”—which I will use hereafter—in reference to the continuous struggle for social justice and self-determination which has not been adequately provided through federal legislature, racial-liberal paternalism, or “market egalitarianism.” “Civil Rights” connote a perceived “end” of racial difference, fueling contemporary neoliberal / neoconservative strategies of turning Civil Rights era redistributive and reparatory social policies into “unfair government spending” favoring “special-interest groups” in “post-racial” America, using multiculturalism’s discursive abhorrence of “exclusivity” against those groups historically traumatized by existing systems of oppression (200-1).

Of course, effectively labeling historically traumatized and disenfranchised groups “special interests” in public discourse requires the audience’s compliance to hegemonic
ontological assumptions and a sustained faith in “colorblind,” market-driven social justice. It also requires the construction and maintenance of a normative, discursively-mediated, yet fluid series of “in-group” identity contents. In Understanding Nationalism (2009), Hogan differentiates between practical identity contents—“someone’s entire set of representational and procedural structures” which must be shared to some extent in order to govern human interactions (27)—and categorical identity contents, which signify group membership and therefore define our understanding of selfhood and “otherness” (29). Given the multicultural bent of the neoliberal hegemony, the focus on practical identity contents in constructing “in-group” identity—middle class, hetero-masculine, hyper-individualistic, uncritically compliant with premises of “market-based” justice—became a viable strategy for imposing a collectively privileged, “logically white” identity while maintaining the moral imperative and “tolerance” implicit in the official multicultural antiracism (Marable, Living Black History 20-1). Yet this does not mean that categorical identity contents play no role in constructing the predominant “in-group” identity. Historically and contemporarily, the hegemonic American nationalism has directly privileged certain categorical identity contents, such as “white” (of select European descents), “Protestant,” “heterosexual,” “masculine,” and “capitalist,” offset by binary oppositions projected onto various “others,” such as “black” (connoting “inferior” African descent as well as deep structured cultural metaphors), “non-Protestant,” “homosexual,” “feminine,” and “socialist.”

Michael Eric Dyson has revealed in his essay “Reflecting Black: African-American Cultural Criticism” (2007) that King’s Protestant-based, integrationist rhetorical ethos fit more neatly into the neoliberal multicultural nationalism and its narratives (132), which may begin to explain why radical black intellectuals, with their socialist political leanings, “non-Christian”
religious beliefs, demands for structural reforms to exploitative capitalist institutions, and unwillingness to adopt quintessentially American framings, ideologies, and value systems have been positioned in opposition to King, a posthumous signifier of egalitarian social progress. King also deployed the language of the long-hegemonic “Protestant Work Ethic,” which Levy et al. (2002) empirically documents as a significant and direct ideologically-induced impediment to adequately informed judgments about individuals bearing stigmatized social and economic labels (1228-230). This further explains the marginalization of “radical” black subjectivities in neoliberal multicultural discourse, as will become apparent in the following chapters, in which I will provide a more sustained analysis of the identity politics implicit in the neoliberal multicultural framing of the black freedom struggle and the corrective potentialities of black radical literatures as an analytic site to bolster more nuanced understandings of the historical, social, and psychological traumas of black and various “other” subjectivities. My present claim regards the need for dialectic, historically contextualized, and theoretically engaged methodologies for explicating the culturally mediated and often hegemonic manipulations of social movements, and the implications of the neoliberal ontological systems through which we understand our objective reality. In developing such a research program, we may begin to understand the deeper workings of ideology and discourse and how they influence our schematic information processing routines, our unconscious emotive-cognitive reactions, and their concomitant social behaviors—a research program which may yield more compelling evidence supporting literary studies as a corrective for those atomizing impediments to empathetic arousal, prosocial behavior, and intersubjective engagement.
Literature, Ideology, and the Prospects of the Narrative-Empathy Hypothesis

The link between empathy and prosocial behavior has been well documented by evolutionary and developmental psychology. In *Empathy and Moral Development: Implications for Caring and Justice*, Martin Hoffman summarizes a plethora of scholarship supporting the theory that empathy, understood “not in terms of outcome but in terms of the processes underlying the relationship between the observer’s and model’s feelings,” is the foundation for prosocial and moral behavior (30). These processes, however, are complicated by a number of variables and impediments, including the perceived similarity of categorical identity contents between the observer and subject, the various situational (real or fictive) contexts in which the observer and subject meet, and the very form and medium whereby the empathetic appeal is registered, all of which we have seen are profoundly influenced by neoliberal multicultural hegemony. Drawing upon thirty years of research, Hoffman concludes that of all empathy arousal modes, *role-taking* involves the most developed set of cognitive processes and is thus the most likely to translate into prosocial behavior in light of the aforementioned variables (52-4).

Revealing similar results, Sheri Levy, Antonio Freitas, and Peter Salovey (2002) add that the observer’s ability to think and understand concepts and motivational goals abstractly—precisely the intellectual function promoted through study in the humanities—shows positive empirical correlations between empathy, role-taking, and prosocial behavior (1225). Throughout the present study, I have made numerous references to theories suggesting that the humanities and literary readership in particular promote empathy and prosocial behavior through critically engaged role-taking and intersubjective interactions, perhaps most clearly articulated in Nussbaum’s *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life* (1997). Here Nussbaum directly connects the psychological insights above to the development of empathy and emotional
intelligence—integral components of citizenship in functional democratic societies—through the study of literature and narrative forms:

Novels … construct and speak to an implicit reader who shares with the characters certain hopes, fears, and general human concerns, and who for that reason is able to form bonds of identification and sympathy with them, but who is also situated elsewhere and needs to be informed about the concrete situation of the characters. In this way, the very structure of the interaction between the text and its imagined reader invites the reader to see how the mutable features of society and circumstance bear on the realization of shared hopes and desires. (7)

Kimberly Chabot Davis’ recent study “White Book Clubs and African American Literature: The Promise and Limitations of Cross-Racial Empathy” (2008) lends corroboration to Nussbaum’s hypothesis, going further to suggest that “African-American literature in particular encourages readers to develop a politicized point of view about race, class, and inequality that has the potential to influence their actions in the public sphere,” yet she makes clear the significance of “ethnicity, age, gender, education, and political affiliation” in influencing the level of transformative empathy across racial lines (157-8). Thus in order to further advance the viability of literary studies for such a project we must develop a means of countering those privatizing neoliberal tendencies which have stunted corrective capacities for individual and political action.

Reasonably so, the viability of literary studies in promoting more just cognitive schemas, more empathetic human relationships, and more prosocial behavior has been subjected to much needed critical skepticism, which I interpret as a call for more rigorous, interdisciplinary scholarship, not fatalistic submission to hegemony’s totalizing inevitability. As Suzanne Keen
notes in *Empathy and the Novel* (2007), the theory positing literature’s capacity to stimulate empathy and promote prosocial behavior remains “theoretical speculation,” despite compelling fMRI research that could potentially link mirror neuron activation—widely acknowledged as integral neurological determinants of empathetic, moral, and social development—to role-taking in literary readership (13-5). Furthermore, many theorists’ assumptions regarding the universality of emotions, along with general skepticism over the reliability of research methods and inconsistencies in experiment results (understandable in light of the many variables in the relationship between cultural stimuli and individual subjectivity), have drawn fundamental theoretical skepticism, especially among postmodern critics. And finally, as Jodi Melamed warns in *Represent and Destroy* (2011), uncritical neoliberal multicultural education tends to represent literary counternarratives as tangible proof of “accomplished social and political transformation,” thus “marginalizing antiracist materialisms” (108). In the absence of airtight theoretical and empirical corroboration for the narrative empathy hypothesis, we are left to speculate, and regardless whether we accept or reject existing theories of narrative empathy, we would still be left with those widely acknowledged impediments to empathetic arousal, deployed through the privatizing, isolating, anti-intellectual, and critically disengaging ideological demands of neoliberal multiculturalism and its ontologically limiting and socially destructive conceptual frameworks. Thus, a central function of publicly engaged scholarship must be to account for the dynamic interplay of reader and subject identities, dialectically explicating the complex social and cultural processes whereby hegemonic discourses influence identity formations and cognitive structures. Thus, while the ultimate objective of the present study is to explicate the cognitive politics of neoliberal multiculturalism through the critical analysis of 1960s-1970 black
radical literatures and intellectual traditions, this method can be expanded to provide rich insights into the experience of subjectivity and identity in the contemporary, late capitalist United States.
Chapter Two

Waiting for Something More than Black Capitalism in Sonia Sanchez’s *We a BaddDDD People*

“In a society where the good is defined in terms of profit rather than in terms of human need, there must always be some group of people who, through systematized oppression, can be made to feel surplus, to occupy the place of dehumanized inferior. … those of us for whom oppression is American as apple pie, have always had to be watchers, to become familiar with the language and manners of the oppressors, even sometimes adopting them for some illusion of protection. … The oppressor maintains their position and evades responsibility for their actions. There is a constant drain of energy which might be better used in redefining ourselves and devising realistic scenarios for altering the present and constructing the future.”

-Audre Lorde

Few can reasonably contradict the assertion that a combination of institutional racism, systematized economic exploitation, and the degeneration of community bonds—familial, ideological, geographic, demographic—are the most pressing issues confronting marginalized black Americans trapped in quotidian cycles of poverty in deindustrialized urban centers. Yet despite the unequivocal racial and gendered tendencies of these systems of socio-economic marginalization and identity trauma, neoliberal multicultural hegemony has managed this contraction in its “progressive,” “post-racial” ethos in a number of ways. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the neoliberal hegemony’s pervasive business ontology and subsequent conceptual-schematic cognitive systems, sutured with moralizing narratives of multicultural “progress,” obscure the historical contingencies of racial and gendered oppression and exploitation, primarily because these “others” are unrecognized in the mainstream nationalism’s normative in-group identity. This chapter will focus more upon the final factor mentioned above—the discursive “disarming” of Black Nationalism, irrevocably hindering its capacity to
promote black group solidarity as a viable means of attaining racial unity and political, economic, cultural, and psychological empowerment. Deprived of both a socially recognized identity and legitimate means of attaining those (largely economic) criteria for in-group normativity, these “others” have formed a seemingly permanent underclass, an out-group discursively emplotted as what Lorde refers to as “surplus,” “dehumanized inferior[s]” devoid of agency, public burdens in a system wherein “the good is defined in terms of profit rather than in terms of human need” (533). Under the pervasive business ontology ordering social relations under neoliberal multiculturalism, those domestic and international “other” subjectivities most exploited, marginalized, and oppressed under existing systems of domestic and global capitalist power—and denied the proscribed means of acquiring the social and economic capital needed for group recognition and cultural empowerment—are effectively silenced in the mainstream American politics and public consciousness, stemming partially from the “official antiracisms” and concomitant social policies designed to combat and/or manage contradictions in the “post-racial” American nationalism, in which normative identity politics obscures the root causes of social oppression and thus limit the public’s capacity for positive social change.

For those impoverished and working class black Americans whose social conditions had been largely unaltered by Civil Rights legislature, the great promise of mid-twentieth century black radicalism was a public platform to actively assert economic, political and cultural self-determination and self-definition, which in The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual (1984) Harold Cruse identifies as the “inseparable elements of social change” for black Americans (94)—a “revolution of the mind,” as James Brown has memorably characterized it. This begins to explain the immense significance of black radical intellectual history for those individuals—of all races, ethnicities, sexes, genders—still trapped in capitalist systems of social and psychological
oppression mid-century black radicalism and many of its contemporary social movements sought to dismantle. Conversely, notes Jodi Melamed in “The Spirit of Neoliberalism: From Racial Liberalism to Neoliberal Multiculturalism” (2006), the mainstream neoliberal multicultural narrative—permeating public discourse, educational institutions, and other mediums of ideological socialization—emplots black radicalism in binary opposition to pluralistic “progress,” pitting benevolent, “tolerant” liberal integrationism against black radical separatism, “monoculturalism,” misogyny, homophobia, and racial essentialism (18-9).\(^1\) In Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capital (2011), Melamed adds that even when black radical thought has retained a “tolerated” position in the multicultural canon, its messages and broader historical commentaries are co-opted by the dominant nationalism to reinforce neoliberal multicultural “progress” narratives (48-9). Citing a salient example of this phenomenon in Living Black History (2006), Manning Marable critiques Spike Lee’s dramatic rendition of conservative intellectual Alex Haley’s The Autobiography of Malcolm X, a work thrice removed from reality, twice commodified, fallaciously marketed as an autobiography, purged of its radical potentiality, and thus made palatable for the hegemonic multiculturalism (144-9).\(^2\) The film rendition of Malcolm X’s life, however epistemologically limiting, presents his pre-Hajj—pre-pluralistic—persona as flawed, divisive, and counter-productive. The viewer is lead to admire the new Malcolm, the integrated multicultural protagonist disenchanted by and ultimately opposed to radical Black Nationalism, solidifying negative associations with black radicalism and “monocultural” black cultural nationalism.

This draws our attention to what Tim Lake, in “The Arm(ing) of the Vanguard, Signify(ing), and Performing the Revolution” (2006), calls the manipulation and management of black radicalism’s meaning in institutional memory. The selective representations of black
radicalism’s divisive, volatile rhetorical posturing and admittedly problematic identity politics in
the public consciousness have tragically obscured their insights into the complex dynamics of
racial injustice, calling for serious critical attention to black radical literature and its
revolutionary potentialities (308-9). While no apologist for patriarchy, misogyny, homophobia,
and reverse-racism, black radical literature forces readers to rigorously analyze the relationship
between racial, gendered, sexual, and classed oppression in post-Civil Rights America; more
completely understand black radical identity politics as a reaction to the “logically white”
hegemonic ideal; and better contextualize the historical role of ethnic nationalism as a means of
attaining group empowerment in pluralistic America. Such methods of inquiry provide greater
analytic insight into the historical and ideological formations of black radicalism and neoliberal
multicultural nationalism, the discursive means through which the former has been marginalized
by the latter, and how the discursive obfuscation of racial difference in “post-racial” America
influences schematic-conceptual cognitive processes governing social and political behavior.

Despite mainstream characterizations reducing 1960s and 1970s black radicalism to a
threatening hypermasculine ethos and disconnecting it from its contemporary social movements,
such as second and third wave feminism, LGBT activism, and other freedom struggle
movements, James Smethurst has correctively argued in The Black Arts Movement: Literary
Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s (2005) that women and sexual minorities were often highly
influential in the development of the Black Power and Black Nationalist intellectual traditions,
which during the period were among the only places in which the issue of patriarchal male
supremacy could be raised (85-6). The poetry of Sonia Sanchez, among the best known female
artists and intellectuals in the twentieth century black radical tradition, addresses these
contradictions in the hegemonic narrative, which has situated “progressive” (neo)liberal
multiculturalism as the guarantor of racial justice while obscuring the continuity of white privilege, patriarchy, and capitalist exploitation under its aegis. Additionally, Sanchez’s poetry—in both content and form—navigates the psycho-social trauma plaguing black feminine (and to a lesser extent masculine) subjectivity under (neo)liberal multicultural nationalism while also providing a powerful critique of those strains of black radicalism whose social program amounted to little more than turning white capitalist patriarchy into black capitalist patriarchy, whose focus on economic nationalism and male-dominated hierarchies drastically limited the prospect of black collective solidarity and concomitant systems of political, economic, and cultural empowerment. Furthermore, her highly under studied sophomore work *We a BaddDDD People* (1970) directly engages with the question of black capitalism and market-based social justice as viable means of group solidarity and cultural empowerment, making it particularly relevant for our current analysis of modern “post-racial” neoliberal multiculturalism and its cognitive impediments to racial justice.

Assessing 1960s and 1970s black radicalism in light of its central mission—to engender those systems of racial, ethnic, gendered, and community-based solidarity through which all minority groups have claimed recognition under American multicultural democracy—provides a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between then-contemporary hegemonic nationalism, its prescription of normative identities privileging Anglo-European bourgeois values, and the near-totalizing marginalization of impoverished black women under all historical phases of Western capitalism, no matter the official antiracism used to justify the political, economic, and cultural exploitation of non-normative bodies. In what follows, I will contextualize the formation of ethnic nationalisms prior to and following the major shift in racial epistemologies following World War II, suggesting that pre-war, hegemonic white supremacy
and racial typologies made possible those ethnic nationalisms empowering European immigrant groups, while post-war (neo)liberal multiculturalism restricted the capacity for a similar black ethnic nationalism. I will then present a close reading of Sanchez’s *We A BaddDDD People* (1970), drawing upon the theoretical pretexts established in the previous chapter to facilitate a more rigorous navigation of the complex social, economic, and cultural structures of oppression and identity trauma plaguing the mass of black Americans under contemporary American capitalism, prerequisite for correcting the flawed schematic-conceptual processes reinforcing neoliberal multicultural hegemony.

**Imagining a Black Nation**

“Before a group can enter the open [American] society,” writes Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton in *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (1967), “it must first close ranks … group solidarity is necessary before a group can operate effectively from a bargaining position of strength in a pluralistic society” (44). This process of creating a positive, self-defined cultural identity and facilitating community building—the “fundamental premise” of the twentieth-century black radicalism, as Carmichael and Hamilton suggest—has been the means whereby virtually all minority groups have gained some sense of collective security, self-determination, empowerment, and inclusion in American institutions. Given the success of ethnic nationalisms in providing some semblance of political, economic, and cultural power for various once “other” European immigrant groups, how can be begin to explain the failure of Black Nationalism and Black Power movements in the post-World War II period? A common answer points to their rhetorical brand of racial essentialism and identity politics, commonly conceived as reverse-racism by most twenty-first century sensibilities. Many of the less problematic examples can be rationalized by referring to postcolonial theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s
term *strategic essentialism*—drawing upon a shared history of oppression and a common enemy in the oppressor as a means of enacting positive social change for social out-groups. But the unifying link in black identities proved tenuous for post-Civil Rights Black Nationalism. As Patrick Colm Hogan demonstrates in *Understanding Nationalism: On Narrative, Cognitive Science, and Identity* (2009), racial-nationalist movements lacking broad attachments to common geographic spaces, religious practices, ethnic customs, and other categorical identity contents lack the cohesive bonds necessary to unify a group historically deprived of their heritage and collective identity (54-6).³ In the case of black Americans, as Manning Marable notes in *Beyond Black and White: Transforming African-American Politics* (2009), besides a common history of slavery, apartheid, and the sociological label “black,” the vast differences in “language, culture, ethnic traditions, rituals, and religious affiliations” complicated the Black Nationalist vision of communal solidarity (186). Furthermore, the expansion of the black bourgeois and middle class, who undeniably saw great social improvements under (neo)liberal multicultural social policies, served further the class divide among black Americans while subsequently reinforcing two central (neo)liberal multicultural narratives: “racial progress” and “individualistic virtue,” that “pulling oneself up by the bootstraps” and “defying all odds to succeed” that holds such a mythic appeal in the American mind.

Further complicating this issue, the gendered and sexual essentialism, patriarchal hierarchies, and homophobia fairly common in black radical ideologies have alienated many women and sexual minorities (while nevertheless inspiring such groups to utilize black radical strategies for collective action and group empowerment). But these provide only a partial explanation of black radicalism’s failure to establish group solidarity during the 1960s and 1970s. A further insight comes through considering the development of various pre-World War
II ethnic nationalisms and their relationship with then-contemporary hegemonic narratives of national identity. In *Democracy and the Melting Pot* (1915), eminent Jewish sociologist Horace Kallen documents the importance of group solidarity among Jewish-Americans prior to winning some semblance of representation in the proto-pluralist American nationalism, explaining that “democracy means self-realization through self-control, self-government, and … one is impossible without the other” (215). Similarly, in *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City* (1963), influential sociologists and liberal policy makers Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan document the importance of ethnic isolation in gaining political control of local politics, as well as the group-controlled economic capital used by assimilated European immigrant groups (18-9). Black Americans, deprived of legal and political rights, economic assets, and unifying categorical identity contents, have never been able to benefit from this sociological phenomenon, revealing a flaw in multiculturalism’s assumptions about contemporary racial equality. At a time of limited federal government influence on local political processes and limited domestic or international concern for the welfare of non-WASPs, late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century American Jews, southern and eastern Europeans, Catholics, and other social outsiders segregated into ethnic slums were able to establish political, economic, and cultural enclaves in which control of local institutions eventually transformed into the social capital necessary for their integration into the mainstream. In this way, the biological determinism and official Anglo-American supremacy of the period bolstered these ethnic nationalisms and their processes of “nation-building” as means of survival for oppressed peoples. Additionally, many western European immigrant groups possessed similar categorical identity contents to the privileged Anglo-American archetype—white skin
and Judeo-Christian religion—demarcating them as more easily assimilated than peoples of African, Asian, Native American and various racially and culturally “non-white” descents.

Notably, these European immigrant groups were fully integrated—“fully white”—by the Second World War. As a result of the Holocaust, the “end” of direct Euro-American imperialism via the Atlantic Charter, and the Cold War struggle for economic dominance in the postcolonial world, a politically strategic “official antiracism” became necessary to manage racial contradictions in pluralistic narratives of democratic nationhood. These narratives, conditioned to preserve the global supremacy of Anglo-American capital during the Cold War, deployed multiculturalism as a means of presenting the American image as one of tolerance and racial justice while obscuring and / or kowtowing to those currents of white economic, political, and cultural supremacy still reverberating throughout public and individual consciousness. In “The Spirit of Neoliberalism” (2006), Melamed explores how this multicultural narrative hindered the capacity of black radicalism to advocate “monocultural” ethnic nationalism and group solidarity previous ethnic groups had used as a means of empowerment, while simultaneously transferring those “racial” stigmas once overtly associated with racial “blackness” to “cultural” categories, implicitly privileging a normative, “logically white” identity at the expense of black cultural identities (18-9). As such, the various strains of mid-century black cultural nationalism—in their Afrocentric, Islamic, Marxist, and “other” non-normative ideologies designed to establish positive, self-defined black identities—are necessarily emplotted in opposition to (neo)liberal multicultural “progress,” thus marginalizing their critiques of the contradictions between abstract notions of racial justice and freedom delivered under hegemonic liberal capitalism and the objective social realities of the majority of black Americans and other historically marginalized minority groups.
However, considering the broader social and historical realities of racial difference in America quickly dissolves the logic of this multicultural narrative and its assumption regarding “abstract equality” and post-racial “market egalitarianism.” The systematic deprivation of black cultural identities—not to mention basic citizenship, voting, and property rights—significantly limited those categorical identity contents needed to bolster black ethnic nationalism and group solidarity. In *Beyond Black and White: Transforming African-American Politics* (2009), Manning Marable adds that the “symbolic representation” of black Americans in highly visible areas of multicultural American life further impinges upon establishing black solidarity by creating a class-based divide in black identities privileging the successful while marginalizing the impoverished and oppressed (125). Furthermore, the sweeping de-industrialization and “white flight” from urban centers in the late 1960s and 1970s, coupled with the rising prominence of black entertainers in pop culture, also played significant roles in establishing this dichotomy between the marginalized affluent black bourgeois—whose existence reinforces “racial progress” and “individualistic virtue” narratives—and the black masses. Regarding this dichotomy, Paul Gilroy notes in *On Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line* (2000):

De-industrialization ensures that the economic predicament of these divided black communities is bleak, particularly where their subaltern social world is circumscribed by a high degree of spatial segregation. At the same time, the elements of globalization and the centrality of black cultures to pop culture, youth cultures, advertising, cinema, and sports have never been greater. However, this enhanced visibility does not mean that the black body is imagined in postures or roles … that would be chosen as a means to articulate or complement black political interests. It can be argued that novel
communicative technologies and the faceless forms of appropriation they foster impact negatively upon solidarity building tactics devised in earlier periods and refined when black subculture moved above ground during the 1960s and 1970s. (214)

Here we begin to see how the symbolic representation of black life and culture became a central point of contention for black radical intellectuals, as will become apparent in the following analyses. From the late 1960s, with affluent black professionals and entertainers reinforcing (neo)liberal multicultural narratives and posing no immediate threat to white-controlled social power, black radicalism lacked the means of unifying and facilitating solidarity amongst an increasingly complacent black polity, yet maintained intellectual and artistic mediums for contesting the psycho-social trauma of black life in (neo)liberal multicultural America and striving for empowered identities.

Of course, these goal of nation building and other basic tenets of Black Nationalism have existed for centuries, as Sterling Stuckey demonstrates in The Ideological Roots of Black Nationalism (1972), yet only under post-war (neo)liberal multiculturalism have such ethnic nationalisms run counter to the mainstream hegemony, suggesting that post-World War II radical movements possessed disruptive potential for the “officially antiracist” nationalism and its narrative of cross-racial equality and solidarity.4 In questioning the viability of democratically-mediated racial justice within existing capitalist institutions, 1960s and 1970s black radical intellectuals examined how such systems essentially preserved those social structures historically used to deny political, economic, and cultural agency for the majority of black Americans. Without wide-scale redistributive public policies on the national level and a “strategically essentialized” black collective needed to establish group solidarity and disrupt pervasive cultural stereotypes, the existing systems of economic, cultural, intellectual, and psychological
impoverishment still plaguing many urban and rural centers in the contemporary world could not be adequately addressed. At the first level of public policy, which has operated based on the (neo)liberal multicultural narratives of nationhood and an implicit white liberal paternalism, the inadequacy of affirmative action and welfare as systems for ultimate racial empowerment has demonstrably failed to elevate the majority of black Americans while subsequently contributing to symbolic representation and systemic welfare dependence, two sources of identity trauma plaguing impoverished black subjectivities and the schemas of the “in-group.” At the level of group solidarity, those movements and organization designed to address this need have met with various public aversion—mostly from conservatives borrowing liberal multicultural ideologies as a means of re-institutionalizing white privilege. At one extreme, we find the NAACP—an organization founded to strive for and preserve the rights of historically oppressed blacks—framed as a “special interest group,” creating a perception of “unfairness” under “post-racial” American politics. At the other extreme, more radical cultural and political movements toward black solidarity have met with direct aversion from those indoctrinated into an uncritical, historically disjuncted understanding of racial difference in “color blind” multicultural America.

Under this rubric of uncritical “post-racial” (neo)liberal multiculturalism, the broad political, economic, and cultural contingencies of white supremacy and black marginalization are thoroughly obscured. As Juliet Hooker notes in Race and the Politics of Solidarity (2009), dominant groups in Western liberal democracies view their political communities as the product of voluntary agreements between citizens around political principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity, despite the fact that the very shape, literally and metaphorically, of these polities reflect imperial histories of conquest and colonization in some cases,
sustained exclusion and discrimination of racial and ethnic minorities on the other, and
many other kind of violence and injustice. (53)

Given the broad historical realities and ramifications of white supremacy throughout U.S.
history, the idyllic myth of American exceptionalism and democratic “progress”—inseparable
from the (neo)liberal multiculturalism—can persist only if those hegemonic ideological
underpinnings remain in place. Under Civil Rights era racial liberalism and liberal
multiculturalism, public policy self-consciously recognized the relationship between historical
oppression and contemporary social realities for black Americans, leading to policies designed to
address such realities. Though arguably well-intentioned, these policies proved ineffective,
misguided, and dominated by an infantilizing white liberal paternalism; yet they nevertheless
expanded the black middle class, lending corroboration for progress narratives leading to “post-
racial” politics under neoliberal multiculturalism, which rose to nationalistic prominence in the
Reagan-Thatcher 1980s. This latest ideological development, whose language, narratives, and
prerogatives have dominated political discourse over the past thirty years, has been used as a
means of dismantling those public policies designed to counter those “histories of imperialism
and colonization” rather than make meaningful, proactive reforms. It has also served to
delegitimize public concerns over contemporary manifestations of racial and gender inequality.
And it has—perhaps most importantly—obscured the dialectic between capitalism, patriarchy,
and racial inequality over a thirty year period in which domestic and international wealth
polarization, a persistently racialized and gendered system of labor exploitation, and deeply
entrenched institutional racism have flourished.

Navigating this dialect became a central mission of third wave black feminists, many of
whom possess personal, if not intellectual, ties to post-World War II black radicalism. Implicit in
its “fundamental premise” of nation and community-building, black radicalism sought to establish an empowered, socially-recognized cultural identity. Those more masculinist strains—which in many cases have come to represent the totality of black radical thought in the public consciousness—often borrowed various Anglo-American, African, or Islamic patriarchal traditions as means of establishing social empowerment, which begins to explain the misogyny, homophobia, and hypermasculinity—all of which run rampant in past and present hegemonic and ethnic nationalisms. Yet the work of many black radical intellectuals who drew upon the positive goals of community building and positive identity maintenance as means of addressing the serial problems of black existence in America—racism, sexism, economic inequality and exploitation—complicate any dismissive reading of black radical literature and intellectual history. In navigating the dialectic of capitalism, patriarchy, and racial inequality, Sonia Sanchez’s *We a BaddDDD People* meditates upon the degeneration of black cultural nationalism into capitalistic economic nationalism, as well as the plight of the black underclass under (neo)liberal multiculturalism. Further, when read in the proper context, these poems can supplement readers’ understanding of the complex dynamics of “post-racial” oppression and thus engender those cognitive processes essential in correcting fallacious schematic-conceptual knowledge and information processing routines.

**Rhetoric, Action, and Self-Definition in *We a BaddDDD People***

As we have seen, post-World War II Black Nationalism was a program for political, economic, and cultural empowerment for impoverished and working class black Americans, who had been transformed into a seemingly permanent underclass and “out-group” under the hegemonic post-World War II nationalism. Sanchez’s poems invest in these questions of group power and identity the perspective of a working class black feminine subjectivity, among the
most economically oppressed—and thus marginalized—demographic groups existing under
domestic and global (neo)liberal multiculturalism. *We a BaddDDD People* oscillates between
poems centered on appealing to group solidarity and reviving the waning spirits of black cultural
nationalism in the late 1960s; poems critiquing (neo)liberal multiculturalism’s identity politics
and the patriarchal and increasingly capitalistic ideologies adopted by many black radicals; and
poems explicating the endemic social and psychological traumas unique to impoverished and
working class black women. Critically navigating these aesthetically-mediated experiences,
while keeping in mind their broader historical, social, and ideological contexts, provides the
foundations for correcting fallacious schemes and conceptual prototypes about racial, gendered,
and sexual oppression in “post-racial” America, a necessary step in promoting social justice
through literary studies and the humanities.

Born Wilsonia Benita Driver in Birmingham Alabama in September 1934, Sanchez
moved to New York City when she was nine years old, where she eventually studied poetry and
became involved in political activism among the burgeoning community of black artists and
intellectuals. She would later become a key figure in the black radical intelligentsia, as well as a
leading Black Arts poet and dramatist and champion of Black Studies in university curriculums.6
Much of Sanchez’s early poetry, including *We a BaddDDD People*, was published by Dudley
Randall’s Detroit-based Broadside Press, perhaps the most important producer of Black Arts
poetry during the in the 1960s and 1970s. As Evelyn Leasher writes in “Broadside Press of
Detroit” (2000), in a Cold War culture in which black radical writers were ostracized from
mainstream publishing and artistic circles, “Broadside not only welcomed these writers but
nurtured them and, as black publishers, gave them a sense of self-determination and community
control” (113). Just as Broadside established a medium for black-controlled cultural production,
Sanchez and other Black Arts writers’ work championed a form of cultural nationalism—in distinction from solely political and economic nationalisms—intended to establish positive, self-defined individual and collective racial and gendered identities (systematically denied black Americans throughout history) as a means of achieving group solidarity and thus political, economic, and cultural empowerment.

In light of the declining revolutionary potential of black cultural nationalism in the late 1960s—largely being replaced with more determinedly political and economic nationalism and suppressed by increasing state persecution—many of the poems in *We a BaddDDD People* can be read as “rescue attempts” for the black revolutionary mood, as D.H. Melham has argued in “Sonia Sanchez: Will and Spirit” (1985). Having been widely panned as “noisy exhortation” and aesthetically compromised by “shrill sixties rhetoric,” and coupled with its homophobia and racial essentialism, it should perhaps come as no surprise that *We a BaddDDD People* has received relatively little critical attention. Yet as Melhem and Phillip Brian Davis have argued, Sanchez’s formal elements—a blend of modernist poetics and black vernacular—reveal complex rhetorical meditations on black identity, black radicalism, and their relationship to the mainstream American nationalism. Melhem identifies in *We a BaddDDD People* “a breathless racing to uplift” designed to excoriate and move beyond the “facile rhetoric” of black radical polemics and formulate legitimate means of establishing group solidarity and social empowerment (82). A further insight into the formal sophistication of Sanchez’s poetics comes from Davis’ “Nationalism and Social Division in Black Arts Poetry of the 1960s” (1996), in which he argues that Sanchez’s use of “direct address … invites us to conflate addressee and audience… [and] is meant to be heard by blacks and overheard by whites” (247, emphasis in original). Navigating this intragroup and intergroup division in Sanchez’s poetics will be
especially relevant in interpreting Sanchez’s volume, but unlike Davis, I resist reducing Sanchez and other Black Arts poets to ideologues and rhetoricians, especially given her complex navigation of the racial, gendered, and class-based dynamics of (neo)liberal multicultural oppression and her observably critical stance toward then-contemporary practices in black radical movements.

As it is perhaps the most noted feature of black radical literature, it seems fitting to begin with an analysis of the role of reverse-racism and racial essentialism in Sanchez’s *We a BaddDDD People*. While Phillip Brian Davis frames the “violent rhetoric” of Black Arts poetry as a “performative act” designed to “annihilate those persons who effect one’s oppression” and “impress upon one's peers just how righteous, how fearsome, how potently nationalistic one is” (254), this reading misses Sanchez’s deep ambivalence about black radicalism’s racial and gender-essentializing rhetoric, an idea as central to the work as her suspicion toward lukewarm liberal paternalism, each of which have contributed to deeply-structured systems of social oppression. “TCB,” the abbreviation of “takin’ care of business,” complicates the reductive reading of Black Arts reverse-racism:

wite/mutha/fucker

wite/mutha/fucker

wite/mutha/fucker

wite/mutha/fucker

wite/mutha/fucker

cracker.

wite/mutha/fucka

wite/mutha/fucka
As Melhem suggests, this should be read as a rallying call for proactive strategies for black empowerment rather than empty, divisive rhetoric (83). The repetition, with slight variations in anti-white epithet and varied “-er” and “–a” endings to the noun “fuck” stresses the overabundance of counterproductive rhetorical posturing and a pressing lack of tangible means of facilitating social justice for impoverished and working class black Americans. Tension between rhetoric and action remains a recurrent theme in the volume, and Sanchez’s prognosis is cultural nationalism, self-definition, self-determination, and group solidarity. As such, the anti-white polemic in *We a BaddDDD People* at one level reflects a justified distrust in liberalism, white paternalism, and widespread ignorance about the nature of black oppression. At another level, the emplotment of a white enemy can be read as a rhetorical deployment of strategic essentialism, drawing upon what little common identity black Americans share—a history of political, economic, and cultural oppression. At both levels, Sanchez seems aware of the limitations of anti-white rhetoric and the pressing need to reinvigorate and unify black political activism to create affirmative and affirming black identities.

Channeling the energies of a waning and increasingly compromised black revolutionary mood became a central function of Black Arts literature. In *The Journey Back: Issues in Black Literature and Criticism* (1980), Houston Baker describes how the transformative national
potential of black activism had been stunted by Civil Rights legislature, the “The War on Poverty,” and “Great Society” initiatives, and when the Black Power struggle escalated in 1966 the lack of widespread public support and subsequent state suppression emplotted them in opposition to American “progress,” thereby limiting their potential for achieving racial solidarity (80). In “so this is our revolution,” as elsewhere in We a BaddDDD People, Sanchez laments and attempts to energize the dwindling influence of black radical activism in late 1960s:

the

revo lushun is here

and we still

where our fathas /

muthas were

twenty yrs ago

cept we all look

prettier. (63, lines 11-18)

Here the intragroup divisions noted by Phillip Brian Davis—the Black Power narrator addressing integrationist blacks—become apparent, as Sanchez calls into question the superficial consumerism central to the values of mainstream American and integrated blacks. Additionally, the opening lines, in which we find “nigguhs with naturals / still smoken pot drinkin / shootin needles into they arms / for some yestuhday’s dreams” and “sistuhs fucken other sistahs / husbands” critiques the degeneration of those community building activities that facilitate collective and individual empowerment. These problems, largely located in impoverished and working class black populations, were inadequately managed by President Johnson’s “War on
Poverty” and “Great Society” initiatives, but significant progress was made in addressing such problems by the Nation of Islam (NOI), suggesting that the self-defined cultural identities NOI represented—at least for men—have provided the best remedy for drug abuse, fiscal, and sexual irresponsibility.

As such, “so this is our revolution” illuminates the importance of positive cultural identities—defined for blacks and by blacks—as a means of individual and collective empowerment. However, this strategy struck against the hegemonic liberalism’s proscribed method of racial uplift and integration—adoption of middle class, bourgeois values, which in turn leads to various forms of social capital. Having witnessed the historical implications of this strategy for working class black Americans, who face deeply embedded systems of discrimination fundamentally unlike those of previous immigrant groups, post-Civil Rights black radicalism ultimately rejected the “talented tenth” hypothesis that W.E.B. Dubois believed in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) would accomplish broad social improvements for the mass of black Americans. In this context we can begin to understand the rejection of the (neo)liberal multicultural proscription for racial empowerment, especially as many working class blacks perceived the black middle class to have succumbed to the common postcolonial condition described by Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1962). “In an underdeveloped country,” as the American black collective is to be understood,

an authentic national middle class ought to consider as its bounden duty to betray the calling fate has marked out for it, and to put itself to school with the people: in other words to put at the people’s disposal the intellectual and technical capital that it has snatched when going through the colonial universities. But unhappily we shall see that very often the national middle class does not follow this heroic, fruitful, and just path;
rather, it disappears with its soul set at peace into the shocking ways—shocking because anti-national—of a traditional bourgeoisie which is stupidly, contemptibly, cynically bourgeois. (150)

Here Fanon focuses on social (“intellectual and technical”) capital, without which the black masses lack agency in a society in which social capital is the ultimate source of economic and political power. Yet the systematic deprivation of social capital—in the form of inadequate access to education, healthcare, and other public services—and cultural capital—the source of unifying categorical identity contents integral to ethnic nationalism—further explain the black economic and intellectual bourgeois’ failure at significant racial uplift. In relation to “so this is the revolution,” Sanchez is less concerned with the superficial economic trappings of racial progress and criticizes the lack of black cultural empowerment resulting from the mid-century black revolutionary movements, which Dean Robinson and others have accurately demonstrated directly benefited the black middle class and left the lives of the black working class largely unchanged (203). The inability to create and sustain a collective yet fluid and self-defined black identity so essential for effective community-building—the inability to provide black children a psychological space “to love their blk / selves,” to plant “a blk / culture / to be raised on this / wite / assed / universe” (lines 27-30)—ultimately results in a perpetual form of social “otherness” masked by the (neo)liberal multicultural nationalism, however much consumerism and capitalistic decadence provides an outward appearance of progress.

Throughout We a BaddDDD People, Sanchez maintains a consistent skepticism regarding (neo)liberal multicultural capitalism’s capacity to dismantle those systems of patriarchal and racial oppression inextricably linked to its ascendance to global dominance. She maintains a similar skepticism regarding the capitalistic ideologies and patriarchal tendencies
common in many strains of Black Nationalism. Having lost much of its revolutionary, transformational power in the years following Civil Rights legislature due to both internal division and external pressure, the black radical goal of nation-building and political activism had degenerated further into struggles for inclusive capitalist power, as Joe Street notes in *The Culture war in the Civil Rights Movement* (2009, 152-60). In “blk / rhetoric,” Sanchez laments this desecration of the revolutionary ideal and increasing adoption of capitalism among black revolutionary groups:

who’s gonna make all
that beautiful blk / rhetoric
mean something.

like
i mean
who’s gonna take
the words
blk / is / beautiful
and make more of it
than blk / capitalism.

u dig? (15-6, lines 1-11)

Here Sanchez interrogates a fundamental question among black feminists: can capitalism as a social order, as an ontological basis upon which to structure human relationships, exist without the exploitation of non-normative bodies? Similarly, in *Black Looks: Race and Representation*
bell hooks explores the unique difficulty black women face in creating a “radical subjectivity under white supremacist patriarchy” as well as black male-dominated social orders, as neither account for the underlying gender politics associated with capitalist social relations (46). Angela Davis has also written extensively on the relationship between sexual oppression and capitalist social relations, notably in “Women and Capitalism: Dialectics of Oppression and Liberation,” in which she interrogates the convergence of black slavery and American capitalism—the foundational argument for reparations and redistributive social policies—and marital and gendered oppression inseparable from each phase of patriarchal capitalism, regardless of what racial group ranks atop the hierarchy (168-72). Given the weakening of black cultural nationalism in the late 1960s and 1970s, black radical movements had increasingly turned toward economic (capitalistic) nationalism, which in many instances preserved the gendered oppression endemic to mainstream capitalism, a highly problematic prospect for black feminists and sexual minorities. This would further divide the black collective.

Lacking the broad categorical identity contents needed for a successful nationalism, and increasingly alienating racial, gendered, sexual, and classed “others,” the state of black radicalism in 1970 was understandably troubling for Sanchez. Summarizing this situation and suggesting the rhetorical function of Black Arts poetry, Philip Brian Harper accurately identifies a deeper, highly ambivalent current in “blk / rhetoric”:

By calling into question what will ensue amongst the black collectivity after it has heeded the general call—succumbed to the rhetoric, as it were—Sanchez points to the problematic nature of the black nationalist project that characterizes Black Arts poetry.
This problem was endemic to late 1960s and early 1970s black radical movements—the question of what alternative model of social life would provide racial justice for black Americans. The NOI, which sutured Islamic morality with the economic principles of American capitalism, provided perhaps the most coherent strategy, yet their patriarchal hierarchies, conservative ideologies, and racial essentialism made them less attractive to black women and sexual minorities, as well as those leaders who, like Malcolm X, became disenchanted with the hypocrisy of the organization under Elijah Muhammad. With Malcolm X’s death in February 1965 and a diminishing faith that Civil Rights legislature could provide for racial justice, black radicalism’s revolutionary potential at the national level diminished, leaving unfulfilled the goal of creating and sustaining a black cultural nationalism and concomitant positive, self-defined cultural identities. Without some means of political, economic, and cultural agency, true uplift of the majority of black Americans and the attainment of true racial justice through collective social and political action would be indefinitely deferred, signified in the persistent repetition and enjambment of “like” and “i mean” throughout the poem and volume.

Later in the poem, Sanchez continues her imploring search for spiritual leadership within Black Nationalism, a leader untainted by the allure of patriarchal capitalism, Black Nationalist and (neo)liberal multicultural alike:

who’s gonna give our young

blk / people new heroes

(instead of catch / phrases)

(instead of cad / ill / acs)

(instead of pimps)
Here we see the continuation of the critique of black radicalism’s turn toward patriarchal capitalism and away from cultural empowerment, a turn away from political activism and community building toward sterile rhetorical posturing, consumeristic complacency, and ultimately subsumption into the mainstream (neo)liberal multicultural nationalism. As Melhem notes, this poem can be read as an “S.O.S”; in exchange for positive, socially-recognized identities and those political, economic, and cultural institutions through which minorities gain some sense of power—however illusory—in a pluralistic society, black Americans receive only empty, material goods as incentives for integration into the (neo)liberal multicultural milieu (82). Some of these prizes—“pimps,” “wite whores,” “drugs,” “ripple” and other products designed to make black people appear more “white”—actively contribute to and reflect the psycho-social degradation of the black community, while others reinforce the caricature black culture has historically represented in the mainstream American consciousness—minstrels and entertainers (“chit / er / lings,” “new dances”); gangsters and criminals (“cad / ill / acs,” “pimps,” “drugs”); and interracial sex predators (“white whores”). Given the crime and destructive psycho-social behavior plaguing modern urban centers —the effect of systematic poverty, institutional racism,
and the degeneration of community bonds—as well as many mainstream stereotypical representations of “blackness,” this poem, written during the transition from de jure to de facto racial oppression, accurately describes the contemporary ramifications of black integration into the capitalistic mainstream without having first established collective group solidarity and positive, self-defined cultural identities.

Notably, “blk / rhetoric” is inquisitive, asking who will make more of the revolutionary mood in black America than rhetoric and black capitalism. “Indianapolis / summer / 1969 / poem” similarly highlights the perverse effects of consumerism and capitalistic values on the black freedom struggle, yet actively asserts proscriptions for black action. Punctuated with “i mean” and “like,” linguistic signals of frantic thought and / or quotidian exasperation, and centered upon a utopian desire, Sanchez here meditates on the (neo)liberal business ontology, the capitalistic tendency to reduce everything to “e / co / no / mics,” and how such capitalism-motivated black nationalisms fail to account for gendered and classed exploitation:

like if brothers

programmed sistuhs for love

instead of

fucken / hood

and i mean

if mothas programmed

sistuhs fo

good feelings bout they blk / men
and i mean

if we programmed /

loved / each

other in com / mun / al ways

so that no

blk / person starved

or killed

each other on

a sat / ur/ day nite corner.

then may

be it wud all

come down to some

thing else

like RE VO LU TION.

i mean if.

like. yeh. (22-3, lines 30-58)

The significance of the conceptual metaphor is important here, as Sanchez shifts verbs in lines 44-5, revising her desire to “program” black people to simply have them “love” one another. The
dehumanization implied in understanding “people as machines to be programmed,” common in the (neo)liberal multicultural business ontology, must be abandoned, lest black people continue to conceptualize one another as means to an economic end and thus continue to be programmed for exploitation and trauma, like the “young bruthas” and “blond / wigged … sistuhs” being prostituted for white desires (lines 6, 18-20). This inclusion of sexual exploitation of black bodies is especially relevant, as well as the systemic degeneration of black familial roles discussed in the poem, as each reveal links between racial, gendered, sexual, and class-based oppression under American capitalism. In “Reflections on the Black Woman’s Role in the Community of Slaves,” Angela Davis traces these forms of oppression to the gender roles and familial degradation imposed upon blacks during slavery, laden with contemporary implications for black and white, feminine and masculine sexual identities (112). The hypersexualization of black bodies, a traditional and perennial form of racism, is a common theme in black radical literature, such as Cleaver’s *Soul on Ice* (1968), Baraka’s *Dutchman* (1964), and *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1964), in which he recalls pimping black men and women to whites. Central to Sanchez’s poem lie the objective reality that working class women—often women of color—are disproportionately affected by rape, sexual violence, and prostitution under the capitalistic sexual commodification of non-normative bodies. In her utopian scenario, Sanchez presents the fact that true racial solidarity and concomitant political, economic, and cultural empowerment must come from within the black community, from a shared interest in ending black exploitation; must reject the traumatic psycho-social implications of white liberal paternalism; and must interrogate the relationship between racial, sexual, gendered, and class-based oppression under (neo)liberal multicultural capitalism. The consumeristic complacence Sanchez describes in “blk / rhetoric” and “indianapolis / summer / 1969 / poem,” coupled with
more aggressive government pressure toward black activism following Civil Rights legislature, helped to enervate black revolutionary fervor, particularly as it further fragmented the burgeoning black middle class from predominantly working class blacks.

The aforementioned poems represent the dominant political theme in *We a BaddDDD People*—establishing group solidarity through cultural nationalism. But interspersed therein are (higher quality) poems expressing more personalized views into Sanchez’s black feminine subjectivity. “221-1424 (San/Francisco/suicide/number)” moves away from the rhetorical posturing and direct addresses in her more political poems, presenting an imaginary scenario in which a nameless, genderless black narrator—“fixin to / hang it up” because of the totalizing despair and oppression s/he faces as a black person in “progressive,” “post-racial” America—finds renewed purpose in giving voice to black rage in confronting the ignorance of a liberal suicide hotline operator:

```
don’t u read the fucken papers?
don’t u live?
what’s that?  u say it’s
all improven for us negroes.
what kind
of fool are u?  what u? some kind of
wite / liberal / pacifist / jew?
all u
honkies are alike.
```
shit man u

ain’t got no kind of understanding.

[...]

what’s that you say?

I sound better? yeh.

I do. (12-3, lines 38-57)

The narrator, resigned to the fact that s/he is “blk. liven in a / wite /psychotic/neurotic / schizophrenic/society” (lines 16-9) with no means of escaping systematic white supremacy, finds catharsis in a venting anger on whites (i.e “honkies”), which in much Black Arts literature is associated variously with individual to systematic manifestations of social power, overtly white supremacist and liberal “progressive” alike. Assuming the narrator is a black woman, her act of spoken resistance, however facile and socially insignificant, provides a rare medium for assertive personal agency at a time in which black women’s voices were largely marginalized—especially in mainstream public discourse. In “Sixties Stories' Silences: White Feminism, Black Feminism, Black Power” (1996), Wini Breines explores how women of color were alienated from hypermasculinist black radicalism as well as predominantly white, middle class second wave feminism, effectively silencing their voices in discussions over legitimate progress toward egalitarian, “post-racial” democracy (108). Furthermore, the historical manipulation of the Civil Rights movement has widely facilitated public ignorance regarding the nature and deep-structured mechanisms of white privilege as well as the close ideological relationship between black radicalism and the more “positive” second and third wave feminisms and gay and lesbian liberation movements (114). In Sanchez’s poem, the narrator engages in what Brenda Carr
identifies as a feature of “‘resistance literatures’ of all kinds”: to “strategically assert presence and cultural authority [and] assert agency through self-defined sociosymbolic practices” (120-1). This process of communicating a feminine subjectivity through poetry and writing establishes spaces to share counterstories and vent rage about oppressive social environments, which can provide psychological relief as well as mediums of communication with worlds ignorant of your objective social realities. In presenting the psychological catharsis associated with outbursts against white liberal ignorance, Sanchez illuminates the psychological function of the black radical reverse-racism decried by so many modern scholars. If the narrator’s frustration and hopelessness manifests itself as a desire to go out and “do in a couple honkies,” it should not be understood as an irrational call to violence, but rather a last resort, a final destructive impulse to take down a system which labels your perpetual oppression “progress.”

While the narrator’s anonymity in “221-1424 (San/Francisco/suicide/number)” draws attention to the common psycho-social trauma of black life under (neo)liberal multiculturalism, the directly personal “a/needed/poem for my salvation” channels Sanchez’s feminine struggle against black patriarchy, capitalist oppression, and “logically white” normative identities:

[…]

have taken day / time
nîte / time rhetoric

seriously and been wounded
by / lovers of slick / blk /rappin

(in blker words:


pimps & jivers)

am gonna loooook in a
mirror each time i pass one.

smile at my image
& say. yeh sistuh. it ain’t easy.

but mooooove
beautifullee on passsst it.

keep on holden yo / head higher
cuz yo / bessssst is yet to

coooome.

am gonna take me seriously.

toooday.

& study myself.

git a phd in soniasanchezism.

& dare any motha / fucka
to be an authority on

me. (49-50, lines 6-28)

Having “taken seriously” and “been wounded” by the empty rhetoric of mainstream racial orders and select strains of black radicalism, characterized as “pimps” and “jivers” who have
compromised the struggle for black cultural self-definition and self-determination, the narrator eschews ideology and its “-isms.” The turn to studying only “soniasanchezism” and a assuming a resolution of self-love running counter to the narrator’s formerly outward-looking struggle for positive self-definition and identity. The understanding that psycho-social empowerment begins with the reevaluation of one’s own individual and collective self-concept became a central tenet of numerous third wave feminisms and other anti-normative countercultural movements of the period. In specific reference to women of color feminism, Amanda Davis asserts that
texts by black women that focus on the construction of self and identity ‘break new ground’ by clearly naming the ways structures of domination oppress and make it nearly impossible for black women to survive and become subjects if they do not ‘engage in meaningful resistance on some level’ (26).

In “Sexual Subversions, Political Inversions,” (2006), Cherise Pollard adds to Davis’ observation that Sanchez’s poetic “subversive practices” constitute a “sisterly” perspective—one that supports the black communal family, but one that can be gently (or not so) corrective … to their “brother’s” political positions” (174). Given Sanchez’s relatively conservative views on family and sexuality and her extended commitment to the NOI, I agree with Pollard’s assessment that Sanchez’s level of criticism of patriarchal and capitalistic black radicalism is quite tame. But in defying “any motha / fucka / to be an authority on / me,” Sanchez acknowledges that true social empowerment for black people—and black women in particular—requires critical awareness, self-reflection, and active resistance toward both problematic strains of black radical ideology and the narratives and labels imposed upon them by (neo)liberal multicultural hegemony, racial paternalism, and the concomitant normative identity politics inseparable from the propagation of de facto white privilege.
As previously noted, Sanchez was an active champion of Black Studies as an academic discipline, which she and other black radical intellectuals conceptualized as a means of preserving black histories and counterstories in a “post-racial” multicultural society. Despite its aversion or absence in institutional memory, black radicalism has played a fundamental role in the creation of positive, self-defined cultural identities among black Americans. In “Cultivating Consciousness among Black Women: Black Nationalism and Self-Esteem Revisited” (2010), a compelling study of the relationship between black nationalist consciousness and self-esteem among black women, Sherry C. Eaton cites her own and numerous studies confirming a higher level of self-esteem and self-concept among black students exposed to various manifestations of Black Power ideology (816-8). Certainly, the impact of black women in the various radical movements of the 1960s and 1970s can be partially credited for this legacy, and Sonia Sanchez’s broad critique of the relationship between patriarchy, capitalism, and racial and gender-coded oppression provides a lens through which to interpret the ideological currents of black radicalism as a source of political, economic, cultural, and psychological empowerment, a means of drawing upon a shared history of psycho-social exploitation and trauma to establish group solidarity and a position of strength in multicultural America. Assessing the ideological transformation of racial orders in the post-World War II period further contextualizes the manipulation of black radicalism’s intellectual legacy in institutional memory, a chink in the great cognitive barrier neoliberal multicultural hegemony has erected to obscure from vision the objective social realities of the domestic and global “other” and the capitalist enterprises profiting from their despair.

In giving voice to the counterstories of marginalized subjectivities, the study of black—nay, all—radical literatures and intellectual traditions must necessarily play an active role in
what Melamed terms a *critical multiculturalism*, one which accommodates the fluid identities constituting American society while prioritizing active awareness of the means and manifestations of social injustices through scholarship, pedagogy, and activism (108). Yet to implement this potentially fruitful antiracism through the study of literature and culture requires a new evaluation of the role of mass-mediated ideological discourse in creating nationalistic identity formations and how such normative identity formations inform those schematic-conceptual systems which govern human thought and behavior. In confronting the complex “technologies of race” existing under the neoliberal multicultural regime, Sonia Sanchez and other black radical intellectuals provide powerful counternarratives possessing corrective potential for individuals with limited experience of racial and gendered power dynamics under contemporary pluralistic democracy.
Chapter Three

“What the Crust of our Stance has Become…”: Navigating Nationalisms in Amiri Baraka’s

*Dutchman* and *The Slave*

Perhaps more than any black author and intellectual of the late twentieth century, Amiri Baraka has been a consistently vociferous critic of nationalistic multicultural narratives which lead to cultural imperialism, liberal paternalism, and other “post-racial” hegemonies developing in the decades following the Civil Rights movement.¹ At his most puerile and problematic—specifically in his more political works during his Black Nationalist period—Baraka exudes “intolerance” in his polemic homophobia, misogyny, and divisive reverse-racism, partially explaining the critical attitude many contemporary scholars take toward Baraka’s intellectual legacy.² Certainly a better artist than political theorist, Baraka’s early poetry and “transitional” plays offer an especially rich site for explicating the identity politics faced by black subjectivities in the transitional period from 1950s racial liberalism to post-Civil Rights and contemporary (neo)liberal multiculturalism. That such national-ideological transformations were occurring in tandem with Baraka’s own transformation of selfhood—from black bourgeois to discharged soldier, ‘schwartzte bohemian’ to Black Nationalist—provide insights into the connection between social, ideological and psychological constructions of normative identities under both neoliberal multiculturalism and the more problematic ideologies of black radicalism. As Jodi Melamed has argued in *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism* (2011), the privileging of the white racial liberal logics, inextricably emplotted in those progress narratives suturing American capitalism with the post-World War II “official antiracism,” further marginalizes those subjectivities most traumatized under existing social power arrangements (107-9). Without such counternarratives and those public mediums
necessary for contesting the hegemonic master narrative, the thinking public lacks the means of assessing those “technologies of race” that uphold contemporary systems of “other-coded” oppression on socio-economic and psychological levels.

*Dutchman* and *The Slave*, two dramas written during Baraka’s transformation from disenchanted bohemian to Black Nationalist, explore the identity traumas endemic to the (neo)liberal multicultural “technologies of race,” those systems of obliquely racialized and gendered discrimination and systemic inequalities obscured under post-Civil Rights, “post-racial” public policies and ideologies. As suggested in chapter one, twenty-first century racial prejudice—on an individual, cognitive level—exists primarily in socially constructed, unconscious, emotive-cognitive processes, activated through various linguistic primes. Since such processes necessarily impact political and social behavior, the role of effective social criticism, as Mark Bracher notes in “Schema Criticism” (2011), is to better our “understanding of how discourse—including literature and literary criticism—can (re)form subjectivity in socially consequential ways” (6-7). Since much of this unconscious cognition stems from fallacious schemas—information processing routines used to make judgments about unfamiliar persons and situations—black radical counternarratives possess a unique corrective potential in their more nuanced meditation on the social realities and concomitant identity traumas faced by various oppressed subjectivities. In reference to Baraka’s plays, each provide a rare exploration of the instability of empowered, self-defined black identities under the two ideologies most readily available to black men in the post-Civil Rights era: a Black Nationalist separatism plagued by hypermasculinity, homophobia, sexism, and anti-intellectualism or integration into the neoliberal multicultural milieu, which he came to associate with liberal paternalism and the commodification, fetishization, and misrepresentation of black life and experience. In light of
interdisciplinary research in cognitive humanities, which offer insights into the psycho-social identity formations of social “out-groups”—in this case black masculinities in the decades surrounding the 1964-5 Civil Rights laws—critics can examine with greater rigor the complexity of racial and gendered identity politics common in 1960s and 1970s black radicalism and mainstream, neoliberal multicultural nationalism, revealing the double-binds and psychological complexities of Baraka’s protagonist’s black masculine subjectivities, a necessary step in providing for empathetic, intersubjective engagement in readers.

A central claim of the present study is that black radical literature and thought possess a unique corrective potentiality for those seeking to develop a theory of narrative empathy, which requires the transcendence of identity-based impediments to empathetic arousal during literary role-taking. Analysis of Baraka’s protagonists’ subjectivities is a crucial step in empathetic arousal, revealing insights into how and why misogyny, homophobia, and an essentializing hypermasculine black ethos and anti-white racism came to occupy such a central role in Baraka’s and other black radicals’ political rhetoric, which in turn has transmitted to mainstream hip-hop culture. Such a program of literary analysis also reveals potential underlying causes of toxic identity contents and the oppressive social systems in which they develop. Furthermore, critical awareness of our own cultural saturation in contemporary neoliberal multicultural narratives, metaphors, and linguistic frames—which through institutional memory construct, constitute, and trigger emotive-cognitive processes—can promote more comprehensive understandings of contemporary ramifications of historical and social processes, making conscious those unconscious cognitive obfuscations of systemic racially-coded inequality. Baraka’s depiction of traumatized black masculine subjectivities under both mainstream neoliberal multicultural nationalism (Dutchman) and militant black radicalism (The Slave) provide great analytic depth in
explicating the social and psychological complexity of race in “post-racial” America, methods of inquiry capable of supplementing fallacious cognitive schemas, making conscious unconscious prejudices, and revealing the means whereby neoliberal multicultural hegemony manufactures public aversion to egalitarian social policies, solidifying a brand of tolerated, subliminal, systemic racism through ideological-linguistic framings. It is my contention that this intersubjective engagement through literary readership can act as a corrective for fallacious cognitive schemas, and pedagogical mediation of this readership can address the aforementioned identity-based impediments, a topic discussed in greater detail in chapter four. As foreseen by Baraka and other black radicals, the failure of post-Civil Rights social policies to adequately realize the promise of social justice is evinced in the perpetuation of traumatic social and psychological realities, the ultimate causes of socially and psychologically destructive behavior—such as legal biases, racial profiling, and cyclical poverty—which undermine true progress toward more just social institutions.

**Navigating Nationalisms in *Dutchman* and *The Slave***

Given Baraka’s public reputation as a radical intellectual, it should come as little surprise that some critics take his polemic, Black Nationalist political writings at face value, reducing them to personal condemnations of homosexuality, feminism, and racial cooperation. For instance, in reference to Baraka’s “transitional” writing, Jerry Gafio Watts’ *Amiri Baraka: The Politics and Art of a Black Intellectual* (2001) suggests that Baraka “never offers a sustained critique of liberal integrationism or a rigorous defense of black nationalism. In the place of rational argument, Baraka substitutes denunciations, slurs, and slanders, all of which solidify his state as a demagogue” (255). Similarly, in *The Culture War in the Civil Rights Movement* (2007) historian Joe Street characterizes *Dutchman* and *The Slave* as “misogynist understanding[s] of
the male psyche” which reflect Baraka’s adoption of black radicalism’s dominant hypermasculine machismo (68). While Watts may be correct in reference to Baraka’s more political writings, and Street accurately identifies Baraka’s meditation upon black masculine double-consciousness under 1960s liberalism, their readings ignore the complex meditations of racial, gendered, sexual, and classed anxiety in Baraka’s *Dutchman* and *The Slave*, which reflect a deep ambivalence toward both liberalism and hypermasculine black radicalism as viable means of asserting positive, self-defined black identities. Evinced throughout his early drama and poetry, Baraka was critical of the mainstream American Nationalism and its emplotment of normative black identity, as well as the oppressive gender and sexual politics he would later adopt in his more black nationalist writings, suggesting that Baraka understood them as a *means* of countering the deep structured associations of denigrated black masculinity in *Dutchman* with ultimate *ends* in the anti-intellectual, patriarchal, neocapitalist dystopia we find in *The Slave*.

Considering Baraka’s experience with unstable black masculine identities throughout his life—and reflected in his transitional plays—Baraka’s drama provides rich insights into the inadequacies of both mainstream (neo)liberal multicultural nationalism and black nationalism as viable means of attaining group solidarity, positive black identities, and social empowerment, a tension central to the conflicts faced by each of Baraka’s black masculine protagonists.

Baraka was born into a middle class black family in Newark, New Jersey, and felt increasingly alienated from the white world in the predominately Caucasian schools he attended (as well as the beginning of his college education at Rutgers). He increasingly came to feel alienated from black middle class values and capitalist class aspirations, which he experienced during a brief stint at Howard, the “capstone of black education in America.” Jerry Gafio Watts points out that Baraka considered Howard and its ideological position toward black culture to be
the source of the “negro sickness,” an institution “situated in a victim status ideology” that offered little resistance to the perceived inferiority of black culture in its integrationist stance toward capitalistic social mobility (22-3). Abandoning Howard and the self-loathing black identity it came to represent for him, Jones joined the armed services, was later dismissed, and eventually found himself among the predominantly white liberal literati of Greenwich Village, formative years in Jones’ artistic and identity development. In “Camping the Dirty Dozens: The Queer Resources of Black Nationalist Invective” (2000), Marlon Ross notes that Jones shared the Beats’ rejection of the “organization man,” the conservative culture of 1950s Eisenhower-McCarthy era that marginalized those not conforming to middle class consumerist values (295), which Jones associated with the integrationist stance of Howard and the black bourgeois, as well as the shifting racial orders arising in the post-World War II period.

Baraka’s early poetry, similarly to that of other Beat writers, criticized the established hegemony’s marginalization of non-normative racial, ethnic, sexual, gendered, and various “other” groups, but Jones increasingly came to resent the Beats’ apolitical and thus complacent stance on social action. Perhaps more importantly, he also became troubled by what Norman Mailer in “The White Negro” (1967) identifies as the hipsters’ and bohemians’ sexual and economic fetishism of black culture and the “primitivism” associated with black life and jazz culture (169). Permeations of black cultural practices—primarily in various entertainment industries—into the mainstream at one end lends corroboration to liberal progress narratives and their official anti-racism while at the other end reinforces long-standing cultural stereotypes (and thus conceptual prototypes) originating in slavery, including the hypersexualization of the black body and the infantilizing effects of white paternalism. As Cedric Johnson reports in Revolutionaries to Race Leaders: Black Power and the Making of African American Politics
(2007), Baraka travelled to Cuba in 1960, during which he wrote “the dynamic of revolution had touched me, … seeing youth not just turning on and dropping out, not just hiply cynical or cynically hip, but using their strength and energy to change the real world … it was too much” (47). This experience, in addition to being called a “cowardly bourgeois individualist” by Mexican activist Rubi Betancourt, inspired him to reject Beat bohemia and its early brand of liberal multiculturalism. Becoming increasingly disenchanted with the tokenism and political complacency in bohemia, Baraka opted in favor black nationalism, an active, however ideologically problematic output for his traumatized black masculinity. As such, my reading of Dutchman and The Slave reflect Baraka’s symbolic mediation of the “binary oppositions pitting angry black manhood against white-bowing liberal sissiness” noted by Ross (293), focusing also on what Brian Yost in "The Changing Same: The Evolution of Racial Self-Definition and Commercialization" (2008) identifies as the cultivation of a black “political consciousness” relying to some extent on strategically essentialized assumptions about a universal blackness “not remotely resembling the acceptable or expected safe, commercialized black man, which he believes will not be susceptible to white subjugation” (1317-9). For Baraka, and black cultural nationalism in general, these ideological missions fulfill a necessary step in black nation and community building. Yet unlike most scholars analyzing Dutchman and The Slave, I resist reducing these plays to biographical psychoanalysis and racial allegories transmitting clearly defined ideological messages, as Watts, Streets and many others have tended to do. Certainly, Baraka and other black radical writers were suspicious of liberalism and those progress narratives deployed to obscure the realities of racism in “post-racial” America, but what few scholars have noted is Baraka’s deep ambivalence regarding militant, separatist, hypermasculine
black radicalism, with its racial essentialism and often anti-intellectual ethos, as a viable means of positive self-definition for black Americans.

*Dutchman* has long been considered Baraka’s most acclaimed work, and the abundance of critical scholarship written about it has made much of its rich interpretive dimensions; however, many critics have tended to reduce it to racial allegory, a reading Baraka rejected as the work of “demented academicians” symbol hunting. Instead, Baraka writes, “[Lula] is not meant to be a symbol, but a real person, a real thing, in a real world. She doesn’t represent anything—she is one. And perhaps that thing is America, or at least its spirit” (*Home*, 187-8, emphasis added). Similarly, readings of Clay as an ideal of black revolutionary masculinity fail to adequately assess the complexity of the play’s social commentary on black identity under (neo)liberal multiculturalism and separatist black nationalism. As such, I agree with Nita Kumar’s "The Logic of Retribution: Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman*" (2003) in that the influential and oft-cited readings of critics Kimberly Benson and George Piggford, which argue that Baraka intended this play as a rallying call toward militant Black Nationalism through his essentializing reversal of the white-black, good-evil binary (265), ignore a more dynamic view of Baraka’s understanding of the “race question” and the inadequacy of existing black radical ideologies. Keeping in mind Johnson’s observation that in black radical literature “whiteness and blackness serv[e] as proxies for bourgeois and proletarian sensibilities,” (43), I agree with Kumar’s assertion that 

[t]he play [*Dutchman*] does not so much posit an authentic black sense of selfhood as explore the processes and modes of misrepresentation concerning it. It engages dialectically with racial domination in terms of representation and attempts to invest art and language with the power and immediacy of action (274)
Such a reading draws our attention to perhaps the most salient feature of the play: Lula’s ceaseless, antagonizing attempts to “define” Clay’s identity. Reading Lula as the “spirit” of “post-racial” American liberalism’s identity politics, with their fetishism of black life and milieu of cultural (stereo)types, supports a more complex allegorical reading of *Dutchman*, one which accounts for the legitimate psycho-social anxieties of black life in the 1960s. The setting itself, “heaped in modern myth,” alludes to the quotidian, timeless struggle of black peoples for cultural self-definition, which, if achieved, could effectively correct the cognitive processes in white minds that unconsciously relate blackness with stereotypical cultural images.

As in much black radical literature—certainly the primary texts under review in the present study—interracial sexuality and desire play a fundamental thematic role in *Dutchman*, in which predatory, manipulative Lula’s constant attempts to define—and liberate, by her own white liberal calculations—Clay’s black subjectivity. Yet in “The New Desdemona: The White Liberal Woman in African American Drama” (2010), Cigdem Usekes notes how

Far from freeing Clay from intellectual and existential shackles, Lula merely wishes him to swap one set of stereotypes for another. The images Lula entertains in her mind as fitting Clay, or any other black man for that matter, basically fall under two categories … “a raunchy, overly potent, maniacally belly-rubbing, and mindless ‘field nigger,’ or a meek, selfless, helpless, hobbling ‘Old Tom’ who laughably denies his ‘real’ potent self. The one is an outlet for her own erotic fantasies, the other an image that allows her to believe she controls the world. (39)

In *Dutchman*, “the white liberal woman surfaces as a formidable foe for black men: the ultimate weapon of white society, all the more threatening because she is successfully disguised as an ally,” and the ambivalence surrounding this alliance is punctuated throughout the play by the
obvious power dynamics of (neo)liberal multiculturalism, especially as this relates to hegemonic definitions of normative black identities. Lula first emplots Clay as a black sexual brute, predatorily stalking her (a white woman), situating herself as the seductress by moving closer to the window so Clay would “have more than that [a “potshot” of her “ass and legs”] to go on” (7). When he fails to fit this stereotype, and having assessed his physical appearance and dialect, she goes on to inquire about his “type”— which pre-formed prototype of integrated black masculinity he fits. Her first guess: the bohemian “race man” Jones was in the process of un-becoming:

Lula: You look like you’ve been trying to grow a beard. That’s exactly what you look like. You look like you live in New Jersey with your parents and are trying to grow a beard. That’s what. You look like you’ve been reading Chinese poetry and drinking lukewarm sugarless tea. You look like death eating a soda cracker. (8)

This thinly veiled reference to Beat bohemianism, with their form of cultural imperialism in co-opting jazz culture, Eastern theology, and other manifestation of multicultural exoticism, sutures Clay’s appearance with black emasculation. The adjectives “lukewarm” and “sugarless” conjure associations with the half-hearted liberalism Baraka perceived in the apolitical bohemians of Greenwich Village, and the additional reference to his middle class upbringing in New Jersey—which Lula guesses correctly—fuels Lula’s infantilizing and emasculating tirades against Clay’s bohemian intellectualism and middle class aspirations.

All of this Lula gathers from Clay’s visual appearance, suggesting that her attempts to define Clay’s identity stem from then-contemporary cultural models, which reinforce stereotypical images of black manhood. Noting his shirt and tie, Lula then proceeds to her next prototypical image of black masculinity: the middle class, conformist, “Uncle Tom.”
Emboldened by getting disjointed parts of her stereotyping right, and with Clay’s mention of his friend “Warren Enright”—who Lula gathers by his “hopeless colored name” (15) to be a member of the black bourgeois—Lula proceeds to verbally attack Clay for buying into integration, for patronizing Baudelaire and “white” literature, for wearing “clothes … from a tradition you out to feel oppressed by” (18). Notably, Clay’s character details are closely related to those of Baraka—a Newark-born, black middle class man in self-exile from bohemia, whose birth name—Everett—appears in Lula’s list of stereotypical black middle class names (15). In light of these autobiographical details, Marlon Ross reads Dutchman as Baraka “exorcising his own demons of ‘Beat’ sensitivity” and distancing himself from the passivity that he associated with the “white middle class bohemians and homosexuals of Greenwich Village” (295). But Kumar notes that such a reading, in focusing wholly on the Baraka’s characters’ “need for assertion of ethnic and racial identity” ignores the “complex negotiations with such binary categories as black/white and art/activism” (271). While Black Arts ideology “envisioned a splitting off of ‘Black Art’ from white America and a purification of that public sphere,” as Adam Gussow argues in “‘If Bessie Smite Had Killed Some White People…’” (2006), the evident ambivalence regarding the viability of such binary separation in Baraka’s drama complicate reducing of Dutchman and The Slave to biographical psychoanalysis or racial allegory.

Thinking dialectically allows us to interpret Clay and Lula’s interactions as the workings of racialized conceptual prototypes deployed through (neo)liberal multicultural hegemony. Under this ideological system, despite an outward appearance of “abstract equality,” the continued dominance of “white” Anglo-American political, economic, and cultural power and the nationalistic privileging of normative, “logically white” identities undermine the formation of positive, self-defined black identities and group empowerment. It is thus problematic when
Lula—aping the “progressive” ethos of (neo)liberal multiculturalism—suggests she and Clay can be free of their histories, all the inconvenient realities and deeply embedded racial, gendered, and sexual differences can be left in “the past” without adequately addressing the continuation of systematic oppression (21). Coming from the manipulative, deceptive, Eve-like Lula, this is likely one of the mainstream nationalism’s “lies” it uses to “control the world” (9). The final line of the first act—Lula screaming “GROOVE” (21), an expression of jazz culture indelibly founded in a history of racial oppression—suggests the full extent to which black cultural expression had been co-opted, commodified, and sold to the mainstream as mediums of “knowledge” about black life and experience, hegemonic tokens of “progress” toward racial equality and egalitarian cross-racial solidarity.

This invocation of black music sets the tone for the next act, in which Lula turns to the next most salient information she—and mainstream America in general—possesses about “blackness” and cultural identity: entertainers. Gussow notes Baraka’s politicization of jazz and blues in Dutchman as a means of criticizing liberal America’s “cross-racial connoisseurship” of black cultural expression, using his drama “to dynamite the rails down which the Down Home Blues Express was soaring into the hearts and minds of white America” (228). In “The Problem with White Hipness: Race, Gender, and Cultural Conceptions in Jazz Historical Discourse” (1995), musicologist Ingrid Monson looks to Baraka’s Blues People (1964) as a source of Baraka’s—and the vast majority of black jazz musicians and intellectuals—resentment toward whites’ cultural imperialism of black “hipness” and epistemological (mis)understanding of black life and experience:

The hipness Baraka speaks of is an attitude or stance marked through modes of symbolic display associated initially with bebop: beret, goatee, "ridiculously draped suits in the
manner of the zoot suit," horn-rimmed glasses, heroin addiction, bop talk, and, of course, the music itself. The attitude of the bebop musician as "anti-assimilationist" social critic became embodied in and visualized through various sonic, visual, linguistic, and ideological markers. (397-8)

In the play, the dominance of musical reference—and the ignorance of white cultural imposition of meaning on black cultural representation—draws our attention to a salient, prescient, and postmodern feature of Baraka’s critique of (neo)liberal multiculturalism: that the “culture market” strips radical black art and expression of its revolutionary potential, sterilizes it for mass consumption, and fixes its meaning through (predominantly white) capitalist class powers that control mass-mediated representation. But Clay lacks any other language with which to communicate with Lula and thus yields what Walton Muyumba in The Shadow and the Act: Black Intellectual Practice, Jazz Improvisation, and Philosophical Pragmatism (2009) describes as Clay navigating “the tensions between one’s subjective / intersubjective acceptance by the white world, and one’s subjective phenomological awareness of one’s role-playing” (16-7). After some racially and sexually charged sparring during which Lula labels the middle class intellectual Clay an “escaped nigger” (29), he responds defensively, exasperatedly, by stating “that’s how the blues was born” (31). From here, Lula links this reference to jazz culture to the primitivism and sexual liberation white liberals often equated with black experience and cultural expression, as evinced by Mailer’s discussion in “The White Negro” and Baraka’s experience among the Beats. This leads Lula back to her initial stereotype of Clay as an embodiment of virile, black masculine sexuality, completing a cycle in which multicultural American nationalism, like the “Flying Dutchman” myth alluded to in the play’s title, seeks to reconstruct and renew a palatable black identity to fit the hegemonic, normative model.
While the psychoanalytic and racial allegorical readings of *Dutchman* suggest that the play’s conclusion, with Clay’s violent outburst toward Lula and claiming of self-definition and self-determination, reflects Baraka’s turn toward black radicalism, but Kumar’s illuminating reading of the play suggests that Clay’s closing tirade, which is dominated more by correctives to Lula’s understanding of black identity than clear assertions of authentic black selfhood, should be read as a commentary on liberal multicultural (mis)representation rather than an idealization of black hypermasculinity:

Clay: Well, don’t! Don’t you tell me anything! If I’m a middle class fake white man … let me be. And let me be in the way I want.

*Through his teeth*

I’ll rip your lousy breasts off! Let me be who I feel like being. Uncle Tom. Thomas. Whoever. It’s none of your business. You don’t know anything except what’s there for you to see. An act. Lies. Device. Not the pure heart, the pumping black heart. You don’t ever know that. And I sit here, in this buttoned up suit, to keep myself from cutting all your throats.

[…]

All the hip white boys scream for Bird. And Bird saying, “Up your ass, feeble-minded ofay! Up your ass! and they sit there talking about the tortured genius of Charlie Parker. Bird would’ve played not a note if he just walked up to East Sixty-seventh Street and killed the first ten white people he saw. Not a note! And I’m the great would-be poet. Yes. That’s right! Poet. Some kind of bastard literature … all it needs is a simple knife thrust. Just let me bleed you, you loud whore, and one poem vanished. (34-5)
Foremost, there is no direct evidence that Clay resents his identity as “a middle class fake white man,” or an “Uncle Tom,” the famous white-defined representation of impotent black masculinity. The repetition of “Thomas,” with a minor yet significant alteration in the “conformist black” character, signifies Clay’s desire for self-definition and establishing a positive sense of self. With this facile act of self-definition, Clay becomes emboldened, frantically and increasingly incoherently attempting to communicate the realities of “the pure heart, the pumping black heart” which accounts for the individual nuances of black life as well as the broader, systemic traumas of black identity under (neo)liberal multiculturalism. As Kumar notes, the “essentialist view of blackness that lies beyond the representational realm is shown ultimately to be self-defeating and self-destructive, since it presumes an impossibility of communication,” providing insights into Baraka’s philosophical ambivalence regarding black radicalism’s essentialism and identity politics as a viable means of establishing group solidarity and fluid, positive, self-defined black identities (273). While many critics have viewed Clay’s polemic outburst as Baraka’s approved or recommended reaction to systematic identity trauma, I agree with Matthew Rebhorn’s contention in “Flaying Dutchman: Masochism, Minstrelry, and the Gender Politics of Amiri Baraka’s Dutchman” (2003) that:

[I]f Clay’s violence in Dutchman becomes the occasion for his linguistic assertion of black virility, the rest of the play discloses an amazing anxiety about the integrity of this black masculinity, an anxiety that problematizes any reading of this play as a realization of Baraka’s political and cultural ideology. (802)

Baraka’s masculine protagonists in Dutchman and The Slave exemplify this anxiety, as each fails to locate positive, stable, self-defined identities in the traumatic social environment of
(neo)liberal multiculturalism as well as the militant black separatist sects which have come to represent the totality of black radicalism in the popular imagination.

_The Slave_, which Watts suggests is Baraka’s “most racially militant play” designed for “dramatic shock therapy” for white audiences (78-83), has been widely panned and reduced to racial allegory, an interpretive lens that distracts from the play’s meditations on black anxieties over the viability of (neo)liberal multicultural integration and militant black separatism as means of establishing stable black identities. The conventional reading, as rehearsed by Street, interprets Walker Vessels’ perpetual enslavement “not because of his racial essentialism but because he has failed to overcome his attraction with the white world” (67). Yet I argue the opposite; that racial essentialism maintains Walker’s psychological slavery as he absorbs the anti-intellectual ethos of black hypermasculinity and its acceptance of patriarchal capitalism and the traditional white-black binary. While _Dutchman_ largely explores the cultural stereotypes and conceptual prototypes of the white liberal world, _The Slave_ interrogates those conceptual prototypes existing in the mind of the revolutionary black male, prototypes for white liberal emasculation juxtaposed with an “authentic” black masculinity. Throughout the course of this short play, it becomes evident that Walker, the leader of a separatist, black revolutionary army located in a potentially apocalyptic, dystopic American “future,” has serious doubts about the viability of black separatist radicalism and the essentialized, hypermasculine _ethos_ many of its proponents championed as an ideal means of reclaiming black dignity and providing more just social arrangements.

Like _Dutchman_, there are significant autobiographical elements of this play, such as the parallel marriages and offspring (two daughters) of Baraka / Hettie Cohen and Walker Vessels / Grace Easley, as well as the formative presence of white liberalism on the intellectual and
ideological development of Baraka and Walker, as embodied by Allen Ginsberg and Brad Easley, respectively. Strangely and tellingly, Easley, for large measure, is seen as the voice of reason, challenging the logic behind Walker’s alleged war to promote more just social arrangements, the end game of which he later admits to be only “to change … the complexion of tyranny” (66):

Easley: You’re so wrong about everything. So terribly, sickeningly wrong. What can you change? What do you hope to change? Do you think Negroes are better people than whites … that they can govern a society *better* than whites? … I mean really, if the Western white man has proved one thing … it’s the futility of modern society. So the have-nots become the haves. Even so, will that change the essential functions of the world? Will there be more love or beauty in the world … more knowledge … because of it? (73)

Here we find evidence of deep ambivalence, telling of the tragic ramifications of fundamentally unjust social relations and identity politics of (neo)liberal multiculturalism and the adoption of such principles by black radicals. Sandra Shannon corroborates this point in "Evolution or Revolution in Black Theater: A Look at the Cultural Nationalist Agenda in Select Plays by Amiri Baraka" (2003):

It is obvious that he [Walker Vessels] searches for the proper motive to justify the use of guns, fists, and explosives. While he flaunts the various agents of death and physical abuse before viewers, his sheer ambivalence neutralizes their effectiveness and instead presents the picture of Walker Vessels as a schizophrenic "rebel without a cause." (290)
Walker’s violent, reactionary response to Easley’s aforementioned challenge suggests that the new black capitalistic patriarchy will operate by the same hierarchal, essentializing, and brutally hypermasculine Social Darwinism.

Self-consciously, Walker rationalizes his militant separatism because when “‘the Western ofay’ was dominant, he was unconcerned with justice, beauty, and happiness unless it was his own” (73); therefore, Walker’s admission and apparent inner-conflict over the viability of separatist black nationalism as a mean of providing more just social arrangements reveals an auto-critique of both black revolutionary ideologies’ rhetorical posturing and the incongruity of their plan to enact meaningful social improvement for the black polity, not to mention the failure of the mainstream nationalist discourse to recognize the psycho-social legacies of racism. Insightfully, Henry Louis Gates Jr. reads Walker’s advocacy of militant black nationalism as marked by desperate and half-hearted resignation to a lesser of two evils:

The only thing Walker is certain of is that the white liberal is the major obstacle to his goal. In other words, he is not convinced of the undeniable rightness of his own ideas as he is of the undeniable wrongness of his adversary’s. (93)

Walker, like Baraka, adopted black revolutionary ideology in desperate resignation that white liberalism, with its implications for unstable, traumatizing, and externally defined black identities and ignorance to the deeper implications of American racism, was incompatible with black liberation. Given Baraka’s and Walker’s formative experience with “white” intellectual history, they each seem unwilling to cede “intellectuality” to an essentialized notion of “whiteness” and accept hypermasculine primitivism and “anti-intellectualism” as the idealized essence of black masculinity. Regardless of his later rhetorical, essentializing equations of liberated black identity with hypermasculine machismo opposed to emasculated, weak, and homosexual white liberal
intellectualism (i.e. Easley and his “queer academic friends”), Baraka, like Walker, must have felt alienated among the “ignorant motherfuckers who have never read any book in their lives,” the individuals for whom the rejection of whiteness necessitated a relapse into the oppressive white definition of black “savagery” (67). The Slave mourns the fact that the black-white binary has stifled the intellectual and strategic growth of productive black radicalisms. Baraka’s deep anxiety about the role of the black intellectual in recreating a more just social arrangement is revealed in Walker’s admission that he’d “rather argue politics, or literature, or boxing, or anything, with you, Easle” (67) than take part in the destructive hypermasculinity and problematic symbolic conceptions of “blackness” associated with the some strains of militant, essentializing black radicalism.

As the play ends with Walker abandoning what Gates calls “the last day of the liberal-intellectual empire” (95), he transforms into the an old “field slave,” significantly differentiated from the “house slave”—as are the black bourgeois and black proletariat in much black radical rhetoric. The symbolic significance and centrality of this slave character in the play is insightfully discussed in Cindy Gabrielle’s “Re-membering the Clichés: Memory and Stereotypes in Baraka’s The Slave, Fuller’s A Soldier’s Play and Hansberry’s Les Blancs” (2009), in which she identifies the circuitous nature of black symbolic enslavement as a central theme in The Slave. Yet she errs in her interpretation of Walker the field slave as “definitely the spokesman of the entire Black community” and a metaphorical representation of blacks still “mentally colonized by whites” (150-1). Rather, Walker’s opening monologue frames the play as an interrogation of the relationship between the ideological straight jacket of essentialism and the failure to develop positive, self-defined racial, gendered, and sexual identities, a subject of considerable angst in The Slave:
Whatever the core of our lives. Whatever the deceit. We live where we are, and seek nothing but ourselves. We are liars, and we are murders. We invent death for others. Stop their pulses publicly. Stone possible lovers with heavy worlds we think are ideas … and we know, even before these shapes are realized, that these worlds, these depths or heights we fly to smoothly, as in a dream, or slighter, when we stare dumbly into space, leaning our eyes just behind a last quick moving bird, then sometimes the place and twist of what we are will push and sting, and what the crust of our stance has become will ring in our ears and shatter that piece of our eyes that is never closed. (43)

This monologue draws attention to the speaker’s existential struggle for identity and the illusory nature of identities imposed through ideology. “The core of our lives,” however deceitful, refers to the objective social realities of “living where we are,” those circumstances we, as individuals profoundly conditioned by social environments, must navigate in developing that “nothing but ourselves” which is identity and perception of selfhood. That identity and perception of selfhood relies upon opposition to “others,” which makes individuals “liars” and “murderers” willing to “stone possible lovers with heavy world we think are ideas” in order to support their own positive sense of self—in other words, those epistemological hierarchies and essentialisms upon which identity is formed. Regardless the hierarchy and brand of essentialism, be it the hegemonic, “logically white” liberalism or militant black nationalism, “what the crust of our stance becomes”—what our commitment to destructive psycho-social ideologies yields—is a self-blinding reminiscent of Oedipus Rex.

If we accept this as an admission of Walker’s ideological self-delusion, we begin to interpret his actions much differently, complicating the conventional psychoanalytic and racial allegorical reading. The opening monologue continues:
An ignorance. A stupidity. A stupid longing not to know … which is automatically fulfilled. Automatically triumphs. Automatically makes us killers or foot-dragging at the core of any filth. And it is a deadly filth that passes as whatever thing we feel is too righteous to question, to deeply felt to deny. (43-4)

This continues the critique of black radical essentialism, which in its hypermasculine rhetoric has posited as “too righteous to question, to deeply felt to deny” the anti-white polemic and troubling identity politics common in much black radical rhetoric. Similarly, this divisive rhetoric has impeded realization of intragroup solidarity as well as intergroup cooperation from legitimate allies as a result of its rhetorical misogyny, homophobia, class-polemics, and essentializing identity politics. Admitting that the dystopic race war in which *The Slave* set is a war against “three hundred years of oppression; not against individuals” (72), Walker draws attention to the inherent injustices stemming from essentialism and the reduction of questions of social justice to a black-white, proletarian-bourgeois binary. *Dutchman* and *The Slave* investigate the unstable geo-historical environments for positive black identities under the hegemonic neoliberal multiculturalism and the more problematic and essentialist strains of black radicalism, and each play arrives at a similar conclusion: that true racial justice—if such a thing is possible in the United States—requires a rigorous analysis of the racial, gendered, sexual, and classed dynamics of oppression that undermines our narrative of an egalitarian democracy.

In “Toward Black Liberation,” Stokely Carmichael—among the most influential black radical intellectual, critics, and theorists of the period—wrote of the inability of post-Civil Rights America to comprehend the deeper foundations of racial prejudice, located not only in the social, economic, and psychological realities of oppression, but also within the multicultural discourse and narrative emplotment of victimized blacks in need of “rescuing” from benevolent liberal
whites. This limitation, he writes, “is an inevitable consequence of the dictatorship of definition, interpretation, and consciousness, along with the censorship of history that the [American] society has inflicted upon the Negro—and itself” (119). Whatever the progress narrative attached to the multicultural “official antiracism,” Carmichael reminds us, “[i]t is white power that makes the law, and it is violent white power, in the form of armed white cops, that enforces those laws with guns and nightsticks” (124). The granting of federally recognized Civil Rights and selective inclusions into various areas of middle class, corporate life in fact did very little to improve the lives of the majority of black Americans, and hegemonic, epistemological meanings associated with the 1960s, the Civil Rights movement, and black radicalism have fomented ignorance regarding the structural remnants of white supremacy. As Jodi Melamed notes in Represent and Destroy (2011), literature by “others” can influence this situation in one of two ways. It can be subsumed by the neoliberal multicultural hegemony, reinforcing neoliberal “progress” narratives and ontologies and thereby solidify inadequate schemas and cognitive processes by allowing readers to “misrecognize literature as accomplished social and political transformation” and thus “marginalize antiracist materialisms” (108); or it can be used to urge readers to critically engage with the remnants of white supremacy and racial, gendered, sexual, and class-based oppression existing under neoliberal multicultural nationalism. This calls for critical scholarship explicating the relationship between identity, ideology, and literary readership as we develop a theory of narrative empathy and a legitimate antiracism to combat twenty-first century systems of inequality.
Chapter Four

“The Price of Hating Others is Loving Oneself Less”: Reclaiming Eldridge Cleaver’s Soul on Ice for Social Justice Pedagogy

The failure of 1960s and 1970s black radicalism to advance critical antiracisms drawing attention to the complex psycho-social dynamics of oppression under neoliberal multicultural hegemony is reflected in perpetual racially and gender-coded systems of domestic and global poverty and traumatized identities. However much “post-racial” ideologues eschew the biological determinism that once posited “race” as a “natural” determinant of one’s life outcomes, “race” remains a sociological fact in America and the “global marketplace,” profoundly shaping the social environments and experiences of countless impoverished “others” unrecognized under hegemonic narratives of normative identity. Domestically, institutionalized racism is most visible within legal institutions, which disproportionately prosecute and imprison impoverished blacks and other minorities and thus reinforce negative cultural stereotypes and conceptual prototypes leading to racist attitudes, traumatic social labels, and out-group dehumanization. More directly, as Ryan Scott King notes in “Jim Crow is Alive and Well…” (2007), institutionalized racism via the legal system has been, and continues to be, a means of depriving blacks and other minorities of voting rights and thus political representation for often arbitrary legal offenses (256-7). Of course, as legal and Critical Race Theory (CRT) scholar Derrick Bell writes in “Fear of Black Crime is a Political Tool” (2005), “fear of black crime is … not based entirely on myth. … Black crime is real. No less real is the poverty and hopelessness that underlie so much violent crime” (353). Thus, effective social criticism and public policy must address underlying causes of toxic behaviors, which in turn must grapple with the
relationship between the discursive construction of nationalistic in-group and out-group identities and the unequal distributions of political, economic, and cultural power.

Hardly breaking news, the clear correlation between racialized and gendered systems of impoverishment and toxic behavior has not prompted American policy makers to embrace proactive measures to address the problems plaguing a disproportionately non-white out-group. Rather, as Melamed suggests in *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism* (2011), these forms of “legitimate violence have been increasingly exercised through norms that impose legibility and illegibility and attach punishments to transgressions of norms,” thus allowing “normalizing violences of political and economic modernity to advance and expand” (5). These normalizing, obliquely racialized appeals to “law and order” and the escalation of “The War on Drugs” and “The War on Crime” have set the conceptual parameters and logics guiding such policies and have served to further advance the criminal justice and prison-industrial complexes as a means of disenfranchising, marginalizing, economically exploiting, and casting as “other” individuals whose material circumstances leave few alternatives to legally “transgressive” behavior—however arbitrarily enforced. The exclusion of such subjectivities from neoliberal multicultural nationalism has prevented widespread awareness among members of the in-group regarding the complex systems of economic exploitation and the mechanisms whereby hegemonic discourse impedes more proactive comprehensive of cognitive processes and social policies.

Needed is a complete “reframing” of neoliberal multicultural public discourse—a critical examination of the how discourse and its proscriptive normative identities set counter-productive conceptual parameters for addressing and understanding racial inequality. Needed are counterstories, which CR theorist Richard Delgado asserts in “On Telling Stories in School”
(2009) provides a foundation for effective teaching about racial difference and the cognitive implications of narrative in our epistemological understanding of reality (340-1). This chapter will focus on utilizing Eldridge Cleaver’s *Soul on Ice* (1968) as a literary counterstory representing perhaps the most marginalized demographic in modern American society: the impoverished, urban, undereducated black male. Though certainly containing some troubling elements to contemporary sensibilities, Cleaver’s collection of prison essays provides a rich, though highly understudied view into the situational determinants on toxic behavior—persistent racially-coded social inequalities, an arbitrary and ineffective criminal justice system, and a lack of positive, socially-recognized identities—which continue to shape the experience of countless individuals under “post-racial” neoliberal multiculturalism.

Up to this chapter, I have focused primarily on the historical, ideological, theoretical and textual precepts for utilizing 1960s and 1970s black radical literatures to promote greater consciousness of racial oppression and those social institutions through which it is perpetuated. In the present chapter I will provide a more rigorous analysis of pedagogical implementations of *critical multiculturalism*, a method of radical pedagogy aimed at promoting stable, positive, and reflective cultural identities through an active awareness of the psycho-social implications of racial difference in “post-racial” America and the globalized world.¹ This chapter begins with a close analysis of select essays from Cleaver’s *Soul on Ice*, which explore the dynamic interplay of institutional racism and psycho-social trauma that led him and countless other black men and women to lives of poverty, despair, crime, and the U.S. Correction System. I will then draw upon principles from CRT and other theoretical schools of radical pedagogy and critical multiculturalism as a means of making conscious unconscious prejudices and addressing what Joyce E. King terms a persistent “dysconscious racism,” which is not necessarily an “absence of
consciousness, but an *impaired* consciousness or distorted way of thinking about race” (128, emphasis in original). Unconscious racism—schema-based attitudes and underlying prejudices—and dysconscious racism—which creates a warped (mis)understanding of the complex systems of racial oppression in the modern world—are the product of those obliquely racialized discourses existing under neoliberal multicultural hegemony, and remain common among white Americans—not to mention black and other ethnic Americans socialized in existing institutions. Consistent with cognitive research on narrative cognition, Delgado and other CR theorists emphasize the importance “others’” counterstories “to reveal the contingency, partiality, and self-serving quality of the stories on which we have been relying to order our world” (340, emphasis in original).² CRT utilizes counterstories as a means of exposing the mechanisms of racism in legal, educational, and other institutions through which systematic white privilege is maintained, and 1960s and 1970s black radicalisms’ counterstories can serve to demonstrate how neoliberal multicultural hegemonic narratives demarcate impoverished black Americans as a *de facto* underclass. Drawing upon this methodology, which demands fundamentally altering the discourse surrounding liberal multicultural pedagogy, scholars in the humanities can facilitate critical engagement with the complexities of racial difference and thus promote more adequate cognitive schemas and conceptual systems on an individual level—and ultimately facilitate “trickle-up” social change.

**Eldridge Cleaver, Counter-Narrative Weaver**

As previously noted, Cleaver is especially valuable for a critical multicultural pedagogy because he introduces a subjectivity often ignored (or misrepresented) in literary narrative conversation: the urban, impoverished, undereducated black male. As such, Cleaver’s *Soul on Ice* provides powerful counternarratives to neoliberal multicultural discourses, which fuel faulty
schemas emplotting criminals as inherently “bad people” who lack discipline and must be punished, rather than traumatized, unstable individuals who need social rehabilitation, support for positive, self-defined, socially-recognized identities, and ultimately less traumatic formative environments. Furthermore, as Mark Bracher writes in *Social Symptoms of Identity Needs* (2009), these schemas ignore the social factors that contribute to criminal behavior, such as poverty and institutionalized racism and sexism, causing “law-abiding citizens” to juxtapose themselves to an inherently “flawed” subaltern “other” as a means of supporting, or perhaps constructing, their own benevolent sense of identity.³ Such is the case in the common framing of the criminal justice system as a means of “punishment” or “deterrence” for inherently “bad people” (in opposition to us “good people”) rather than “rehabilitation” for people on early tracks of criminal delinquency, which due to labeling and social stigmatization are often give few alternatives to repeated destructive behaviors and further entrenchment in toxic identity contents. *Soul on Ice* presents a highly insightful commentary on (1) the socio-historical contingencies of Cold War “official antiracism” and the systematic impoverishment of black Americans under its visage; (2) the complex systems of psycho-social oppression perpetuated by the hegemonic nationalism’s “logically white” normative identities; and (3) how each of these processes rationalize “legitimate violence” and contribute to ineffective and objectively discriminatory legal and social policies. Each of these commentaries, mediated through a theoretically sound critical multicultural pedagogy, can provide correctives for inadequate schemas and identity-based impediments to narrative empathy, a necessity for effective teaching about racial difference under “post-racial” neoliberal multicultural hegemony.

Leroy Eldridge Cleaver was born in Arkansas on 31 August 1935 to working class parents and a physically abusive father. After moving repeatedly, the Cleavers settled in Los Angeles,
where Eldridge initiated his criminal record for bike theft at age twelve. Spending three years in penal institutions before being committed to adult prison, Cleaver’s formative background of youth delinquency represents a common pattern of racial inequality and youthful tracking toward ineffective corrections institutions. *Soul on Ice* places Cleaver into the genre of prison literature, which has been fundamental in the American literary canon beginning with the slave narratives that comprise the earliest black American literature. As prison literature critic H. Bruce Franklin writes in *Prison Literature in the United States: The Victim as Criminal as Artist* (1989), slave narratives and early black prisoner literature contested the moral applicability of legal justice for a people denied political, economic, and cultural self-determination, especially as their labor provided the foundations for American capitalism (248). Similarly, Martin Luther King Jr’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” further interrogates the democratic viability of social justice for black Americans. But *Soul on Ice* fits much differently into this tradition, as Doran Larson argues in “Toward a Prison Poetics” (2010), because the essays therein “do not assume the dissociative voice of social justice, but seek to establish Cleaver—through self-analysis—within a social discourse on justice” (154, emphasis added). In speaking for a subjectivity widely neglected in literary and cultural analysis, *Soul on Ice* “testifies to the history of American racism’s demand that black men in America exchange humanity for peace, and dignity for freedom, and that finally seeks inter-racial respect: a book that presumes to speak for and in the voice of the black man in America” whose account of his individual identity traumas—in a white-dominated society and in correctional institutions—provide greater analytic insight into psycho-social oppression under (neo)liberal multicultural hegemony (155, emphasis in original).

The autobiographical essays comprising *Soul on Ice* are divided into four sections. “Part One: Letters from Prison” deals most directly with Cleaver’s life and experiences in California
prisons, which will be particularly useful in our discussion of marginalized black masculine subjectivities. “Part Two: Blood of the Beast” deconstructs the post-World War II shift to “official antiracism” and the pressing implications of racial inequality deeply rooted in, and perhaps indivisible from, the history of American capitalism. “Part Three: Prelude to Love” consists of a number of letters between Cleaver and Beverly Axelrod, his white liberal lawyer who helped renew his faith in interracial cooperation for social justice. And finally, “Part Four: White Woman, Black Man” confronts the historical and cultural dynamics of interracial desire, bearing implications for sexual psychology as well as the systematic degeneration of the psychosocial bonds of the black family throughout U.S. history; it would thus serve as an insightful foil for the many works of women of color feminists who interrogate similar racial and sexual dynamics. Given *Soul on Ice’s* thematic breadth and depth, I will focus primarily upon Cleaver’s explication of the transformational racial identity politics arising under post-World War II “official antiracisms,” as well as his individual counterstories, which complicate cognitive schemas and conceptual systems uncritically emplotting black criminals as inherently flawed individuals and thus perpetuating both unconscious and dysconscious racism.

A central understanding to be gained from *Soul on Ice* is that inequitable social institutions—such as persistent housing segregation and gentrification; widespread, but widely ignored racially-coded urban poverty; racial profiling in the criminal justice system; negative and / or externally mediated cultural representations black experience; ineffective social welfare programs and policies facilitating racial equality; and inequitable and ineffective systems of public education, healthcare, and other social services—have profound effects on social power dynamics, which in turn influence formative environments, toxic identity contents, and often yield destructive social behaviors. Patricia Falk espouses this perspective in discussing the legal
controversy over the role of situational factors in the “mental functioning” governing criminal behavior, suggesting that the criminal justice system, if it truly seeks social justice, must account for the influence of social constraints on human accountability for their behaviors and life outcomes (735). Similarly, as Mark Bracher writes in *Social Symptoms of Identity Needs* (2009),

> [I]ndividuals whose identities are not adequately recognized by the dominant social order are more likely to participate in both social movements and socially deviant behaviors, such as various forms of delinquency. Both … offer an alternative environment in which one’s identity finds greater support in the form of social recognition, new opportunities for identity enactment, and greater experience of self-efficacy. (45)

Yet under “post-racial” neoliberal multiculturalism, with its turn toward privatization and away from social investment in perpetually oppressed groups, the prevailing business ontology and free market logics, narratives, frames, and metaphors obscure the root causes of toxic behaviors, fueling deterministic schemas, capitalistic Social Darwinism, and rampant hyperindividualism, which in turn engender public support for retrogressive public policies—such as the “wars” on crime, poverty, and drugs which Victor Rios demonstrates directly contributed to the mass criminalization of black youth and the swell in prison construction beginning in the 1980s. With the neoliberal business ontology providing the conceptual logics for comprehending all areas of social life, and with the nationalistic in-group identity centered around economically-oriented practical identity contents, the perception of equal—or at least reasonable—opportunity must be maintained, fallaciously blinding people to more comprehensive and adequate understandings of human experience outside of one’s own. In the context of the present discussion, I will show how a traditional literary explication of select portions of *Soul on Ice*, delivered with a well conceived pedagogy based on literary, cognitive, and pedagogical theory, can provide means whereby
students gain more comprehensive understandings of the complex dynamics of social power which influence the psycho-social reality of their own and various “others’” identities.

*Soul on Ice* begins with a deeply insightful, yet sorely under studied essay entitled “On Becoming,” the title of which highlights Cleaver’s existential examination of his development and the circumstances which led him through his traumatic, alienated youth to increasingly destructive transgressive behavior. As Kathleen Rout observes in *Eldridge Cleaver* (1991), the most recent book-length study of Cleaver’s work, he began his criminal career at age twelve for bicycle theft; he would spend periods of his adolescence in reform schools, until eventually being arrested at age eighteen for marijuana possession, beginning his “nearly unbroken stretch from 1954 and 1966 in adult prisons” (4-6). While the bulk of his formally autobiographical narrative occurs in his later work *Soul on Fire* and his unfinished *Autobiography*, “On Becoming” “sets the tone,” or perhaps “establishes the frame,” through which the reader should approach the text, observing that Cleaver and countless other minorities are “tracked” throughout life into toxic identities and self-fulfilling prophecies of adult delinquency, as Victor Rios argues in “The Hypercriminalization of Black and Latino Youth in the Era of Mass Incarceration” (2007). Beginning with turning points in American and his own history—the legal end of segregation in 1954 and his first adult imprisonment a month later—indicate that his life prior to imprisonment had been profoundly influenced by an overtly racist, white supremacist society and its mechanisms of racial oppression. Yet reflecting on perhaps this first major turn toward racial liberalism as a nationalistic ideology, Cleaver indicates the lack of legitimate moral conviction in lawmakers “temporizing over right and wrong, over legality and illegality, over constitutionality and unconstitutionality” when in reality “what they were clashing over was us, what to do with the blacks, and whether or not to start treating us as human beings” (22). As an
impoverished black man, the legal “end” of segregation, so often uncritically posited as a progressive, transformational moral victory, did little to address the systems of power which led to his life in poverty and the formative environments so conducive to destructive behavior. Furthermore, Cleaver elucidates the deeper injustice in a system where moral and legal transgressions of white segregationists go unpunished while young black men are imprisoned and further traumatized for arbitrary, non-violent offenses, which often lead to more destructive social behaviors (22).

In reading *Soul on Ice*, we must keep in mind these psycho-social meditations on the viability of racial justice, as well as Cleaver’s past tense narration and admitted familiarity “with the Eldridge who came to prison, but that Eldridge no longer exists” (16). In transcending that identity, Cleaver is in fact “becoming subject” through emotional self-reflection. In “Silent Rage and the Politics of Resistance: Countering Seductions of Whiteness and the Road to Politicization and Empowerment” (2011), an insightful examination of subaltern rage as a positive emotional basis for establishing positive identities, Dalia Rodriquez explains how redefining self is only part of the process of becoming subject. The other critical part of becoming subject is becoming critically conscious of how social structures reproduce inequality. Becoming subject emerges as one comes to understand how structures of domination work in one’s own life, as one develops critical thinking and critical consciousness, as one invents new, alternative habits of being, and resists from that marginal space of difference inwardly defined. (590)

Read in this light, the anger, volatility, misogyny, violence, and other problematic elements that much critical scholarship has focused upon in *Soul on Ice* becomes an emotionally charged redefinition of self necessarily accompanied by a critical awareness of the various “structures of
domination” that have lead to his and countless others’ life patterns of poverty, petty transgressions, prison trauma, and ultimately more violent and destructive crimes.

Like each work under review, part of these “structures of domination” Cleaver examines in *Soul on Ice* involves the social dynamics of racial-sexual identity. “On Becoming” centers on an episode in which a white guard destroys a picture of a white “pin-up” girl, after which Cleaver begins to grapple with the sexual implications of socialization into a white standard of beauty, which develops into deeper meditations on the psycho-social implications of normative white identities as the nationalistic ideal (26-8). Such meditations, which are further developed in Cleaver’s most commonly anthologized essay “The Primeval Mitosis,” generally offend liberal sensibilities in their perceived racial and gendered essentialism, yet for Cleaver, we cannot read this in a vacuum. Women of color feminism has also grappled with the psycho-sexual dynamics of interracial desire, and such methods of inquiry can gain important insights from Cleaver’s masculine perspective. As such, it is troubling that liberal scholars like Rout seem to take the toxic misogyny, violence, and racial hatred which Cleaver is here seeking to eradicate from himself as virtues he endorses, revealing the incoherence of her scathing, overly reactionary critique. In addition to illuminating the formative situational factors on black men in a persistently oppressive, white supremacist American society, Cleaver also provides a vivid examination of the line of thinking that produces and rationalizes toxic behaviors, notably his misogyny and rape of multiple women. Because it is an important passage, and because critical attention has tended to cite only select sections, I will here reproduce a substantive section of the text to illustrate the psychological complexity of “On Becoming”:

I became a rapist. To refine my technique and *modus operandi*, I started out by practicing on black girls in the ghetto—in the black ghetto where dark and vicious deeds
appear not as aberrations or deviations from the norm, but as part of the sufficiency of the Evil of a day—and when I considered myself smooth enough, I crossed the tracks and sought out white prey. I did this consciously, deliberately, willfully, methodically—though looking back I see that I was in a frantic, wild and completely abandoned state of mind.

Rape was an insurrectionary act. It delighted me that I was defying and trampling upon the white man’s law, upon his system of values, and that I was defiling his women—and this point, I believe, was the most satisfying to me because I was very resentful over the historical fact of how the white man has used the black woman. I felt I was getting revenge. From the site of the act of rape, consternation spreads outwardly in concentric circles. I wanted to send waves of consternation throughout the white race.

Read at face value—and out of context—this passage presents the irrational hatred, the “frantic, wild, and completely abandoned state of mind” that led Cleaver to his rape of an unstated number of black women before he “crossed the tracks and sought out white prey.” The reference to the psychological masculine rage associated with slave rape—another instance in which whites have been immune to their own legal and moral codes—is presented as his rationale, yet clearly this does not legitimate his actions.

Cleaver’s awareness of the inhumanity of his actions is apparent in paragraph following the aforementioned passage, in which he self-critically examines how the psycho-social traumas of his own black experience led him to commit terrible injustices:

After I returned to prison, I took a long look at myself and, for the first time in my life, admitted that I was wrong, that I had gone astray—astray not so much from the
white man’s law as from being human, civilized, for I could not approve the act of rape. Even though I had some insight into my own motivations, I did not feel justified. I lost my self-respect. My pride as a man dissolved and my whole fragile moral structure seemed to collapse, completely shattered.

That is why I started to write. To save myself. (33-4)

In this segment, Cleaver not only admits to the inhumanity of his behavior, but also meditates upon a deeper level of morality, beyond “the white man’s law”—which we have seen is anything but colorblind. While Cleaver clearly has no intention to rationalize his behavior, he is also critically aware of the social realities and traumatic psychological environments that have marked black Americans as an historical and contemporary underclass, which he discusses at length in the following essay. “On Becoming” illuminates the embattled terrain of his own black masculine identity and that of many working class and impoverished black Americans. Revealingly, we see that the root cause of rape is not sexual satisfaction, but rather a desire for power, often perpetuated by individuals systematically deprived of power and benign identity contents. And while Rout is perhaps justified in criticizing Cleaver for thrusting complete accountability for his actions on white society, to ignore the validity of deeper meditations on the psycho-social determinants on his criminal behavior seems counterintuitive (19).

Given that Cleaver here offers perhaps the most penitential moment in the collection of essays, it seems strange that Rout would conclude that Cleaver “hates all women.” Her analysis of the reproduced segment of “On Becoming” reads:

[A]lthough Cleaver says that he resented white males for their historical abuse of black women, he himself raped an uncounted number of black women as “practice” for his
official assault on white society in the form of interracial rape. He was proud to have “defiled” white women, but he fails to place his molestations of black females in any such objectionable category. Actually, his indifference to black women is just as chilling as his hatred for white women. (15)

Here, Rout seems to ignore the fact that Cleaver is clearly not advocating the act of rape, nor does he suggest Amiri Baraka does so in his cited section of “Black Dada Nihilismus,” a poem from *The Dead Lecturer* (1964); rather, in examining the psychological implications of interracial rape and sexual violence they are “expressing the funky facts of life,” objective social realities resulting from psycho-social trauma (*Soul on Ice* 15). As such, we should not read this as a position of advocacy, but rather a meditation on a sociological fact that continues today, an observable social phenomenon in need of critical engagement, not squeamish avoidance. A literary example of this phenomenon is seen in Richard Wright’s *Native Son* (1940)—a potential companion text for *Soul on Ice*—when the body of Bessie, Bigger’s black female victim, is considered little more than evidence by the authorities; he is not on trial for her murder and rape, but for the murder and (alleged) rape of Mary Dalton, a wealthy white girl.

Objective realities such as these support Cleaver’s assertion that his rape of white women was considered “official” in a legal sense, reflecting not his advocacy of black female degradation but rather addressing a relevant concern about complex, deeply structured racial-sexual dynamics in American society. Further, although Cleaver refers to the symbolic, metaphorical significance of white feminine sexuality as “The Ogre” his unremarkable, confrontational poem “To a White Woman,” Rout ignores the fact that he grounds his discussion in the context of the symbolic threat of white women to black men in his sickening, lustful reaction to the picture of the white woman at whom Emmitt Till (allegedly) allegedly whistled
and was thus brutally murdered. (29-30). She also ignores Cleaver’s instructive discussion of the indoctrination of black people into the white standards of beauty (a persistent social phenomenon; Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* is a relevant text to illustrate this phenomenon, as is Chris Rock’s 2009 documentary *Good Hair*), as well as the personal shame he feels for his perceived injustice toward black women. And though he eventually professes love for his white lawyer Beverly Axelrod, this need not signal Cleaver’s rejection of black femininity; rather, we may read this in terms of Patrick Colm Hogan’s “romantic nationalist narrative,” in which the separation and/or union of lovers reflects sub-national division and often ends in symbolic reunification, in this case signaling his desire to transcend the racism and sexism that had caused many black revolutionaries to embrace misogynistic patriarchy and reject white liberalism for its colorblind, pluralistic narratives and willful ignorance to the remnants of racial oppression (*Understanding Nationalism*, 307).

As such, I do not interpret this as a rejection of black femininity so much as a desire to transcend racial essentialism, a theme self-consciously present in all of the black radical texts under analysis. In the title essay “Soul on Ice,” Cleaver describes in great detail how his prototypical “white woman” functions as little more than a selfless symbol or object—a conceptual prototype—which his relationship with Axelrod helped to expose as an inadequate feature of his cognition. Cleaver seems aware of the inadequacy of his essentialism as a reliable way to understand other people, revealing that his later racial-theoretical discussions in “Part Four: White Woman, Black Man,” however unsophisticated, should be interpreting based on postcolonial theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s concept of *strategic essentialism*, the use of essentialism as a means for an oppressed group to strive for group solidarity, critique and resist hegemony, and enact positive changes. Furthermore, to suggest that Cleaver advocated hatred
toward anyone seems unwarranted, given the tone of the essay and Cleaver’s closing realization that “the price of hating other human beings is loving oneself less,” a clear statement meant to expunge his toxic behaviors and mentalities from his present set of essays, which upon closer examination reveal expansive counternarratives to common “criminal-as-inherently-evil” frames as well as neoliberal multicultural discourses that fuel faulty schemas (17).

Later in Soul on Ice, Cleaver provides a more direct critique of the development of official antiracisms in the post-World War II period, as well as a chronology of social movements upsetting ideological white supremacy among black and white youth, particularly in “The White Race and Its Heroes” and “Domestic Law and International Order.” The former discusses the shift in racial orders following World War II, with the Atlantic Charter affirming “the right of all people to choose the form of government under which they may live”—yet it took immense international struggle before “this piece of rhetoric” gained “even the appearance of reality” (91). In the essay, Cleaver identifies the desire of revolutionary youth—of all races—to topple the perpetual systems of white supremacy, embodied in the nationalistic myths of a “schizophrenic nation” whose “two conflicting images of itself”—overt white supremacy and an “officially antiracist” egalitarian democracy—are irreconcilable without critical analysis of hegemonic nationalism and restructuring normative American identities (98):

Even when confronted with overwhelming evidence to the contrary, most white Americans have found it possible, after steadying their rattled nerves, to settle comfortably back into their vaunted belief that America is dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights—life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. With the Constitution as the rudder and the Declaration of Independence as its guiding star, the ship of state is sailing always
toward a brighter vision of freedom and justice for all. … But the moment blacks were let into the white world—let out of the voiceless and faceless cages of their ghettos, singing, walking, talking, dancing, writing and orating their image of America and of Americans—the white world was suddenly challenged to match its practice with its preachments. (100)

As a result of the blatant contradiction between American visions of racial justice and democratic ideals and perpetual racially-coded oppression—not to mention Cold War foreign policy interventions toppling democratically elected socialist governments—white Americans were prompted to “re-evaluate their self-image” and disabuse themselves of the “Master Race psychology developed over centuries of imperial hegemony” (89). Central to this process, however ostensibly “progressive,” lies the privileging of a “logically white” identity, thus transferring what were once racially “black” qualities to “cultural” blackness” and positioning white, liberal, capitalistic practical identity contents as the ideal. In this equation, minorities are “integrated” into the “in group” only in their willingness and capacity to fulfill “logically white” and increasingly economic criteria for normativity.

While “The White Race and its Heroes” largely deals with the symbolic shift of racial orders under post-World War II “official antiracisms,” and most notably challenges the perpetuation of white privilege under its auspices, “Domestic Law and International Order” directly engages the institutional violence imposed by domestic and international white supremacy under (neo)liberal multicultural hegemony. Explicating the relationship between legal institutions and existing power arrangements, Cleaver notes that

[w]hich laws get enforced depends on who is in power. If the capitalists are in power, they enforce laws designed to protect their system, their way of life. … If Communists
are in power, they enforce laws designed to protect their system, their way of life. …

“The people,” however, are nowhere consulted, although everywhere everything is done in their name and ostensibly for their betterment, while their real-life problems go unsolved. (156)

Given the shift in racial orders, which objectively improved the economic prosperity of the black bourgeois and middle class, the political, economic, and cultural exploitation and impoverishment of the majority of black Americans could be rationalized only if they were painted as a legally transgressive subclass, misrepresenting a problem of poverty and racially-coded oppression as one of “cultural others” threatening “law and order,” general safety of “the [white] people” privileged under existing power structures. In this way, as Tony Platt suggests in “Reconstructing Race and Crime: The Radical Tradition Revisited” (2007), racially-coded appeals to the “logically white” in-group—“law and order,” “The War on Poverty,” and “The War on Drugs”—position the prison-industrial complex as a means of managing racial contradiction in America’s “exceptional” ethos by casting as “other” those victims of institutional racism and inadequate social conditions for racial justice (36-7). Furthermore, the white, capitalist class arrangement of social power—built upon the exploitation of minorities, women, and the working class—changed complexion only in the most marginal ways, largely through corporate multiculturalism and symbolic representation of minorities in visible areas of social life. The white capitalist class continues to possess disproportionate social, political, economic, and cultural power over blacks and other minority groups, an objective social reality either obscured or rationalized—but never adequately addressed—by neoliberal multicultural ideologies and public policies.
As we have seen in chapter one, the contradiction between white-dominated institutions of political, economic, and cultural power and the nationalistic ethos of “post-racial” America is managed through the neoliberal multicultural dogma of “abstract equality” facilitated through “free-market” logics and willfully ignorant readings of Darwinian theory—which conservatives paradoxically condemn for religious reasons yet embrace (fallacious) for socio-economic reasons. Critiquing these notions of “abstract equality,” Cleaver notes that there are Negroes and whites, Indians, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Jews, Chinese, Arabs, Japanese—all with equal rights with unequal possessions. Some are haves and some are have-nots. All have been taught to worship at the shrine of General Motors. The whites are on top in America and they want to stay there, up there. They are also on top in the world, on the international level, and they want to stay up there, too. Everywhere there are those who want to smash this precious toy clock of a system, they want ever so much to change it, to rearrange things, to pull the whites down off their high horse and make them equal. Everywhere the whites are fighting to prolong their status, to retard the erosion of their position. In America, when everything else fails, they call out the police. On the international level, when everything else fails, they call out the armed forces. (158)

In this passage, Cleaver reveals that his term “white” refers to those white capitalists—the “haves”—responsible for the perennial exploitation of minorities, women, and the working class—the “have-nots,” which in Revolutionaries to Race Leaders (2007) Cedric Johnson identifies as a common strategy among black radicals seeking to instill upon blacks a proletarian class consciousness (43). For blacks and other minorities—including many working class whites and revolutionary white youth—the struggle against a system of private property in which white
capitalists already own the means of social power and blacks and other historically marginalized groups possess no legitimate avenue for group empowerment became the defining counter-cultural current during the 1960s and early 1970s, evidently striking against Cold War America’s nationalistic ethos. For those exploited working class whites, coerced to take orders from and ignorantly identify with their capitalist oppressors, indoctrination into the hegemonic nationalistic in-group and its obliquely (or overtly) racialized prejudices further detract attention from current systems of economic exploitation. Under neoliberal multiculturalism “all have been taught to worship at the shrine of General Motors,” leading to uncritical complacence in a system of objectively exploitative and unjust social institutions.

Throughout *Soul on Ice*, Cleaver examines the deeper currents among all oppressed races, communities, and nations challenging a (neo)liberal multicultural hegemony designed to preserve the fruits of centuries of exploitation—a hegemony deployed through nationalistic discourse, normative identity politics, institutional violence, and ultimately martial force. Placing Cleaver and his collection of counternarratives in this context, and attending with greater critical vigor to his intellectual legacy than contemporary scholarship has done, provides a compelling literary reference point for 1960s and 1970s black radicalism and the geo-historical landscape in which it existed. Keeping in mind the psycho-social identity politics and continued systems of political, economic, and cultural oppression under post-World War II official antiracisms—and continuing under “post-racial” neoliberal multiculturalism—I will now provide a brief analysis of theoretical precepts for promoting critical multiculturalism in pedagogical praxis and how such pedagogical mediations of racial difference and literary intersubjective engagement can provide a more comprehensive theoretical basis for the narrative empathy hypothesis.

**Conclusion: Cleaver in the Classroom**
My first encounter with Cleaver’s work was in an undergraduate African-American literature survey course. I was composing a research paper about Amiri Baraka’s early and transitional writings, and asked my professor for a recommended supplemental text for my exploration of black radical thought, at which point he suggested that I read *Soul on Ice*. With the one copy available at the small university library listed as “missing,” I turned to the *Norton Anthology of African-American Literature* assigned for the course and came across “The Primeval Mitosis,” which taken out of context from the other essays in *Soul on Ice* left a troubling impression on my liberal sensibilities in its essentializing discussion of racialized gender roles, which based on the editorial introduction I took as representative of Cleaver’s ideological position. Years later, when I finally read *Soul on Ice* in its entirety, I felt that I had done an injustice to Cleaver, whom I had so viciously slandered in my earlier work. As a result of that editorial’s narrative “framing” of Cleaver, which “begins” with his birth and early criminal activity, “continues” with his self-education and conversion to Islam in prison, his role as Minister of Information in the Black Panther party, his shoot-out with police and concomitant exile, and finally “ending” with his rebirth and conversion to Christianity. With just this background, and knowing from some additional research that Cleaver had raped numerous women and was often criticized for his sexism, homophobia, and reverse-racism, I approached “The Primeval Mitosis” unconsciously predisposed to negative emotional reactions to his work, and with only this essay and scathing commentaries like Rout’s to represent him, Cleaver and his telling critique of “post-racial” politics are bound to attract condemnation from scholars.

For my analysis, this calls attention to a fundamental need for critical reassessment of how the ideological currents of liberal multicultural education serve to further entrench uncritical and potentially counterintuitive attitudes, which Derrick Bell shows to be the primary site for
maintaining white, patriarchal, capitalist supremacy and corresponding systems of racial and gender-coded inequality. At one level, as Jodi Melamed argues in *Represent and Destroy* (2011), “post-racial” liberal multiculturalism and pedagogy often presents race-critical and radical literatures as historically disjuncted corroboration for various “progress” narratives and emplotted signs of “accomplished social and political transformation” (108), thereby socializing “whites to see themselves as good antiracists by virtue of their antiracist feeling and desire for diversity, even as whites continued to accrue unearned benefits from material and social arrangements that favored them” (37). Over two decades ago, bell hooks made the observation in *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist. Thinking Black* (1989) that “racism” no longer adequately expresses the mechanisms of exploitation for blacks and other people of color, as the “official antiracism” in public discourse had effectively located the unpleasant reality of “racism” in individuals, not society as a whole. Rather, hooks writes, we must understand contemporary systems of racial oppression in terms of white supremacy or white privilege, reflected in various social institutions—discriminatory criminal justice systems, vastly unequal social institutions, and a private sector consistently and uncritically controlled by a white elite (112).

The function of critical multiculturalism is to move beyond these traditional framings of racial difference as acts of private individuals unreflective of broader social tendencies and the complex relationships between racial, gendered, sexual, and class-based oppression. Certainly, violent hate crimes still exist between groups with historical and ideological tension—Muslims and Christians, blacks and whites, men and women, heterosexuals and homosexuals, and so on. But much more pervasive are instances of *institutionalized racism*—which we may more clearly reconceptualize as *institutionalized white supremacy* or *institutionalized privilege*—legal and social policies enacted and / or continued under neoliberal multicultural nationalism that ensure
the political, economic, and cultural hegemony of white-dominated capitalism and institutional privileging of “white” identities. The black and white binary no longer suffices to explain racial difference, as working class whites—historically the demographic most likely to possess racist attitudes—are, as Bob Dylan once noted, “just a pawn in their game.” Liberal multiculturalism—at least that brand practiced by intellectuals legitimately working toward social justice—has tended to focus extensively on questions of racial, gendered, and sexual oppression, often ignoring the systems of class oppression aimed at working class whites for much of U.S. history. The conservative backlash against multiculturalism—embodied in the so-called “culture war,” perhaps the newest instance of a counterproductive conceptual discourse—can easily be linked to the alienation of white males from courses and mediums of intellectual engagement with critical antiracism. As racial psychologist Beverly Daniel Tatum notes in “Teaching White Students about Racism: The Search for White Allies and the Restoration of Hope” (2009), “if learning about racism means seeing oneself as an ‘oppressor’, one of the ‘bad guys’, then of course there will be resistance.” Few white men, especially under neoliberal multiculturalism’s “anti-racism” indoctrination, “would actively embrace such a self-definition” (278).

As Derrick Bell notes in “Wanted: A White Leader Able to Free Whites from Racism” (2000), white men (like me) have a vital role in the contemporary “post-racial” politics, in which black and minority leaders speaking against the evils of institutional racism are labeled “whiners” and advocates of “special rights,” while black and minority leaders marching in line with the neoliberal status quo are labeled symbolic “proof” that white supremacy is a thing of the past—or that a politician can claim plausible deniability for their racially-charged appeals. As Bell asserts, such a program of interrogating the sources of racism in white attitudes must chart the relationship between racial, gendered, sexual, and classed-inequalities in the modern world,
which serve the interests of the white capitalist class interests who lobby for and write the laws
(331). Adopting the “self-interest” frame, Bell and others demonstrate that proactive social and
legal policies are good for everyone—less traumatic social environments, less crime, fewer
prisons, fewer taxes—but neoliberal multicultural ideology often blinds whites to the
mechanisms of their own exploitation; instead, they are led to blame minorities, “liberal elitists,”
and entitlement taxation for their own, very real financial insecurities and struggles, creating a
powerful narrative suturing “welfare queens” and “Willie Hortons” to “oppressive big
government”—all funded on their “hard-earned dime”—even while relatively massive sums of
government funds are essentially transferred to the private-sector through lobbying, bureaucracy,
and tax codes. Impoverished and working class whites are led to blame affirmative action for
awarding “special privileges,” especially when they view themselves as coming from more
limiting social circumstances than a middle or upper class minority—even though the vast
polarization of wealth and outsourcing of blue-collar manufacturing jobs stem from the
conservative “free-market” logics and public policies arising in the neoliberal age. Here we can
see the rationale behind the Tea Party Movement and other predominantly white populisms
arising in the U.S., which often raise reasonable concerns regarding Bush-era policies transferred
to President Barack Obama, unfortunate enough to inherit the worst economic environment since
the Great Depression and to also be a black man with an “un-American” sounding name. We
must recognize that the argument is legitimate, even if the target of the hostilities is misguided.

A critical multicultural pedagogy would include these working class “white” and
immigrant subjectivities, just as it would include Cleaver’s black masculine subjectivity and
numerous “others” whose literary counterstories complicate neoliberal multicultural hegemony
and the narratives it deploys to obfuscate contemporary systems of oppression and economic
exploitation. But effective critical multicultural pedagogical praxis also requires a particular environment and method of classroom activity to promote generativity, which Mark Bracher in *Radical Pedagogy: Identity, Generativity, and Social Transformation* (2006) cites as a primary component of emotional intelligence in its “capacity to generate ideas by abstracting from and naming affects and images, and the ability to integrate different categories of experience by building bridges between their respective (primarily linguistic) concepts” (46). In the present analysis, this draws our attention to three impediments to correcting white prejudices under liberal multiculturalism in its current institutionalized form. First, since the majority of faculty members in multicultural education are minorities—often yielding predominantly “white” faculties in “traditional” academic fields—white students may find themselves unable to bridge their own experience with the experiences presented in multicultural literature and pedagogy, simultaneously impeding critical engagement with and empathetic arousal toward “other” identities. Second, some instructors’ tendency toward essentialism—“white oppressors,” “male patriarchs,” etc—often alienates white (masculine) identities, which are the most likely to harbor ill-feelings toward women and minorities. Without interrogating the social contructedness and social contingencies of racial privilege, an uncritical and pervasive condemnation of white identities can further drive white students into the camp of “angry white men” behind the “culture war” and “post-racial” conservative backlash—especially those from working class backgrounds who may consider themselves to be anything but empowered by historical and existing social power arrangements. And ultimately, when ignoring broader relationships between racial, gendered, sexual, and class-based oppression, liberal multicultural education lacks coherent theoretical procedures for explicating the role of hegemonic discourse in cognitive functioning and how the social constructedness of “logically white” normative identities
profoundly impact oppressed individuals’ life experiences and in-group judgments about proximal and distal others.

Thus, the role of the critical multicultural educator is to facilitate an environment in which nationalistic hegemony—including neoliberal multicultural discourse and pedagogy—is challenged, foregrounding manifestations of institutional inequality and their racial, gendered, sexual, and class-based dynamics while simultaneously destabilizing and explicating the social constructedness of privileged “white” and “other” identity contents. This contributes to Bracher assertion in *Radical Pedagogy* that educators must “help students understand (1) the nature and origins of their own identity components, (2) the consequences of those components for themselves and others, and (3) the nature, potential source, and likely consequences of alternative identity components they might embrace or pursue” (103). This form of positive, self-empowering identity maintenance, coupled with an unflinching critical engagement with the psycho-social relationship between discursively structured, normative ideals of in-group identity and the life experiences and outcomes of “other” subjectivities, can promote more nuanced comprehension of racial difference in “post-racial” America without feeding into conservative claims of “liberal indoctrination” and ideological exploitation of “white guilt” pathos.

The psychoanalytic approach to teaching about racial difference very briefly discussed above is largely compatible with more socially and historically oriented CRT pedagogy and race-theory scholarship in the cognitive humanities, each of which champion narrative “counterstories” as means of exposing objective manifestations of institutional racism and how racial identity impacts the experience of subjectivity in “post-racial,” neoliberal multicultural America. As Mike Cole notes in *Critical Race Theory in Education* (2009), the presidency of Barack Obama—what the late Manning Marable might call symbolic representation at the
highest level of American life and undoubtedly a landmark in the history of race in the United States—possesses the danger of what Derrick Bell termed a “contradiction-closing case,” a form of corroboration for a “post-racial” politics further marginalizing oppressed out-groups and playing into right-wing conservatism’s goal of restoring de facto white supremacy by dismantling redistributive institutions (57-8). Certainly, we must avoid immediately pigeonholing affluent black individuals like President Obama as black bourgeois, a self-defeating yet possibly unavoidable position many 1960s and 1970s black radicals took. We simply must avoid accepting Obama’s and others’ affluence as proof of realized racial justice when overwhelming data suggests otherwise.

According to the 2010 U.S. Census Bureau, 63.6% of American living under the poverty line were black, Asian, or Hispanic/Latino (25.8%, 12.5%, and 25.3%, respectively), the three largest racial / ethnic minority groups in the America. White “non-Hispanics” comprised 12.9% of impoverished individuals, the largest statistic group. But white “non-Hispanics” also comprise 72.4% of the total population; so relatively speaking, poverty effects disproportionately large numbers of minorities and relatively few whites. How can this disparity be explained? How can almost two-thirds of Americans living below the poverty line be minorities, but they comprise just over one quarter of the total population? The answer to this question forces one to make either a racist generalization founded on a deterministic understandings of human behavior or acknowledge the persistence of institutional racism in our society, located in cycles of urban poverty, unequal access to healthcare and education, and limited opportunities for social empowerment and positive identity maintenance. While the cause for racial justice has undoubtedly made progress as a result of the black freedom struggle, the objective social realities of institutional racism remain very real. Unconscious and dysconscious racism continue to
plague the white mind, embedded in cognitive processes through mainstream nationalism’s identity politics. And humanities scholars, if we seek a niche in the increasing economizing world of higher education, must further develop the promising narrative empathy hypothesis as a viable contribution to the perennial quest for racial justice, which can fruitfully be advanced by rigorous analysis of neoliberal multicultural hegemony through study of the black radical tradition.
Notes

Introduction

1. Like anybody studying these diverse movements, I admit to the difficulty of offering a satisfactory definition that accounts for the complexity and multifariousness of these strains of black intellectual history. I am also conscious of the danger of essentialism in attempting to conflate such a diverse body of thought and draw sweeping conclusions based on a necessarily limited selection of textual evidence. For the purpose of this essay, I will use the term “black radicalism” to signify a specific ideological underpinning common to post-World War II black radicalism: the belief that true racial egalitarianism is incompatible within the current social, economic, and psychological structure of American capitalism, and that without revolutionary changes, the systematic machinations of white supremacy will prevail through oblique discursive mechanisms. Furthermore, this “black radical” ideology was also skeptical of (or outright rejected) white liberalism and Civil Rights movement leaders, whose methods of integration—buying into the hegemonic nationalism and adopting mainstream institutions and values—have provided grounds for a historical “progress” narrative emplotting the Civil Rights movement as the “end” of racial difference in America. As will become evident, the liberal-pluralist ethos of “colorblind” America and the narratives and ideologies that sustain it have blinded many Americans to the racialized, gendered, classed-based systems of inequality and oppression.

2. Neoliberal multiculturalism is another widely used but nebulously defined term. In the present study, neoliberalism will reflect Michel Foucault’s observations in “The Birth of Bio-Politics” (1979), which Jodi Melamed expands upon in “The Spirit of Neoliberalism” (2006) and Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism (2011) regarding the epistemological and ontological transformation of nationalistic racial discourse in the late 129
1970s and 1980s (206-7). Distinct from liberal multiculturalism (1960s through late 1970s), which recognized public responsibility for past racial injustices and recognized the governed as “rights bearing citizens,” neoliberalism’s turn toward privatization, government deregulation, and widespread economization of all elements of human life framed all Americans as “private entrepreneurs and consumers” governed by an uncritical ideological belief in “market based” logics of social justice. These economic framings, imposing “the market” as the conceptual metaphor guiding most avenues of human activity, fallaciously presuppose equal competition in “post-racial” America, obfuscating the objective social realities of racial, gendered, and class-coded systems of oppression. The multiculturalism in this concept refers to America’s post-World War II ideological move—in light of Cold War pressures—toward adopting “official antiracism,” abandoning overt white supremacy in favor of more “progressive” and “tolerant” public image of respect and equality between ethnic and cultural subjectivities. This eventually became framed as the proof of American exceptionalism and the moral imperative for global hegemony while marginalizing various leftist and countercultural movements. For the purpose of this study, neoliberal multiculturalism will refer to the ideology preserving capitalist power by imposing free market logics as the ideal means of facilitating just social interactions, which simultaneously obscures the remnants of racialized, gendered, and class-based oppression through multicultural moral imperatives. For more on the ideological development and political deployment of American neoliberal multiculturalism in relation to late twentieth century foreign and domestic political affairs, see Mary Dudziak “Desegregation as Cold War Imperative” (2009) and Cold War Civil Rights (2000), Joe Streets’ The Culture War in the Civil Rights Movement (2007), David Harvey’s A Brief History of Neoliberalism (2005), Derrick Bell’s Silent Covenants: Brown v. Board of Education and the Unfulfilled Hopes for Racial Reform (2004),

3. For my purposes, “cognitive humanities” refers to the recent field of interdisciplinary scholarship drawing upon insights from cognitive science to supplement the study of literature, language, identity, and culture. Of more specific interest in the present study is that strain of inquiry seeking to explore the role of the humanities in promoting the “narrative empathy hypothesis,” which suggests that the cognitive processes involved with literary role-taking promote social justice and functional democratic institutions through intersubjective engagement.


5. I will here adopt Bracher’s definition of schema in “Schema Criticism” (2011), which I paraphrase as the information processing routines and structures that govern (among other things) an individual’s judgment about various “others” (8-11). Schemas possess specific evolutionary and cognitive functions, as they allow individuals to draw upon previous
knowledge to make rational decisions about various stimuli, including unfamiliar situations and demographic groups about which the individual has little lived experience. A major contention here is that such schemas govern thinking about race. Bracher’s argument that oppressive social policies stem from faulty information processing strategies supports my assertion that neoliberal multicultural “post-racial” ideologies of individualism and colorblind pluralism (which make people less aware of persistent social inequalities as well as systematic and institutionalized racial discrimination) hinder the realization of true egalitarianism and social justice. I will adopt Bracher’s “Schema Criticism” paradigm, which suggests that literary studies can serve an important corrective function in altering destructive schemas and thus promote more just social behaviors.

6. Though racial liberalism (late 1940s-early 1960s), liberal multiculturalism (late 1960s-late 1970s), and neoliberal multiculturalism (1980s-present) are each distinct phases in the hegemonic American “official antiracism,” I will use “(neo)liberal multiculturalism” to denote the period of post-Civil Rights liberal multiculturalism and the transition into the privatizing social programs and “post-racial” politics which characterize 1980s neoliberal multiculturalism.

7. See chapter two.

8. I will return to these unconscious emotional responses and the narrative structures that trigger them in chapter one. For further reading, see Lakoff’s *The Political Mind* (2008), chapter one and Drew Westen’s *The Political Brain* (2007), chapter two.


10. For more on Cold War domestic and foreign policy, see references in note two.
Chapter One


2. See Harvey’s A Brief History of Neoliberalism (2005) for a concise yet thorough account of neoliberal ideological transformation in the U.S. and Europe; for a more focused account of the racialized implications of neoliberal multiculturalism for African-American, ethnic, and various “other” communities, see Melamed’s Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism (2011) and “The Spirit of Neoliberalism: From Racial Liberalism to Neoliberal Multiculturalism” (2006), and Manning Marable’s Beyond Black and White: The Transformation of African-American Politics (2009), especially chapters nine, sixteen, and seventeen.

3. McConachie provides a more nuanced discussion of biological and situational determinants on cognitive development than relevant to my present investigation. For a more extended discussion on the proposed universality and socially-mediated nature of cognitive structuring, see pages 142-5.
4. I will here adopt Mark Bracher’s definition of “schema” in “Schema Criticism” (2011), which I paraphrase as functional information processing routines formed from previous knowledge, experiences, and imaginary episodic encounters humans use to make category-based inferences in relation to an individual’s perception of selfhood and “otherness” (8-11). The faulty schemas he identifies as influencing destructive behavior are each linked to the neoliberal ontological systems I discuss in the present study; I will refer to them collectively as “atomistic schemas.”

5. I will later briefly highlight current research on literary applications of the narrative empathy hypothesis, but for further reading, see Martin Hoffman’s *Empathy and Moral Development: Implications for Caring and Justice* (2009) for a summary of empathy and moral behavior from an evolutionary and developmental standpoint; see Sheri R. Levy, Antonio Freitas, and Peter Salovey’s “Construing Action Abstractly and Blurring Social Distinctions: Implications for Perceiving Homogeneity Among, but Also Empathizing With and Helping Others” (1995) for more evidence regarding variables influencing the transmission of empathy into prosocial behavior; and see Suzanne Keen’s *Empathy and the Novel* (2007), especially chapters one and two, for an admirable summary of psychological and cognitive research dealing specifically with literary studies in promoting empathy and prosocial behavior.

7. See Harvey’s *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2005), especially chapter four, for more on the economic polarization of wealth under neoliberal multiculturalism; for a more sustained analysis of the racial component of wealth polarization and social power configurations under neoliberal multiculturalism, see Roy Brooks’ *Racial Justice in the Age of Obama* (2009).

8. Regarding psychological and cognitive research corroborating the relationship between emotion and cognitive functioning, see Antonio Damasio’s *Descartes Error* (1994) chapters seven and eleven and Drew Westen’s *The Political Mind* (2007) chapters three, four, and five.

9. Beverly Daniel Tatum’s “Why are all the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?” and Other Conversations about Race (1999) is a highly instructive, if somewhat popular and anecdotal account of this process of self-segregation and related identity-based impediments to cross-racial dialogue.

10. A very recent example of this emotive, racialized juxtaposition can be seen in a 2011 election ad for Nevada Congresswoman Sharron Angle, in which she attacks opponent Harry Reid for being “soft on immigration” by depicting burly, tattooed, jumpsuit-clad Mexican thugs sneaking ominously around a barbed-wire fence juxtaposed with innocent, law-abiding white families who are endangered economically and physically by implicitly evil Mexican “others.”

11. My example is arbitrary and easily reversed. Blacks with little lived experience with white Americans might draw upon stereotypes for “whiteness” in the same way. My examples throughout are presented in light of my belief that racism is primarily a problem in white attitudes toward “others,” and that the stereotypes leveled at black Americans an incomparably more socially and psychologically damaging.
12. Melamed also makes an important claim about the neoliberal multicultural ideological justifications for attacks on perceived “monoculturalism,” such as Islam and various leftist and nationalist movements hostile to American neoliberal hegemony. This becomes especially relevant in our understanding of the discursive manipulation of Black Nationalism and other branches of radicalism of the period, as will become apparent in chapter two of the present study. See “The Spirit of Neoliberalism” (2006) pages 18-9.

13. For historical corroboration for this point, see Fisher’s *Capitalist Realism* (2009) pages 33-4 and the introduction of Harvey’s *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2005).


**Chapter Two**

1. Though racial liberalism (late 1940s-early 1960s), liberal multiculturalism (late 1960s-late 1970s), and neoliberal multiculturalism (1980s-present) are each distinct phases in the hegemonic American “official antiracism,” I will use “(neo)liberal multiculturalism” to denote the period of post-Civil Rights liberal multiculturalism and the transition into the privatizing social programs and “post-racial” politics which characterize neoliberal multiculturalism.


3. In *Understanding Nationalism: On Narrative, Cognitive Science, and Identity* (2009), Patrick Colm Hogan differentiates between *practical identity contents*—“someone’s entire set of
representational and procedural structures” which must be shared to some extent in order to govern human interactions—and *categorical identity contents*, which refer to group membership and therefore define our understanding of our own selfhood and that of others (27-9). Following the shift to post-war antiracism and normative nationalistic identity, economically-oriented “logically white” practical identities supplanted overtly racially-coded categorical identity contents as the primary signifier of normative in-group identity.

4. For more on the historical roots of Black Nationalism and its goal of group solidarity, see Stuckey’s introduction, in which he concisely summarizes the significance and intellectual legacy of major Black Nationalist leaders and thinkers David Walker, Robert Alexander Young, Martin Delany, and others.

5. Existing at a time of inchoate feminism and largely uncontested systems of white supremacist patriarchy, pre-World War II ethnic and mainstream nationalisms centered upon similar misogynistic, homophobic, and racist rhetorics as those prevalent in even the most masculinist strains of black radicalism.


Chapter Three

1. Like other scholars studying LeRoi Jones / Amiri Baraka, I am faced with the dilemma of name usage. Though both of the plays under analysis here were composed prior to his name change, I have chosen to use his current, chosen name to avoid confusion.


3. Though liberal multiculturalism (mid 1960s- late 1970s), and neoliberal multiculturalism (1980s-present) are each distinct phases in the hegemonic American “official antiracism,” I will use “(neo)liberal multiculturalism” to denote the period of post-Civil Rights liberal multiculturalism and the transition into the privatizing social programs and “post-racial” politics which characterize neoliberal multiculturalism.

4. For more on the identity-based impediments to empathetic role-taking, see Martin Hoffman’s Empathy and Moral Development (2007). For more on general problems with literary applications of the narrative empathy hypothesis, see Suzanne Keen’s Empathy and the Novel (2007).

5. For a discussion of the legacy of Black Nationalism as primarily a boon for the black middle class, see Dean Robinson’s "Black Power Nationalism and Ethnic Pluralism: Postwar Liberalism's Ethnic Paradigm in Black Radicalism" (2010). If we agree with his argument, then it is implicit that many among the lower / working class black masses for whom Black Nationalism purported to speak were adversely affected by its impact on social policies.

6. See pages 8, 43, and 101 for particularly salient examples.
7. Melamed demarcates a select body of radically antiracist literary work—mid-century black radicalism, third wave feminism, the Third World Left, etc— which possesses a unique capacity to promote critical engagement with the domestic and international mechanics of racism under (neo)liberal multicultural hegemony. See chapter two for an extended analysis.

8. A salient example can be found in Malcolm X’s famous “The House Negro and The Field Negro” speech, delivered to the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in 1963.

Chapter Four

1. For additional reading on critical multiculturalism as a means of effective teaching about racial difference, see Mike Cole’s Critical Race Theory and Education (2009), especially chapters two, four, and six.


3. For an instructive account of how individuals rationalize the benevolence of their own (sometimes destructive) identity contents through opposition to subalterns, see Bracher’s Social Symptoms of Identity Needs (2009), chapter four.

4. See Falk’s “Novel Theories of Criminal Defense Based on the Toxicity of the Social Environment: Urban Psychosis, Television Intoxication, and Black Rage” (1996) for an extensive legal discussion of this controversy, which can be reduced to fundamental epistemological questions about human development—determinism vs. situationism. In the case of my present analysis of Cleaver, Falk’s sections on Urban Psychosis (738-41 and 758-65) and Black Rage (748-56 and 763-80) are especially relevant, as they expose the predominance of the
deterministic view of criminal justice (closely resembling conservative political perspectives) and the need to consider and address situational influences on toxic behaviors resulting from persistent social injustices.

5. In “Racializing Justice, Disenfranchising Lives: Toward an Antiracist Criminal Justice” (2007), Manning Marable provides a cogent review of racialized criminal justice under the neoliberal multicultural period, examining how prison populations ballooned during the 1980s and the War on Drugs, nearly doubling from 650,000 to over one million. Though the vast majority of drug abusers were white, the vast majority of individuals incarcerated for drug related offenses are black, a “racial paradox” drawing attention to institutionalized racism (4-9). For more on the racialization of criminal justice, see Marable’s Living Black History (2007), especially chapter five, and Robert Gangi’s “The Rockefeller Drug Laws” (2007).

6. That twenty years have passed since a literary scholar has focused extensively on Cleaver’s work demonstrates his outsider status in the canon, even in contemporary African-American literature surveys. And given that his perceptively misogynistic and reverse-racist essay “The Primeval Mitosis” has come to represent his literary legacy (at least in the Norton Anthology of African-American Literature, 2nd Ed., 2004), scholars have perpetually failed to acknowledge the value of Cleaver’s Soul on Ice in promoting social justice literary studies.

6. For more on this process of “tracking” young minorities into toxic behavior, see Rios, page 28-31, or Anne Arnett Ferguson’s Bad Boys: Public Schools and the Making of Black Masculinity (2001), especially chapter four.

7. For a similar reframing of Cleaver’s prototypical image of white liberal men, see “’The Christ’ and his Teachings” (31-9), in which Cleaver feels immense guilt for his “hatred of white
people”—which he hates as a symbolic object of oppression—in discussing his admiration for his white teacher Lovdjeff. Despite his critique of “lukewarm liberalism,” a form of hypocrisy that “cuts me deeply” (47), Cleaver and other like-minded black revolutionaries’ willingness to work cooperatively with whites toward more just social institutions necessarily disprove claims that Cleaver was irrationally “racist.”


9. For more on the role of corporate multiculturalism and symbolic representation in corroborating neoliberal multicultural progress narratives, see Manning Marable’s *Beyond Black and White: Transforming African-American Politics* (2009).

10. See Bracher’s *Radical Pedagogy* (2006) for more on the role of educator identity and ideologies, especially chapters six through eleven.
Works Cited


