ABSTRACT

Digital Blackface:
The Repackaging of the Black Masculine Image

By Joshua L. Green

In this post-civil right era, race and ethnicity have taken on more visual rhetorical styles that carry implicit meanings concerning race class and gender. Nowhere is this more evident than in media and mainstream popular culture, where ethnicity is inextricably linked to consumer culture. This post-civil rights information age society consistently repackages the domineering messages that reinforce stereotypes and normative ideologies that oppress sub-altern groups (women, people of color, homosexuals, and people of lower economic status). Through our technological development, representations of the ethnic ‘Other’ have shifted from ‘performing’ ethnicity to ‘being’ the ethnic other. This analysis examines new gaming technologies and the impact the video game Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas has on the player’s perception of black masculinity. This analysis critically analyzes the audience demographic, semiotic codes, cultural context, literary text, and social debates surrounding the game. Ultimately, Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas presents whole new type of animal, more dangerous and more pervasive than the negative representations of African-Americans on television. This is a critical analysis of not just the culture that created it but also the culture that consumes it.
Digital Blackface:  
The Repackaging of the Black Masculine Image

A Thesis

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Chapter 1

Hood Crimes and Street Rhymes 101:
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas

Now, it’s the early 90’s. Carl’s got to go home. His mother has been murdered, his family has fallen apart and his childhood friends are all heading towards disaster. On his return to the neighborhood, a couple of corrupt cops frame him for homicide. CJ is forced on a journey that takes him across the entire state of San Andreas, to save his family and to take control of the streets.-Grand Theft: San Andreas, Prologue

Any reader of the Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas’ prologue above could interpret it as an introduction to a movie narrative. The introduction establishes elements of identification and sympathy for the main character due to the death of his mother and need to protect his family. The writer positions CJ as the protagonist and the corrupt cops as the obstacles over which CJ must prevail. There are elements of Aristotle’s mythic journey, reminiscent of the Odyssey, in which the protagonist must embark upon a journey in order to save his world. These elements combined make for a formulaic narrative plot structure that with which viewers of television and film are familiar with.

Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas (GTA: SA) however is not a feature film, it is instead, an adaptation of various movie themes and narratives siphoned into a highly detailed interactive digital world. Borrowing styles from both television and film it reinforces societal cultural conventions while simultaneously breaking from traditional goal oriented video game rules. The level of interactivity within the game heightens the player expectations and level of involvement. There are a seemingly endless multitude of situations the player can experience. The three dimensional detail and the capacity to roam freely without rules establish Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas (GTA: SA) as markedly apart from other video games past and present. The expansive space and interactivity of the San Andreas world is responsible for its popularity among gamers.

The position of this analysis examines the popularity of this game and its utilization of mainstream representations of black masculinity. The game reinforces pre-existing mainstream American ideologies about race in a way that may possibly have an impact on how we interpret race as a society. In other words, GTA: SA represents a repackaging of a system of racial subordination and objectification for the purposes of dominant mainstream consumption and pleasure. Pertinent to this analysis is Bakhtin’s
notion that contemporary communication is actually in constant dialogue with other texts; past and future over the control of culture and power. This implies that messages contained within the game serve as a reiteration of the American entertainment aesthetic derived from the post-Civil War theatrical productions in black face, to radio (Amos n’ Andy), to talking pictures (The Jazz Singer), to television, and videogames (GTA: SA). These mediums and the stories told through them are the historical predecessors of GTA: SA.

Earlier criticisms of GTA: SA protests the game’s ability to teach violence among adolescents. Few critical analyses have addressed or delineated how the game reinforces stereotypes or depictions of race, gender, class, and sexual orientation. Allegorically, GTA: SA resembles early 1800’s minstrelsy. Similar to the re-appropriation of black skin during blackface minstrelsy era, players in this contemporary medium regardless of ethnic background or physical ability are afforded the opportunity to live and experience what is conceptualized as the ‘authentic’ African-American experience¹.

The implications of the game and its ability to impact perceptions of race are diverse. First, this analysis will address, in subsequent chapters, the historical context of the black body as a commodifiable text within the representational medium of the stage. Next, this analysis will address the textual and contextual levels of the game and how it is adept at teaching race through metaphor, symbolism, and repetition. Finally, this analysis will address the impact of the game’s message on the player’s perception of black masculinity. The position adopted for this analysis is that this game is a microcosm of the racial and socio-cultural debates that plague the American consciousness. It is a visible representation, or exemplification, of a culturally mainstreamed dehumanization and ‘Othering’ that moves beyond issues of race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and ability, to themes of power and maintaining power and the maintenance of power.

Released in October 2004, Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas is an activity centered upon stealing and driving cars. CJ’s character, the lens through which the player observes the San Andreas world, is the driver of various vehicles for all of the episodic missions throughout the game. This narrative convention is similar to the other Grand

¹Yousman (2003) argues that, “What is most important is not authenticity but the appearance of authenticity” (379).
The Theft Auto games GTA: I, II, III and Vice City. Initially the main character was a social miscreant who was reaping vengeance upon a society that had imprisoned him. The sequels that followed the initial GTA developed narratives that were more detailed. San Andreas includes more narrative, character development, and cut scenes which propel the game beyond the categorization of a driving game. GTA: SA is a single player driving game with elements of simulation, role-playing, and a first person shooter. Part of the acclaim associated with GTA: SA refers to its ability to blend together many different genres of video game playing amid an expansive digital world that is four times larger than the previous versions. This evolution of storytelling, however, utilizes popular stereotypes which link social deviance to ethnic groups (Italians and African-Americans). Further, the time in which the narrative takes place and its usage of contemporary music relevant to the game time setting, lends it further believability. Through the introduction of dramatic elements and narrative the game is thrust beyond the episodic realm of a driving game.

San Andreas is a video game adaptation of many popular films and utilizes some of the same narrative and dramatic devices that audiences recognize. By using Hollywood gangster films as a familiar backdrop the developers gave the game a type of hyper-real aura. The developers of GTA: SA emulated 1990s genre ‘hood films’ like Colors (Hooper, 1988), Boyz N the Hood (Singleton, 1991), and Menace II Society (Hughes, 1993). Murray (2005) argues that DJ Pooh, one of three writers for GTA: SA, was also a screenwriter for the independent “ghetto” comedy film Friday (92). The world of San Andreas re-affirms popular stereotypes by conceptualizing the ‘ghetto’ or the ‘hood’ as the authentic space of black life. The developers also utilized criminal characters and narratives that are popular within rap and black culture. The narrative and visual elements within San Andrea are themes taken from Hollywood cinema. These are themes that glorify ruthlessness and aggrandize loyalty to family present in The Godfather (Coppola, 1972) as well as and acquisition of power through wealth and materialism present in Scarface (De Palma, 1983). The character CJ is symbolically similar to Michael Corleone in Godfather because they both begin the storyline as

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2 Hood film is a term taken from Norman K. Denzin’s book Reading Race; it is his final category of black representation in film. Hood films are films that stress the relationship of black community with crime lower class or ‘ghetto’ locations.
innocent characters that are propelled into violence by circumstance. The usage of such popular movies themes allows GTA: SA to assume a hyper-real aura because it codes itself with elements that are popular with a mainstream audience. Imbedded within the popular themes addressed by these movies are commentaries on culture and ethnicity in America.

Ethnicity became a central theme during the Vice City (2002) version of Grand Theft Auto which featured Italian characters. San Andreas is the first version in the series to center the narrative against the backdrop of the black gangsta lifestyle. In the beginning of the game central characters constantly remind CJ of his desertion from the ‘hood’ and the need to “Stay true to the hood”. CJ’s older brother Sean “Sweet” Johnson (played by Chris Bellard) is one of the leaders of the Grove Street gang. Sweet is the family that CJ is trying to save since his mother died. CJ is instrumentally constructed as a violent pawn in order to save his brother from jail. Melvin “Big Smoke” Harris (played by Clifton Powell) is a larger than life philosophical character who gives street guidance to CJ. Finally, Lance “Ryder” Wilson, who is a symbolic digital representation of 90’s gangsta rapper EZ E, conceptualizes the individualist, materialist ideologies of American and African Americans in the post-Civil Rights era. Ryder (played by MC Eiht) is the mischievous, conniving, lecherous, member of the group. EZ E’s mythic re-creation as a member of CJ’s entourage also adds a level of authenticity and familiarity with pop-culture audiences.

The developers use EZ E and his music as a vivid connection between early hip-hop and black life. Through the videogame medium, however, EZ E as a digital entity is re-conceptualized for the purposes of the game and its narrative. The narrative here is more intricate and involved in African-American cultural lore and mainstream depictions of race. The virtual world of GTA: SA is inscribed with a ghetto vernacular that lends it time/place believability because it is familiar to audiences. The game utilizes narrative, setting, music, and characters coupled with the utilization of themes that allude to a hopelessness associated with the African-American community. This elicits the consideration, then, as to how the game operates as a tool for learning and the methods it utilizes to teach the player about race.
Mythological representations of the ethnic ‘Other’ coupled with the strategic rhetoric of the dominate class facilitate the hierarchical division between races as seamless and natural. GTA: SA is a playground where the player can practice and experiment with mainstream stereotypes. It is also a space, however, where mythological representations appear authentic but are in actuality a distortion of reality. Social scientists and theorists argue that video-gaming impacts players’ perceptions and behaviors in the real world. Further, a video-game text is an open system built upon universal sign/signifiers that the player interprets based on their own history and knowledge. The concept of cognitive dissonance argues that people only assimilate information that correlate with their preconceived beliefs. GTA: SA rhetorically utilizes a type of satirical humor that perpetuates racist beliefs about black masculinity present in film and other mainstream cultural productions.

Video games are constructed as an environment that facilitates learning. As a simulation Grand Theft Auto is similar to a flight simulator used to train pilots and astronauts. The designers created a realistic type of environment within which the player can navigate and experience different situations without any immediate consequences. Friedman (1995) argues that, “Playing a simulation means becoming engrossed in a systemic logic that connects a myriad array of causes and effects.” Using this logic it is arguable that the player learns the rules of the game as they are playing it. In San Andreas the player learns how to be successful at burglary, which includes scouting the best locations, acquiring a van, and determining the best times of night for robbery. It is a criminal handbook that uses black male characters to illustrate behaviors and relationships. Video games are simulation based learning devices which simultaneously reinforce and maintain ethnic visual and aural linkages that potentially project ideologies about race, class, gender, ability, and sexual orientation.

Video games, just like films, contain ideological assertions that perpetuate mainstream socially constructed ideas about society. The human agency involved in creating video games makes it a social formation that is derived from personal and social bias. Freidman (1995) argues that, “They can be engaged and debated, and other

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3 The American Psychological Association argues that adolescents who play violent video games show more aggression in the short term than adolescents who play more benign games. (O’Connor 2005).
computer games can be written following different principles. But there could never be an “objective” simulation free from “bias”; computer programs, like all text, will always be ideological constructions” (82). The subjective nature of video games further implies that they have the ability to advance a particular perspective upon audiences which influences beliefs systems and advances a system of ‘Othering’. In the game the player is taught, through boundaries and war, a system of categorization and ‘Othering’.

The video game’s ‘virtual world’ is the axis, or stage, where upon society’s unconscious thoughts, fantasies, dreams, and taboos are reenacted in a fashion that gives them permanence and credibility in the real world. GTA: SA uses satirical humor to address racial and gender oppression while simultaneously granting those behaviors prominence and focus in the mainstream imagination without seeking a resolution. The appropriation and consumption of the black masculine body is an issue of ownership, agency, and perspective. GTA SA is the intersection where reality, artistic expression, and the virtual world collide. It is the space where the debate about artistic expression and obscenity intersect. It encompasses the societal debates that have gone on for years and is repackaged in the form of a make believe virtual space called San Andreas.

**Research Question**

Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas can be critiqued within three avenues of inquiry; decoding, encoding, and political context. The larger question that forms the bedrock of this analysis is what codes are presented within the text of the game, and what is the player’s perception of black masculinity, and what social ramifications arise from the message? This analysis seeks to address the constructed yet naturalized representations of the black masculine body along with the dominate ideologies imbedded within the image.

An overlapping questions is does the player relate more easily to members of the African-American experience or are their negative presumptions reinforced by the game? By extension, how are the images presented in the game more pervasive than images on television or film? What are the ramifications of learning culture through such a process? It is important to explain here that class, gender, sexuality, or physical ability are not absent from the discussion because they are all interrelated through the articulation of objectification. The focus on race is a modus to talk about all these issues. In asking
these questions, it is held that San Andreas is not a stand alone circumstance, but rather, a perpetuation or repackaging of pejorative social ideologies.

Definition of Terms

**Race** is a socially constructed device used to validate hierarchical relationships between classes and ethnic groups. It is a method of categorization and ordering which establishes a framework for inequality in the social realm. Yousman (2003) argues that, “Race would not exist if social inequity did not exist—it is the condition of life that determine the way we perceive the world” (377). Culture is often confused with race and has an entirely different connotation. Madhubuti (1990) argues that **culture** is, “the act of developing intellectual and moral (ethical) faculties integrated patterns of human behavior that include thought, language, action and invention. A culture, if it is to survive and develop, depends upon a people’s capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations” (64). The basis of this critique examines the hypocritical nature of race as a social formation.

The mythological representation of **whiteness**, white supremacy, the white supremist patriarchal system, and white patriarchal dominance take on many meanings in society and in this analysis. All these terms, however, are allusions to power and dominance. First, in their article *Whiteness: A Strategy Rhetoric* Nakayama and Krizek (1995) describe *whiteness* as a strategic rhetorical device that alludes categorization in order to position white ethnicity as universal and normal. Cultural homogeneity is predicated upon who controls social and political power. The nomenclature of **normal** primarily pertains to white men. **White supremacy**, then, is a matter of perspective. Dyson (2003) argues that, “supremacy is shorthand for the institutional and cultural practices of racial dominance that are intellectually justified by its exponents as normal or natural” (34). White supremacy alludes to the privileged perspective of conceptualizing and reinforcing whiteness as the center of existence. hooks (2004) contends that, “white supremacy is not ignorance but the desire on the part of unenlightened white people to maintain their dominance over black people in this nation and around the world” (1). With that observation hooks conceptualizes **white supremist patriarchy** as a form of oppressive dominance that seeks to perpetuate itself through institutionalized racism.
Therefore the words “mainstream”, “popular culture” and “dominant culture” are all derivatives of white supremacy.

The white supremacist patriarchal system would refer to the institutions that ritualize and perpetuate that dominance in the mainstream consciousness as normal or inherent. However, critiquing whiteness is not so much a deconstruction of ‘being’ white as it is the examination of the representational and contextual elements of the image as a privileged signifier. As strategic rhetoric, whiteness frames the world within simple binary relationships of “us” and “them”. The ‘Other’ represents the oppositional nature and separateness from the universal normalized reality of whiteness. Blackness as a dialectical opposite is the quintessential ‘Other’. In order to strategically define itself as normal, whiteness must compare itself to its dialectical opposite. It remains obscure and contradictory in the sense that it defines itself through alienation and consumption. Dyson (2003) contends that, “Part of what it means to be white in America is to be black. White is also black, for a post-appropriationist paradigm” (120). In an abstract sense it is no longer possible to discursively separate black from white in contemporary society. However, there are also concrete barriers and ways of defining and separating the two. Yousman (2003) invokes strategic essentialism in order to draw distinctions between black and white for the purposes of analysis4. What it means to be white in this contemporary information age implies access to mainstream and popular culture which implies privilege and universality.

To understand the institutions of racial dominance which facilitate the white supremacist patriarchal system requires an examination into the concept of myth and de-centering or what Dyson (2003) refers to as economies of representation5. This implies that the signifiers associated with race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and ability are socially constructed in order to maintain the ideology of a bourgeois group as the nodal or anchor point of meaning. Myths are the privatization of history. Barthes (2001)

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4 Yousman (2003) argues that, “Strategic essentialism” we must also acknowledge that in the concrete world outside of academic theory, designations of White and Black still mean something quite clear to most of us and have real consequences in our daily lives. 372

5 Dyson (2003) argues that, “Economies of representation highlight how whiteness has been embodied in films, visual art, and branches of culture where public myths of white beauty and intelligence have gained representative authority to rearticulate the superiority and especially the desirability of whiteness” (107).
argues that, “Myths deprives the object of which it speaks of all history. In it, history evaporates. All one has to do is to possess these new objects from which all soiling trace of origin or choice has been removed” (123). The fundamental principle associated with myth, as Barthes argued, is that it is the articulation of a dominant ideology that transforms history into nature. Mythological representations, in their formation, are subjective distortions of an original concept. Therefore myths can be dissected into their denotative and connotative meanings. The former refers to structures in society that are taken for granted or appear as natural while the latter refers to the ideologies that are concealed within the myth.

De-centering refers to the institutionalized systems of supremacy and dominance that utilize strategic rhetoric and demonizes the ethnic other, in order to reaffirm and validate the power of the dominant class. In their article Fallen: O.J. Simpson, Hillary Rodham Clinton, and Re-Centering of White Patriarchy Dickinson and Anderson (2004) argue that, “within the context of a white masculinity that consistently refuses to define itself, the re-securing of the ideological structure often depends on expelling “others” from the center” (276). De-centering frames power as a constant struggle for centricity of social consciousness and meaning. The constant struggle for white supremist patriarchy is to remain the invisible universalized center point while simultaneously dispensing other groups from gaining positions of power. De-centering is effectively laying the framework of ‘Othering’ where the dominant group formulates mythological cultural meanings that establish simple binaries (white/good and black/bad). Cultural productions are part of the institutionalized mythification which is encoded with dominant ideologies, depicting the ‘Other’ as simply fulfilling the obligations of their nature. So inherent have these ideologies become that, as Strinati (1995) argue:

- cultural producers consciously or unconsciously (usually the latter) instill meanings into cultural products which are then decoded or interpreted by audiences in relatively diverse and independent ways which are none the less, in the final analysis, in keeping with some general dominated ideology. (126)

The dominant class’ ideological indoctrination is so pervasive that it is allegorical to a prison. Even in rebelling against the system one is forced to give it central focus. We are
forced to speak in the language of the system in order to debunk or critique it. Jones (2005) argues that, “As a French philosopher once warned, “When the Negro declares in French that he rejects French culture, he accepts with one hand what he rejects with the other; he sets up the enemy’s thinking-apparatus in himself” (61). Hence, the power of the dominant class is conceptualized in its ability to create and maintain the mythology of its dominance.

In her book *Black Looks: Race and Representations* bell hooks (1992) describes the term ‘eating the Other’ as the fetishized consumption of the exotic or erotized ethnic ‘Other’ by the dominate class as a means of gaining pleasure and spiritual renewal. The ethnic ‘Other’ is analogous to a spice that livens up a bland dish. In this circumstance whiteness represents a cultureless banal existence which consumes ethnic identities as objects that, in their labor, produce “life-sustaining alternatives”. She argues that, “It was this black body that was most “desired” for its labor in slavery and it is this body that is most represented in contemporary popular culture as the body to be watched, imitated, desired, possessed” (34). ‘Eating the Other’, then, describes the ways in which the dominate culture exercise power over the eroticized ethnic ‘Other’ in order to supplement and justify the dominant group’s power. Superficially the dominate group acquires the fetishized and eroticized traits of the lesser group without practicing any of the cultural habits or customs of the dominated group. This is what is hooks (1992) refers to as ‘imperialist nostalgia’. That is the hypocritical practice of the dominate group that destroys an ethnic civilization, weeps over its destruction, and then re-creates and re-tells the narrative of that culture from the dominate culture’s perspective. ‘Eating the Other is used by socio-cultural theorist to explain white consumption of hip-hop music as well as other hegemonic social formations where the dominant group acquires traits of the lesser group. The term ‘spectacular consumption’ is a corollary to ‘eating the Other’.

In his article *Blackophilia and Blackophobia: White Youth, the Consumption of Rap Music, and White Supremacy* Bill Yousman (2003) contends that the image of the black masculine body in the mainstream imagination is used by both admirers and detractors of black culture to perpetuate white supremacy. The image of the ‘thug’ that is consumed by young white audiences is the same image used by hate groups and conservatives who advocate and justify anti-black legislation. Whites are empowered to
enact their fears of black culture through satirical adoration. He uses ‘eating the Other’ as a context toward explaining ‘spectacular consumption’ of the black image.

‘Spectacular consumption’, a term that Yousman borrows from Watts (1992), refers to, “images of “authentic” Black life that are transformed into mediated spectacles that Whites can purchase in the mass-mediated marketplace” (378). The ‘spectacle’, a term best attributed to Debord, is, “not a collection of images but a social relation among people mediated by images” (139). The spectacle is the hyper-real representation of reality. Therefore, within the paradigm of race and representations, both blackness and the image of blackness are commodified.

The Hot Coffee modification (Hot Coffee-mod) is a sexually explicit scene hidden within the play-action of GTA: SA. It appears when the player/CJ takes his girlfriend on a date, she then asks him if he would like to come inside for coffee (sex). Before the modification, the player could only hear the sex happening. Modification to the game, discovered by a game modder⁶ using software available on the Internet, allows the player to view the sex occurring between CJ and his girlfriend. The reaction to this discovery prompted the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) to change the game’s rating from ‘Mature’ to ‘Adults Only’. More importantly this incited several lawmakers and politicians to seriously look at the videogame industry as well as propose legislation that would potentially reduce the amount of videogame sex and violence.

The prospect of selling explicit sexual material to minors is a concern and needs to be addressed. The Hot Coffee modification presents other issues pertaining to the manner in which sex is performed and the deep connotative meanings associated with it. The initial social critique of the graphic sex in GTA: SA overlooks how the game perpetuates and re-centers the dominant ideology by demonizing blackness and objectifying femininity. People of color and women are the agents that are acting out the social taboos hidden within GTA: SA. The hidden sex scene as a playable mini-game reaffirms the linkages between black men and promiscuity. hooks (2004) argues that, “The “player” is the erotic hero leading this life of endless pleasure, behind the mask is the reality of suffering. “He can’t get no satisfaction”” (73). The mythological characterization of CJ as a player equates him to the status of a child who is constantly

⁶ According to Mclean (2005) “modders” are non-employee fans who seek to modify existing games.
playing games and never able to break out of that mold into manhood. The callousness of CJ’s interaction with women re-affirms the stereotypical linkage between black men and savagery because it symbolizes them as unfeeling and beast-like.

The connotative meanings of the mythological representations of race and gender in GTA: SA work to maintain the white supremacist patriarchal system by demonizing the ‘Other’. The developers re-appropriated the black masculine body as a site of insatiable sexual hunger. The developers established CJ as an uneducated inept child only reacting to impulses while simultaneously striping him of his masculinity. Contrary to the female, CJ does not appear naked in the scene. The developers did not give CJ a phallus. West (1994) argues that, “Black sexuality is a taboo subject in America, principally because it is a form of black power over which whites have little control. On the one hand, black sexuality among blacks simply doesn’t include whites, nor does it make them a central point of reference” (125). By not giving CJ the much fetishized black phallus, the game developers striped him of the defining characteristic of manhood about which gangsta rappers (who perpetuate patriarchal dominance) boast.

Representations of women are consistent with the dominant ideology because they implement women in the role that validates their own oppression. Women physically and verbally de-value themselves as sexual objects for the men in the game. The character Denise (one of CJ’s girlfriends) constantly degrades herself verbally within the dialogue between her and CJ. She constantly refers to herself as worthless every time CJ takes her on a date. It is a habitual practice of the game and is the tragic plight of the black women that she must denigrate herself every time she comes in contact with the player. From a appropriationist paradigm Denise’s feminine voice is subverted by masculine sentiments in order to justify her objectification and define masculinity through the habitual practice of patriarchal dominance. It connotes the deep levels of misogyny and rage toward women in the game. Instead of being victims, women are implicated in their oppression because they de-value themselves.

The re-appropriation of both the feminine and masculine black bodies demonstrates how the mainstream audience can appropriate the bodies of the ‘Other’ in order to routinely practice erotized sexual fantasies. These traits and characterizations
are manifestations of the mainstream imagination. These myths, which are the distortions of an image are infused with meanings and belief structures of a dominate group.

The Literature Review

In the article *Sex, Lies, and Videogames* Mclean (2005) contends that despite questionable accounting practices and hidden sex files the stocks of GTA: SA’s production company, Take Two Interactive Software, continues to grow. Take Two was founded in 1993 by then 21-year old Ryan Brant. Brant is the son of Peter Brant who owns high-brow magazines like *Interview* and *Art in America*. In 1998 Take Two bought BMG entertainment which initially produced the Grand Theft Auto series. Rockstar, which is a division of Take Two, began developing the game with images that were critically described as, “graphic, gruesome, and grotesque”. Prior to GTA: San Andreas, sales of GTA III in 2001 and GTA: Vice City in 2002 were instantly popular and boasted huge sales. The popularity and sales of the game seemed to suggest that the gaming public liked experiencing the graphic and grotesque images in GTA. In 2003 the company’s revenues exceeded the $1 billion mark and the stock continued to rise. The release of GTA: San Andreas in October 2004 broke previous records in videogames sales set by the earlier installments of GTA. However, the true popularity of the game is questionable. Mclean (2005) asserts that, prior to the discovery of the hidden sex files within the game on July 20th, Take Two had just settled with the Security Exchange Commission over charges accusing Take Two of, “engaging in fraudulent accounting practices designed to inflate revenue, meet earning targets, and trigger bonuses to executives” (67). In other words, GTA: SA received unfair attention in the press, and subsequent popularity, due to inflated revenue numbers. The charges imply that Take Two was buying their own product and producing phony invoices. This is an important revelation because it implies that the popularity of the game was not as authentic as the numbers indicated however at the same time investors continue to buy stock in the game. Fraudulent accounting enabled companies to boost the hype about their products, when in fact, through manipulation, they were constructing their audience by creating demand.

In his book *Open Mike*, Dyson (2003), called this practice the “social construction of reality and desire.” He argued that, “one is not born with a desire to obtain material goods. Such a desire must be deposited into one’s consciousness and by marketing and
the media, including television and print advertising, creating a culture of consumption and culture of admiration and glamour” (240). Media influences consumer desire and associates need with consumption. In other words companies are constructing their audiences by dictating desire and appealing to target demographics. These companies, whose products are not a necessity of modern life have to create demand for their product. They have to make it to seem as though their product is needed and that the quality of life will improve after people obtain the product. Niche marketing allows companies the ability to appeal to specific demographics. With a rating of ‘Mature’, GTA: SA target demographic is young adult males 18-25. However, the developers of GTA: SA construct their audience by appealing to broad generalized stereotypes taken from popular culture. The result is a commodification and perpetuation of mainstream ideologies pertaining to race, class, gender, and sexual orientation.

In his article Digital Locker Room: The Young, White Male as Center of the Video Gaming Universe James McQuivey (2005) argues that, “An audience is a construction-an artificial concept we create for our mental convenience. That construction helps us make decisions about what to sell, how to build it, and how to advertise it” (211). Popular culture, from which GTA: SA borrows, is an elaborate illusory construction meant to maintain a dominant ideology. Producers and consumers of cultural production are instruments in the facilitation of the dominant ideology. Take Two as a company, owned by white upper-class elites, and constructs its audience through strategic press manipulation and repackaging of pop-culture stereotypes. The repackaging of social constructed stereotypes is sold back to the audience, whether consciously or unconsciously, by producers containing a dominant agenda that masquerade a normative image.

In the article High Art/Low Life: The Art of Playing Grand Theft Auto Soraya Murray, poetically argues that Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas is an interactive space in which players experience familiarized codes from popular culture. She argues that the game emulates popular American films as well as valorizes materialism and barbarism. The context of this game rest in its historical orientation in the early 90’s. The mythologized representations of the gangsta rap social circumstances and the images of
excessive violence on screen create a contradictory site of misunderstanding in the game. Murray (2005) contends that:

> Often grossly misunderstood, the potency of these artist lyrics resides not in what critics see as a celebration of literal violence, materialism, and misogyny. Rather than advocating gangterism, rap lyrics and the hip-hop mentality advocates the proper hardening of will and development of the aggressiveness necessary to shed internalized feelings of victimhood to embrace market competition. (95)

The imitation of the time setting, music, cultural vernacular, and location in the game creates a formalized site where players can experience the vertigo of black life during the early 90’s. The black body, through this game, is a tool for the consumption of the mainstream representation of black life that allows the player the avenue to safely experience the thrill of racialized violence and eroticized sex. Second, it appears to be a vivid reminder of racial and gender oppression, genocide, and slavery. The game uses an arsenal of devices that establish familiarity with the player. It establishes elements of free-roam and free-play within the boundaries of a narrative borrowed from pop-culture images and music. Murray argues that if the audience fails to conceptualize the game as a satire, then perhaps it is because we resemble the images too closely (98).

Since the discovery of the hidden sexual material within the PC version of the Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas, in early July 2005, there have been many government officials calling for more legislation and higher fines for excessive violence and sex violations in video games. Critiques of video game violence argue that the depictions of sex and violence in video games affect the behaviors and attitudes of minors. Assemblyman Leland Yee from California argued that, “growing evidence linked the playing of the games by impressionable teenagers and pre-teens to acts of violence or hostile attitudes towards girls and women” (Broder). Further, the American Psychological Association (APA), a group funded by the U.S. government, argued that 20 years of research suggest that, “in general, children exposed to virtual bloodshed showed greater "short-term" increases in hostility toward peers and authority figures than those exposed to more benign games” (O’Connor). However, the data is not conclusive due to the fact that other research, coming out within the same time period as the APA
report, shows that the effects are not long term. The evidence suggests, then, that the 
immediacy of video-gaming affects the player’s attitudes and behaviors but in the long 
run has no lasting effects. Based on this research video games have about as much 
influence as movies or television shows.

Communication Theory

McLuhan argues that, “by inventing electric technology, we had externalized our 
central nervous systems; that is, our minds. The Mind as a man-made extension became 
our environment, which he characterized as “the collective consciousness,” which we 
could tap into by creating “a global utilities network” (Brockman, xxiii). Here McLuhan 
presents the notion that technology facilitates the possibility for a shared communal 
mind. McLuhan’s theory demonstrates technologies ability to create a type of shared 
human experience but does not address the issue of human agency and who controls the 
power and to what end. Further, Brockman (1996) argues that, “New technologies equal 
new perceptions. Reality is a human-made process. Our images of our world and of 
ourselves are, in part, the models resulting from our perceptions of the technologies we 
generate as products” (xxiv). Brockman’s theory demonstrates two very interesting 
notions. First, he addresses the shared communal mind created through technologies and 
then he points out that they are human made interpretations. The second point 
demonstrates the human ability to make itself over into what it imagines. This second 
notion contends that technology by extension consists of the images we produce and by 
that extension we are trying to become those images. Humanity, then, is not described by 
noun (what we are) but rather by verb (what we are doing).

Video-gaming solidifies, or combines, the notion of the technological collective 
mind and the identification of self with symbol. Through video game ‘play’ the viewer 
practices three functions. First, by sitting in front of the console the player is 
participating in the technological experience and thereby is practicing the communication 
that makes them part of the collective process. Brockman argues that, “A new invention 
has emerged, a code for the collective conscious. I call it “DNI” or “distributed 
networked intelligence.” DNI is the collective externalized mind, the mind we all share. 
DNI is the infinite oscillation of our collective conscious interacting with itself, adding a 
fuller, richer dimension to what it means to be human.” (xxv). He argues, in the prologue
to *Digerati*, that technology and communication create a type of collective consciousness that expands human potential. Communication in this instance has an “inclusive definition incorporating written and oral speech, but also music, the pictorial arts, the theater, the ballet, and in fact all human behavior” (xxiii). Through this experience the players are broadening their human experience by being part of the collective. However, the player is not defined by the sheer access to technology but also how they react to it through ‘play’.

John Huizinga argues that, “play is not ephemeral inconsequential activity, but essential, perhaps central, factor in civilization.” further that, “the human, then, is not characterized primarily by rational thought and self-awareness or creativity and the use of technology but by play” (Dovey, 269). Here ‘play’ is positioned as a type of act that denotes cultural shared experiences and a way through which to identify ourselves. ‘Play’ in the technological simulated world carries with it implications that imply cultural connotations. Roger Coaillois argues that, mimicry is defined as simulation. He contends that, “This term covers those aspects of children’s play which involve role-play or make believe, and extends to the adult playing Hamlet. This includes the identification of the film or sport audience for the star performers they watch. This identification with stars, is mimicry” (Dovey, 269-270). Mimicry, for the audience, involves a suspension of disbelief and a type of incontrovertible belief in the image as the spectacle. Mimicry of the created image asks the viewer to throw off their former selves and subscribe to the image that is produced. In essence, according to Brockman, we are molding ourselves into the things we create through technology and communication.

Finally, through ‘play’ the viewer actively learns to identify with ideology. Not only does the player learn better coordination or to decode an icon but the player also learns commodity-sign relationships, genocide, and racism. In his book *Gargantua: Manufactured Mass Media*, Julian Stalabrass (1996) argues that video games carry with them social implications. He contends, “Vietnam is the genocidal model which lies at the heart of many games, whether they are explicitly based on events there or not. Its vocabulary finds its way into these rewritings of history, where it is of course misused (96). The re-conceptualizing of historical events demonstrates two fundamental troubling notions. First, the re-telling of history practiced by the manufacturers of cultural
production, and second, the de-humanization and invisibility of the ‘Other’. The player learns to indiscriminately kill the 'Other'. While at the same time video game ideologies symbolize the lives of the ‘Other’ as inconsequential because they disappear rapidly from the screen. The process of self identification in video gaming involves a denial of self in order to fit into a type of dominating collective cultural mind set.

**Real World: San Andreas**

On December 12, 2005 a federal judge struck down an Illinois law set to take effect on January 1st 2006 that restricted the rental or sale of video games of a extremely violent or sexual nature (AP 12/02/05). Although this law would eventually fail to pass the state legislature it was another in a list of potential video games laws that were struck down because they limited the freedom of expression granted by the First Amendment.

The December 27, 2005 New York Times article, “Games Sales Thrive Thanks to Big Kids (in their 20’s), suggest that children are not the primary consumers of video games. This trend implies that the children who grew up playing early video games systems are continuing to play video games into their adult lives. In response to consumer demographic, video game manufactures are creating games with adult content. Many of these young adults spend their pay checks on the newest titles and more advanced consoles. Richtel (2005) suggest that, “One factor contributing to the industry's growth this year, analysts said, is the popularity of several M-rated games, which have inspired consumers to buy other games. Some analysts call it the "Halo 2 effect,” the article suggests and this sub-culture is impacting the demand for violent video games. The two most popular video games bought during 2004 by this emerging subculture were; Halo 2 and Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas. These consumers spend more money on video games than on movies. This furthers the observation that the messages imbedded in video games like GTA: SA are messages consumed intentionally and with foreknowledge. Unlike children, the players are able to determine the difference between fantasy and reality. The questions to consider are the types of themes imbedded in the video games that make them so popular. What ideologies in mainstream society do players identify with and seek to mimic?

In the article, “Grand Theft rating flap could spook marketers,” Oser (2005) argues that the sex controversy may cause some retailers like Wal-Mart and Best Buy to
take the game off the shelves. However, the press about the game has prompted players to purchase the game through other means in light of the ‘Mature’ rating changed to ‘Adults Only’. The game’s popularity does not seem to slow despite the negative press and mainstream retail denial. The Family Media Guide ranked GTA: San Andreas the second goriest game of the year, second to Resident Evil 4. Three of the titles on the list are games made by Rockstar, the producers of GTA: San Andreas. Many of the titles on the list for excessive violence are titles of games that in some way portray the lives of African-Americans. It is no wonder the NAACP is also seeking action against the video game industry (Border). They too recognize the threat of negative representation in video games. GTA: San Andreas could have the same kind of influence and fate that Amos ‘n’ Andy had in the 1950’s.

Based on the failure to create effective legislation for video game violence and sexually, one could conclude that legislators still have not completely conceptualized the sub-cultural trends, player demographics, and artistic expression within the games. Similarly, as with the attempted censorship of the 2Live Crew album as obscene, in many cases there is an associative link between obscene and black taboo. Black masculinity is used as a cultural myth facilitated as a tool to reassert what scholar bell hooks identifies as ‘white supremacist patriarchy’.

Methodological Approach

The impact of GTA: SA can be broken down between universalized belief structures that appear normal and contextual dominant ideologies. This is a cultural analysis which seeks to identify how power is maintained through cultural production. This criticism examines Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas by examining it within three frameworks. First it will consider how the game defines and perpetuates stereotypes and power relationships by looking at the reoccurring themes within the text. As an ideological criticism it will look at established collective signifiers of race that construct the game through the implicit racially coded messages. Social and ideological criticism will help to conceptualize how pervasive the text is by looking at its contextual elements.

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7 The 2Live Crew album “As Nasty As they Wanna Be” (1990) was the first rap CD to be deemed patently offensive by a U.S. District Court. Later overturned by the U.S. Circuit of Appeals arguing that the previous trial judge by just listening to the album could not determine the serious artistic value of the work. (Pembler et al, 484)
The chapters of this analysis will address the commodification of the black masculinity body across several stages of representation in media. Chapter Two is a historical examination of black commodification. Chapter Three describes Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas and the digital world. Chapter Four address the possible implications the game possibly has on the player’s perception of black masculinity.

In this post-civil right era, race and ethnicity have taken on more visual rhetorical styles that carry implicit meanings concerning race class and gender. Nowhere is this more evident than in media and mainstream popular culture, where ethnicity is inextricably linked to consumer culture. This post-civil rights information age society consistently repackages the domineering messages that reinforce stereotypes and normative ideologies that oppress sub-altern groups (women, people of color, homosexuals, and people of lower economic status). Through our technological development, representations of the ethnic ‘Other’ have shifted from ‘performing’ ethnicity to ‘being’ the ethnic other. This paper examines new gaming technologies and the impact the video game Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas has on the player’s perception of black masculinity. I will critically analyze the audience demographic, semiotic codes, cultural context, literary text, and social debates surrounding the game. Ultimately, Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas presents whole new type of animal, more dangerous and more pervasive than the negative representations of African-Americans on television. This is a critical analysis of not just the culture that created it but also the culture that consumes it.
Chapter 2
Stages of the Commodified Image

Then my dream went black as sea without borders.
I’d seen the back of a woman, waiting on a pier in a blood red shawl.
She’d found my dozen sketches of a young half-naked Negro.
Tether-veined, thick-necked, his scowl looking away.
A vision so foreign she left my house and ran until the tide took her in.
A blackness finally she nor I could possess.
In the dream, I’d been ready to hold him
To stoke a thin line out of nothing.
I wanted to give him the brave and tender loneliness of the sea.
He was going to tell me what the world was like without sun.
But my brush fell, my dream went black
And I could not make him swim out of death.
-Hip Logic by Terrance Hayes

Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas (GTA: SA) presents a simulation of a world that is encoded with stylizations that facilitate for the player and viewer a subjective knowledge of the African-American masculine experience. The representations of black masculinity fashioned in this game are the same stereotypes of black masculinity repackaged decade after decade, since the 1800’s, for the gratification and glorification of white supremacist patriarchy. In this larger game of pawns and knights where do we find ourselves today?8

We find ourselves at an interesting intersection within a system of oppression. The system blurs the dividing line between many categorizations in media, representation, and text (social formations). However the ideology of exploitation and hierarchy does not change. The basic nature of racism as an ideological construct that establishes hierarchies and meanings remains consistent. Jesper Juul, in his book Half-

8 Games also inspired a theory that discusses a relation between rules and representation: Structuralist such as Vladimir Propp and Claude Levi-Strauss claimed that meaning or narratives were based on formal structures (Pavel 1986; Propp 1968). Ferdinand de Saussure found chess to be inspirational for linguistics; as he wrote, “a state of the board in chess corresponds exactly to a state of the language. The values of the chess pieces depends on their position upon the chess board, just as in the language each term has its value through its contrast with all other terms” (1916). 8
*Real*, argues that, “games are a transmedial phenomenon” (7). Videogames are, despite the activity of play, a storytelling device. Further, the usages of rules, which confine and define free-play, elicit a more realistic interpretation of the events happening on screen as well as foster a learning environment in which the player learns the rules of the game as they are playing.

Although the initial role of the player in GTA: SA is to drive the car from point A to point B, suddenly the responsibilities dictated by the game far exceed that simple task when the player is embodied within the text of black skin. Thus the game develops a narrative imbedded in blackness which confines the player to missions centered on the savage motivations to maim, murder, steal, and have sex, and these override the initial driving task. By actively learning the rules of the game through boundaries, vernacular, and lifestyle, the player conceptualizes black life around lascivious behavior. GTA: SA contains elements of both narrative and game-play. The player both reads and plays the game and, in effect, is not learning black life but role-playing a facsimile of it from popularized myth. The player is free to interpret the text, to free-play, or to solve situations however they choose.

Structural theorists acknowledge signs and symbols as texts that change meaning depending on their relation to other terms and the pre-conceived belief structures held by the viewer. Popularized myth, however, posits the notion that representations of artifacts, like the black masculine body, are de-historized, de-contextualized and de-politicized into a normalized belief structure that is easily decoded by the mass public. Popularized myths contain all the dominate beliefs held by the mainstream society. The various images, social hierarchies, music styles, vernaculars, the language that the game is written in and the rules of the environment mythologized black life and commodified it for the mass audience.

To an extent, players of GTA: SA already understand the discourse because it is a collage of popular television shows and movies. The element of interactive play gives the players debatable forms of control over the narrative. As we will see in the next chapter, the use of narrative in videogames can offer both elements of free-play and structure. ‘Digital blackface’ is a term by which to frame the current appropriation of the black masculine body. In his chapter the digital blackface will be given historical context
by first looking at the commodification of the black masculine image through several transmedial phenomenon (the stage). The historical context of the digital blackface furthers the assessment of this analysis that objectification and exploitation found in GTA: SA is not a new form of racism but rather an ongoing historical reiteration of a dominant ideology.

Stuart Hall argues that, “Codes refer to signs which are the ‘maps of meaning’ into which culture is classified; and those ‘maps of social reality’ have a whole range of social meanings, practices and usages, power and interest ‘written in’ to them” (Makus 499). From its arrival on the American soil the African body was deemed a commodity. The auction block was a type of proverbial stage upon which human beings were codified and equated to cattle. Historically the black body has been re-conceptualized through several mediums (stages): Stage I-the auction block; II-the theatrical stage; III-the radio; televisual, and film stage, and now the digital world, stage IV. As the black body is commodified it has been striped of its cultural heritage and indoctrinated or assimilated into a system of patriarchal oppression which bell hooks refer to as, “plantation patriarchy”.9 The overall argument of hooks’ terminology claims that the type of patriarchal dominance practiced today in black culture was not cultural but learned from outside influences. These mythologized stages demonstrate how the black body becomes a commodified text with sliding signifiers throughout historical representation. Digital blackface is the end result of mythologized representation and is consistent with hegemony. The exploited class accepts, believes, and becomes the mythologized image through simulation.

Representation through the white gaze has burdened people of color in this country. Yousman (2003) argues that the socially constructed black identity was in part the justification for enslavement. He writes that, “All men are equal, but of course Blacks are not men-they are almost men, each slave two-thirds of a man, each Black a quasi-

9hooks (2004) asserts that, “Transplanted African men, even those coming from communities where sex roles shaped the division of labor, where the status of men was different and most times higher than that of women, had to be taught to equate their higher status as men with the right to dominate women, they had to be taught patriarchal masculinity. The gender politics of slavery and white—supremacist domination of free black men was the school where black men from different African tribes, with different languages and value systems, learned in the “new world” patriarchal masculinity” (3).
man, and therefore considered as the other” (378). How strong an African male looked or the how fertile an African woman appeared drove up the price of a slave for buyers at auction, and consequently the wealth of slave master could be determined by how many slaves were owned. Skin color, determined the fate of not just the early slaves but generations to come. hooks (2004) argues that, “According to racist ideology, white-supremacist subjugation of the black male was deemed necessary to contain the dehumanized beast” (48). Blackness in this country is a commodifiable text for the purpose of maintaining economic power. It is a text that 1) is socially constructed and 2) is mythologized within the mass public as sub-standard or less than human. In essence the loss of historical significance, the re-conceptualization and commodification of the black masculine body as a text results in its cultural death. This is a notion that Guy Debord addresses in his analysis of social formations.

French Theorist Guy Debord (2001) in his analysis of the Society of the Spectacle (1967) argues that, “the end of cultural history manifests itself on two opposite sides: the project of its suppression in total history, and the organization of its preservation as a dead object in spectacular contemplation” (184). The spectacle is the affirmation of appearance and the negation of life. It is the function of the spectacle to re-interpret cultural history into a pseudo-reality that can easily be consumed by the dominate culture for social economic functions. The image as it becomes commodified moves further and further away from its original meaning (cultural death). Debord’s notion of a commodified spectacle looks at the image as the final reification of the commodity and therefore consumption results in spiritual death. The commodification of the spectacle brings about cultural death through the re-telling or re-conceptualization of history. Thus spectacle and consumption are linked to identity, and agency, and are central to the current pattern of what bell hooks defines as ‘imperialist nostalgia’.

The auction block (Stage I) level of the analysis theorizes that the black body in American is analogous to a type of commodified text which undergoes a cultural death in order to maintain the economic formations of the dominant class. Stage II, the theatrical stage, looks at representations of the black image that, through practice or ritual, perpetuates the dominant ideologies of the first stage. In the second stage myths become part of the social fabric. Hall argues that, “For the consensus to be legitimized, events
and practices must be defined in a way that makes them appear to represent the natural order of things. They must be endowed with a perspective of naturalness and inevitability that renders alternative constructions unimaginable, outside the realm of consideration” (Makus, 498). Blackface minstrelsy considers the epistemic value of Hall assertions because it is through the medium of stage and performance that myths are replayed and fortified in the social imagination. Blackface minstrelsy presents several continuous notions. First, it demonstrates how dominant ideologies are relayed to the audience while at the same time fortifying those beliefs structures through ritual. Finally, because they are cultural production, minstrelsy exhibits the articulation of hegemony. This theme of ethnic appropriation in a dramatic form begins as an early American entertainment present during the 1800’s and again during the 2000’s as GTA:SA.

The problem with minstrel and blackface routines, which satirized African Americans, is that for the most part neither the performers themselves, nor the audiences who laughed at their antics, belonged to the satirized group. Albert McLean, *American Vaudeville as Ritual* (Hilmes, 310)

The institution of blackface minstrelsy fundamentally re-appropriates humans as agents who work to maintain the ideals of the status quo. In a dramatic fashion the staged theatrical experience performs what Kenneth Burke refers to as symbolic action. He argues that dramatic text performs a type of symbolicity that demonstrates for the viewer behaviors that are to be molded in real life. The usage of drama in text operates to shape, define, and constrain social relations and behaviors (Gudas, 3). In other words, dramatic literature is equated to parables that teach society how to interact. Much in that fashion blackface minstrelsy presented the image of the Negro as a natural savage content in confinement.

Initially blackface performances during the early 1800’s were low-brow performances which appeared between the acts of plays (Moody, 322). Often associated with burlesques shows, they became more popular during war time when performers in blackface would walk about the audience singing nostalgic songs about the institutions of the South. Minstrelsy became more popular in the South during the Civil War era as anti-emancipation propaganda. The usage of black face minstrelsy was a strategy which
reinforced dominant ideologies about black people. It also maintained the institution of slavery as a means toward economic stability. In order for this process to take place two tenets of hegemony are needed; the perpetuation of a normative ideology and the acceptance of the rhetoric by the sub-altern group.

Gramsci’s notion of hegemony considers social formations (political, economic, and ideological) as tactics used by the dominant classes to maintain their power (Hall, 416). Gramsci stipulates two ways in which power is achieved. Different groups struggle for power and that power can be achieved generally through ‘war of position’ and ‘war of maneuver’. dominance is not a static formation, rather something maintained over time. Social domination is not entirely maintained through the overt oppression of the Other. It is, however, facilitated through several institutions. Cultural production (theater) is an institution that has the capacity to reach mass audiences. The struggle for control engineered by different groups vying for power creates an ‘unstable equilibrium’ (Barlow and Davis, 3-4). As an institution, minstrelsy served the hegemonic purpose of the dominant class essentially subverting power by appropriating the voice of the ‘Other’. Mythologized representations of the ‘Other’ operated as ritual used to control the shifting power struggles alive in the country brought impetus by abolitionist and rebellions.

Although there were other incarnations, beginning in the late 1700’s and early 1800’s, blackface performances did not attain mainstream success until 1843 when a full evening was performed in blackface by a group named The Virginia Minstrels (Moody, 322). With that success other groups began mimicking the style of performance and toured to other countries such as England and Germany. The structure of an evening in blackface consisted of two parts. The “First Part” contained a humorous dialogue

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10 ‘War of maneuver’, where everything is condensed into one front and one moment of struggle, there is a single, strategic breach in the ‘enemy’s differences which, once made, enables the new forces to rush in and obtain a definitive (strategic) victory. ‘War of position’ which has to be conducted in a protracted way, across many different and varying fronts of struggle; where there is rarely a single break-through which wins the war once and for all in a flash, as Gramsci puts it.

11 These initial representations were used to rationalize the enslavement of African people and to justify the institution of slavery in the South. As early as 1781, in a play called the Divorce, and then again in 1795, in a romantic farce entitled The Triumphs of Love, a black character named Sambo appeared on the American stage. (Barlow and Davis, 6)
between the Interlocutor and the End Man. The “Second Part” contained the Olio and burlesque. In his article, *The Minstrel Show as Theater of Misrule*, Jules Zanger (2003) argues that, “The Olie’s monologues operated as parodies, these monologues functioned as two-edged instruments, ridiculing both the attempts of the blacks to imitate educated whites, and, at the same time, ridiculing the savants, politicians, preachers, and reformers themselves” (35). The performers often improvised their material in order to appeal to the sentiments of their middle-class audiences. The minstrel stage historically depicted black masculinity within several broad stereotypes which sought to maintain the reasons for their domination. The first, made popular by Thomas Dartmouth “Daddy” Rice was the caricature of Jim Crow and his dance.12 The others that followed were; The Brute, The Coon (derived from raccoon), Uncle Tom, Sambo, and Step-n-Fetch it.

War and propaganda play a key determining factor in the construction of racial identities in America. Leading up to and preceding the Civil War blackface characterizations were used to appeal toward Southern sentimentally and beliefs about slavery and the South. Moody argues that:

Southerners would like to believe that “Dixie” was composed as a patriotic song for the south; but disillusioning as the fact may be, it was originally composed because Dan Emmett was called upon to furnish Bryant’s minstrels with a snappy “walk-around” to finish off their performance. First sung at Merchant’s Hall on lower Broadway, September 12, 1859, it was introduced at a burlesque show in New Orleans just before the Civil War, and form this performance it caught on and became the stirring war song of the South. (325)

Moody’s observations specifically reveal the hypocritical nature of the socially constructed normative beliefs that minstrelsy created as a formal institution. Blackface minstrelsy fundamentally represents Hall’s notion of constructed ideologies articulated through the ritualization of popularized myths. However, not obscured from criticism is the involvement of people of African heritage who participated in blackface

12 One of the most elaborate explanations was that given by Robert Nevin. According to Nevin the dance originated in Cincinnati, and the original performer was a crippled stable boy who was obliged by his infirmity to walk in a curious jumping fashion. This crippled jump copied and elaborated by Rice, was the basis for the “Jim Crow” dance. (Moody, 322)
entertainment. The notion seems absurd; nevertheless it is central to hegemony and assimilation.

Essential to the practice of hegemony is the ability of the dominant class to acculturate and neutralize those voices that deviate from the mainstream belief structure. Contrary to the popularized myths articulated by the purveyors of cultural production there were some African writers who depicted the lives of African-Americans as heroes and people who could control their own destiny. In the article *Split Image: African Americans in the Mass Media*, Davis and Barlow (1993) articulate the notion that black minstrel performers utilized ‘parody’ and ‘signifying’ were strategic devices to subvert caricatures produced by white performers and authors.  

While black performers sought to re-appropriate the language in order to reassert their identity, this notion was a double-edged sword. Without control of the medium (theatrical stage) participation by people of color in some cases could be seen as a detriment. Barlow and Davis (1993) explain that, “Although black entertainers eventually came to dominate postbellum minstrelsy white businessmen owned and controlled it. They demanded that the black performers, they hired, reproduce the outdated routines and caricatures of the antebellum minstrel show” (14). The perpetuation of blackface minstrelsy portrayed by black performers reaffirmed the mainstream beliefs specific to that time that black people actually liked slavery and could not live independently from whites. This reaffirmed the ineptitude of the black culture in the white patriarchal gaze.

There are several reasons why a black performer, such as a Bert Williams, would choose to perpetuate a deprecating stereotype, in effect Othering themselves while accepting the system of domination that dehumanizes them. Bert Williams is similar to a DJ Pooh who help contributed content elements to GTA: SA. The acceptance of the dominant belief structure is a type of identification through assimilation. In her book *Black Looks: Race and Representation* bell hooks (1994) argues that, “Concurrently,

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13 Parody is especially well-suited to the needs of the powerless, precisely because it assumes the forces of the dominant discourse only to deploy that force, through a kind of artistic jujitsu, against domination.” Signifying on the other hand, is a rhetorical strategy calculated to reverse dialogue by turning a statement back on itself in order to gain the upper hand in a verbal contest; it is yet another “double-voiced” or intertextual practice that seeks to subvert existing power relations. (Barlow and Davis 13)

14 Bert Williams embodied the absurd contradictions of this process: he donned blackface makeup to perform on stage-a black man imitating white men imitating black men. (Lipsitz 64)
marginalized groups, deemed, Other, who have been ignored, rendered invisible, can be seduced by the emphasis on Otherness, by its commodification, because it offers the promise of recognition and reconciliation” (26). In her estimation the perpetuation of stereotypes by the sub-altern group is a type of assimilation. Members of the sub-altern group who have effectively been Othered through commodification are simply searching for their identity. As a medium, the theatrical stage only produces the spectacle as Debord (1967) argued, “The negation of life” (184). The desire of the audience to find pieces of themselves through cultural production is consistent with Burke’s notion of symbolic action, articulated earlier. The other tactic and alternative to identification is better articulated through survival culture.

Parody and signifying were linguistic and narrative tactics used by black authors in order to reclaim cultural identity. Survival culture refers to the notion that black people in America must in some form or another assimilate into the white patriarchal system in order to fulfill the basic necessities of life. Mike Dyson (2003) contends:

I think that Levis-Strauss’s notion of bricolage, of taking what’s at hand, what’s left over, so to speak, in the construction of culture to shape one’s survival and identity, is a crucial concept as well in coming to terms with this black gift to move in and through a variety of rhetorics and discourses. Then, our identities have always been fabricated out of the content of our surroundings. (Dyson 161)

Black diasporic culture fundamentally depends on the ability of the group to acclimate to the social and environmental surroundings. Further, in his book Race Matters Cornel West (1994) argues that, “Black survival required accommodation with and acceptance from white America. Accommodation avoids any sustained association with the subversive and transgressive—be it communism or miscegenation. In short, struggling black institutions made a Faustian pact with white America” (124). This is similar to hook’s notion of plantation patriarchy discussed earlier. West’s argument presents the notion that black culture in America must perpetuate and accept the de-humanizing tenets of the dominate ideology in order to avoid extinction. Part of this acculturation deals with accepting basic tenets of capitalism and materialism. Debord’s transformation of the wage-labor relationship furthers the assimilation and survival assertion. He writes:
This incessant expansion of economic power in the form of the commodity, which transformed human labor into commodity-labor, into wage-labor, cumulatively led to an abundance in which the primary question of survival is undoubtedly resolved, but in such a way that it is constantly rediscovered; it is continually posed again each time at a higher level. The abundance of commodities, namely, of commodity relations, can be nothing more than increased survival. (Debord 42)

Black performers who reaffirmed and perpetuated the blackface minstrel stylization in order to maintain a livelihood are a metaphorical extension of Debord’s transformation of the wage-labor relationship due to the commodification of the spectacle. Fundamentally all blackface minstrel performers made their living off the perpetuation of a socially constructed spectacle or ‘myth’. Survival depended on the acceptance of a type of bourgeois ideology. Dominic Strinati (1995) in *Structuralism, Semiology and Popular Culture* asserts that, “freedom is a luxury; it is possible only if you first acknowledge the obligations of your nature” (119). Live Free or Die.

The slow dissolution of blackface minstrel performance in the post-Civil War era was not due to any changing conceptualization of blackness in American. The death of minstrel performance was due to public demands that the art form could not meet. In his article *Negro Minstrelsy* Rick Moody (1944) contends that the death of minstrelsy was due to; the demand for bigger shows, cost of staging, and a sharp drop in the number of troupes (327). Ultimately economic demand and popularity is what influenced the depictions in the theatrical medium.

The Second stage of the commodification of the black masculine body is an exploration of the re-appropriation of the black narrative voice by the arbiters of the dominant class in order to maintain the institution of slavery. This is also the same epoch in time in which the stylization of the black experience becomes a fundamental aspect of entertainment in America, and an essential pillar of stage III.

George Lipsitz (1990) argues that, “The ever expanding influence, reach and scope of the mass media has worked insidiously to legitimate exploitative social hierarchies, to colonize the body as a site of capital accumulation, and to inculcate the desire within us to the idea that consumer desire is the logical center of human existence”
Representations of blackness in the third stage are based on the commodification of the black body as a text within the realm of radio, television, and film. It is important to understand that the representation of African-American life is not a static phenomenon. Whereas the dominant ideology may remain the same, the manifestation and practice of dominant power structures adapt in order to maintain authority. This is central to Gramsci’s notion of hegemony and war of position discussed earlier. Similarly Hall refers to this phenomenon as, “sliding the negative meaning along a chain of connotative signifiers” (Makus, 503). In other words, blackness potentially represents several social constructs; inept childishness, taboo sexuality, and social menace. In this instance blackness begins to represent multiple things, all of which are negative. More appropriately blackness in mainstream media will begin to take on an archetype that is structurally the anti-thesis of whiteness. This social menace archetype does for whiteness what Dubois describes as ‘negative inculpability,’ that is the notion that poor whites derived pleasure and some cultural benefit by not being the “nigger” (Dyson, 105). The de-centering of the racial other perpetuates or reinscribes white racial superiority. Blackness will serve as a paradox that perpetuates the necessity of mainstream society towards the strict adherence to Victorian Protestant values. Through its negation and visibility in mainstream media blackness will teach the mass public how to be American (white)¹⁵.

The radio and television characters Amos ‘n’ Andy represent a turning point in the depictions of African Americans as a commodifiable text on the American stage. More importantly they signify the transition of old minstrel stylizations to a more influential stage (mass media). With the advent of radio replacing theater as America’s primary source of entertainment, two white performers Freeman Gosden and Charles Correll premiered “Sam and Henry” as a radio broadcast on the World’s Greatest Newspaper (WGN) radio station on January 12, 1926 (Hilmes, 306). Gosden and Correll, who performed in the traditional minstrel dialect, changed the title to Amos ‘n’ Andy on March 19, 1928. The minstrel performers, in the aurally centered medium of

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¹⁵ Another way of saying this is that the invention of America and the invention of whiteness are ideologically intertwined because the construction of narratives of domination are indissolubly linked to the expansion of the colonial empire. (Dyson 100)
radio, relied heavily on minstrel dialects and accents as signifiers of race generally accepted as “black”. As a relative narrative, Amos ‘n’ Andy relied on the mythos of dislocation and the adjustment of country bumpkins to city life (Atlanta, Georgia to Chicago, Illinois). This circumstance presents the notion that Amos ‘n’ Andy were perpetual outsiders having to adjust to foreign situations. The program became a sensation among immigrants in America who empathized with the disoriented plight of the two Georgia natives in Chicago.

In her article *Invisible Men: Amos n Andy and the Roots of Broadcast Discourse* Hilmes (1993) argues that, “it was radio- more than any other medium that acted as an agent of cultural assimilation in the United States, and that it is precisely this topic that became one of American broadcasting’s central concerns as it developed its characteristic forms in the late 1920s and early 1930” (313). In its radio incarnation, and later in television, Amos ‘n’ Andy represented a black world completely segregated from the white world. Hilmes writes that creators Gosden and Correll presented Amos ‘n’ Andy’s world as, “as entirely self-sufficient and prosperous, with its own professional and business class, heirs, and heiresses, millionaires, bankers, police and so on, never encountering any kind of racial barriers, never encountering the white world of strict segregation and racial discrimination in any form” (309). This projection of the black world correlates to Gray’s notion of pluralist representation of blackness in contemporary television. He argues that pluralist images of African Americans present a world that is separate but equal (298). Obscured from representation, however, is the concept of diversity within the black community or interracial relationships in the United States. Separate but equal discourse reaffirms the rhetoric of categorization and segregation consistent to that time period. Amos ‘n’ Andy provided a cursory unrealistic perspective of black life that potentially framed it without any real depth. Through performer invisibility the delicate balance that the show established with its viewers was disturbed when the show made the transition to television during the early the 1950s.

During the 1953 season Gosden and Correll, who had hired and trained black actors to play the central roles of the program, were forced to deal with the realization that their show would be taken off the air due to social protest and the lack of a major sponsor. Lipsitz (1990) states that, the NAACP argued in federal court that, “black
citizens routinely suffered abuse from whites addressing them as “Amos” or “Andy,” and that the program defamed black professionals by presenting them as liars and cheats” (65). It was the lack of corporate sponsors, however, that maintained that caused Amos ‘n’ Andy not to be shown in syndication. There are two possible reasons as to why Amos ‘n’ Andy within the televisual medium elicited such a strong reaction from audience and political groups. First, in the televisual arena the performers were no longer invisible. The black actors on screen created a one to one relationship between representation and behavior. Hilmes (1993) quotes M.P. Ely as arguing that, “the visual component of television forced the symbolic quality of Amos ‘n’ Andy’s “blackness” to take on a literal form” (315). The second reason goes back to the previous notion that war shapes cultural identity. Hilmes quotes Ely as arguing that in the post WWII era the type of buffoon caricatures presented by Amos ‘n’ Andy were outdated and irrelevant. Black identity for males had become one that sought out mutual respect and was more cognizant of the rights granted abroad and denied at home. The changing value structure of post-WWII America favored shows like The Goldbergs, Father Knows Best, and Leave it to Beaver. These were shows that re-affirmed the (white) middle class and their values while making blackness obsolete and invisible. However, Lipsitz (1990) argues that, “Placed in historical context, Amos ‘n’ Andy did for the values of the 1950s what the minstrel show accomplished for previous generations” (65). Looking at Amos ‘n’ Andy as an example furthers the assertion that the stylizations of Afro-American masculinity perpetuated by the white supremist patriarchal system operated as a commodifiable text that carried associative meanings across mediums and time. While Amos ‘n’ Andy operated as a specific example within the realm of radio and television they were also part of a larger construction that manifested itself within different incarnations that have sliding social meaning. This is true for all mass media especially film.

There are two very important films that set the stage for black representation in early mainstream media; Birth of a Nation (Griffith, 1915) and The Jazz Singer (Crosland, 1927). Film provides a historical examination into the psyche of American culture regarding the depiction of race, class, and gender. The commodification of the black masculine image pertaining to its representation in television and film is framed as a sexual taboo, social menace, or consumable product. The presence of black bodies in
film (and videogames: GTA: SA) symbolically represents a reductive conceptualization of blackness through consumerism and mythification. As critic and scholar Bill Yousman (2003) points out, “historians like Bogle (1993) argued that, images of sexually dangerous Black men have been the norm since the advent of electronic mass media in the U.S:  

“The black brute was a barbaric black out to raise havoc. Audiences could assume that the physical violence served as an outlet for a man who was sexually repressed. In the Birth of a Nation (1915), the black brutes, subhuman and feral, are the nameless characters setting out on a rampage full of Black rage. (p 13)” (Yousman 385)

The character CJ in GTA: SA is a descendent of D.W. Griffith’s characterization of black masculinity in Birth of a Nation. Comparatively the spectacular commodification and ‘eating of the Other’ practiced today is similar to Al Jolson’s blackface minstrel performance in the 1922 motion picture The Jazz Singer. Further, film more than any other medium provides the contextual framework required to fully examine GTA: SA. The dramatic elements that comprise the game are taken from Godfather, Scarface, Colors, Boyz N the Hood as well as other films.

Spectacular commodification of the black masculine image in the game is derived from its filmic predecessors. This is what Yousman (2003) refers to as “spectacular consumption”. In his book Reading Race, Norman Denzin (2002) argues that there are four historical categorizations of black representation in film. Similar to the stereotypical archetypes of black masculinity, these categories are constantly updated throughout history in order to maintain the dominate ideology and resist any notions that oppose what is presented in media as normative. The categorizations of blackness in film represented the formulation of dramatic narratives that 1) depicted the need for pure segregation (1930-1945), 2) advocated social consciousness of segregation (1947-1962), 3) argued for assimilation (1980), and 4) examined black separatism (1970’s blaxploitation and 1990’s hood films) (27). It is evident from these representative categorizations that film narratives represent the changing social ideals regarding race.

16 Spectacular consumption implies that images of “authentic” Black life are transformed into mediated spectacles that Whites can purchase in the mass-mediated marketplace (378)
and culture in America but do not however de-contextualize the sub-human linkages or attempt to frame blackness as a normal state of being. The debate about race in this country and on film conceptualizes blackness as the ultimate ‘Other’ and separate from what is considered the norm. Denzin (2002) argues that, “by the mid-1920s Hollywood had firmly put in place a system of visual and narrative racism that privileged whiteness. Rarely protagonists, ethnics merely provided local color, comic relief or easily recognizable villains and dramatic foils” (20). Denzin’s assertion validates the notion that blacks on film and throughout representation on the American stage have been presented as sub-human. Denzin’s categorizations present two interesting notions, the perpetuation of old ideals pertaining to blackness and the acceptance of dominant ideologies by the sub-altern group.

Films that advocated for or against segregation refer to films prior to the Civil Rights movement. Moving towards more contemporary circumstances, the second two categorizations that Denzin establishes are films that argued for assimilation and films that examined black separatism. They are an important consideration because GTA: SA temporally represents the late 80’s early 90’s. First, assimilation and integration in film presented the illusion of equality and humanization during the Civil and post-Civil Rights era. The Civil rights and the accompanying abolishment of old separate-but-equal Jim Crow laws were legally coming to an end result during the 1970’s. Films during the blaxploitation era of the 1970’s presented an exotic fetishized world of social deviance which justified anti-black legislation that catered to the illusion of inclusion into mainstream society. It also suggested that blacks in urban settings were becoming a marketable demographic. Through the re-imaginings of blaxploitation films black life was, like Amos ‘n’ Andy, conceptualize into Gray pluralist notion of black representation in media. Pluralist depiction is consistent with bell hooks’ ‘eating the Other.’

Blaxploitation does not seek to authentically represent black life but rather market it to audiences that will live vicariously through it. This furthers the uses and gratifications function of media by facilitating an avenue that allows fantasy and escape for the audience. Denzin (2002) argues that, “The blaxploitation and black comedies of the 1970s celebrated life in the black urban community (usually Harlem), including ‘black roots… and the trappings of the ghetto: the tenements, as well as the talk, the mannerisms
and the sophistication of the streets” (Denzin, 28). Once again these films re-defined authentic black experiences. Similar to Amos ‘n’ Andy, they did not delve into the multi-tiered and multi-cultural aspects of black life. Blaxploitation films adhered to the tenets of separatism. The films of the 80’s attempted to focus less on race because it was a turbulent topic associated with The Civil Rights Movement. These films depicted race as fully emersed into mainstream society creating an ethnicity that is invisible and abnormal.

The racial climate in the post-Civil Rights era of the 80’s was one that attempted to focus less on race or ethnicity and more on homogeneity. Major steps toward integration sought to eliminate blackness as different while at the same time eliminating cultural ethnicity all together. This is the beginning of the assault on the wel-fare state and affirmative action. Homogenization of culture assumes that there is no racial difference or systems of oppression that afflict ethnic groups. And consequently no need to invest in social programs aimed at leveling the playing field.

Similar to the movie Scarface (De Palma, 1983), the 80’s was a decade generally known for excess and materialism. Mainstream society focused more on individualism and the acquisition of personal wealth. Victorian values implied that these goals could be met through hard work and determination, rather than group rights or communal development. A prime example of this phenomenon is the superstar status of emerging figures like Michael Jordan. Michael Jordan represented the mainstream American model to which blacks in America should aspire. This is a troubling notion because it creates the precedent that black masculinity should aspire to be athletic rather than focusing on black intelligence. Dyson (2003) further argues that, “It’s not authentic for blacks to speak articulately. It’s not authentic for them to engage in intellectual performances.” As a result, there is a reduction ad absurdum argument made that rest on white supremacist beliefs which, ironically enough, attempt to name the narrowly conceived strengths of black culture: it’s about the articulation of the self through the body” (30). To some extent Michael Jordan’s ascension into the mainstream represents the erasure of ethnicity and the reaffirmation of dominant Victorian beliefs and Protestant work ethic during the 80’s. The success of many black stars in mainstream America is a double edged sword because it reflects the best and worst imagery of the black community. Members of the
black community who hold on to their cultural identity and reject the Victorian belief structures are seen as deviant. Cultural homogeneity assuages white guilt because it places the blame of economic plight of black America back on the anti-assimilationist community rather than on dominant institutions that maintain white power. These social debates appeared in films as African Americans appeared more often in mainstream cultural productions. This is reminiscent of what West referred to as the Faustian pact; people of African descent who accept mainstream depictions of blackness during minstrelsy. Denzin (2002) asserts that during the 80’s, “Films did all they could ‘to make audiences forget the blackness of a black star’. Blackness was fitted to a white cultural context. Black stories (The Color Purple) were told within a white, Disney-like, Victorian melodramatic format” (28). In film the 80’s represented inclusion into society on the condition of acceptance of dominant social beliefs and the denial of any cultural heritage.

The films of the 90’s, like the 70’s, explored the anti-assimilationist, separatists, world of black life through ‘hood’ films like *Boyz N the Hood* (Singleton, 1991). Films of the 90’s returned to that black world as being separate from the white world but also maintained elements of the individualism materialism modeled during the 80’s. The commodification of the black masculine image in the third stage establishes the basic framework of the fourth stage because it establishes the cultural context from which GTA: SA is derived from. Movies like *Boyz N the Hood, Menace II Society,* and *Colors* establish three harmful precedents. First, they present a type of spectacular cinematic racial violence. Second, that spectacular racial violence and the location of the ghetto became the authentic representation of black life. Third, similar to the failed tactics of parody and signification used by black authors during blackface minstrelsy, the tactics used by producers of ‘hood films’ during the 90’s failed to deter white and black audiences from black violence. Their tactics, instead, reaffirmed mainstream interpretations of black society.

The depictions of racial violence in ‘hood’ films presented the aura of spectacular cinematic racial violence. The usage of cinematic devices like slow motion and special effects added to the illusion of reality and the authenticity of ghetto life. The explicit and grotesque the violence is futhers its believibility. As Denzin argues this reality was
achieved by filmic devices that create the spectacle, “The spectacle is montage, death
scenes up-close, dead bodies moving through space, blood on sidewalks, drive-bys in
slow-motion” (112). They are what he calls, “imitation without satire, a cinema of
excess racial violence turned into spectacle”. Racial violence in this venue propels black
crime and death fantastically into the realm of myth because it gives the spectator a
closer more indepth look into an already fetished and commodified world. In the film
and subsequently in video games the magic of the cut-scene transports the viewer to
another location, releaving them of the pressure of having to deal with the ramifications
of the violent acts. The mise-en-scene elements; music, setting, characters, costumes,
and ghetto vernacular commissioned by the producers and directors of ‘hood’ films
elicited certain ascepts of cultural authenticity.

Dyson (2003) argures that, “The exclusive identification of the ghetto as the
authentic black home is wholly destructive” (154). ‘Hood’ films of the 90’s
conceptualized the location of the ghetto as the sole location of black existence, and, in
affect established a type of black authenticity. The present day acceptance or complicity
towards inequality and impoverishment within the black community is highly
contradictory with and to the rhetoric of the Civil Rights movement. The erasure of
cultural history and objectives is what Dyson (2003) re-articulates as ‘Afroamnesia’, that
is, “the almost systematic obliteration of the dangerous memory of black suffering and
racial solidarity” (154). Buying into the notion that the impoverished sites of the ghetto
were/are the authentic habitat of the black community correlates to hook’s notion of
assimilation and contemporary conservative hegemony. Some members of the sub-altern
group buy into their own oppression because the cultural field has been so absent of their
presence that they are simply looking for identification. The people of the sub-altern
group who considered 90’s hood films as authentic black life suffer from ‘Aframnesia’.
They grew up during a decade with mainstream representations of blackness devoid of
the racial pride and civil rights rhetoric of the 70’s. ‘Hood’ films constructed a black
world by presenting fantastic narratives in socially realistic circumstances. The
generation born after the Civil Rights movement were unable understand the poor
economic status of black America, as Tupac asserts in Tupac Resurrection (Lazin, 2003),
bought into the individualist and materialist ideologies of the 80’s. Young black
audiences going to see mainstream films identified with the plight of the characters on screen. Denzin (2002) argues that, “These films use ethnographic and cinematic realism to achieve their ideological effects; dirty violent ghetto culture seen up close. These effects are produced through close-ups, voice-over narration, and vernacular speech” (114).

‘Parody’ and ‘signification’ during blackface minstrelsy were tactics that ultimately failed to change the landscape of racial representations on stage and in the entertainment industry due to ideology which is embodied in white ownership of the industry. Those tactics were used to re-appropriate the black voice and narratives. In affect reclaiming cultural agency through the control of the black voice. Dyson (2003) argues that, “Nostalgia, at least in that light, is an attempt to exercise sovereignty over memory, to force it into redemptive channels away from the tributaries of trauma that flood the collective black psyche. It is the attempt to rescue ethnic agency and hence manage and control the perception of suffering-from the fateful forces of racial terror” (158). Re-appropriation of identity and culture through 90’s ‘hood’ films can be considered a tactic used by such filmmakers as John Singleton who directed Boyz N the Hood. It is Singleton’s assertion that the depiction of racial violence in the film is a deterrent to that type of lifestyle. Further, during the movie there were lessons taught about gentrification and fathers in the home. However, Denzin (2002) argues that, “hood movies failed to meet the critical challenge for black filmmakers; namely to ‘expand the discussion of race and representation beyond debates about good and bad imagery” (116).

Yousman (2003) and Massood (1993) both argue that violent and sexual images that conceptualize authentic black life, despite the author’s intentions, perpetuate conservative racist culture and justify anti-black violence (police brutality/racial profiling) and legislation (affirmative action and welfare). It is the opinion of cultural critics that Singleton’s goals would be better served if he had argued his points while resisting partriarchal domination. Denzin (2002) writes, “These ghetto-centric narratives glorify violence. In elaborating the urban gangster film genre, they celebrate a violent, misogynist masculinity; a gender politics that turns women into crack addicts, ho’s, bitches, and lazy welfare mothers”(113). Singleton’s tactic of cultural re-appropriation, although good intentioned, was inscribed in a racist language of dominantion. A solution
offered by bell hooks (2004) who argues that, “The real agency and power of black liberation struggle was felt when black male leaders dared to turn away from primitive models of patriarchal violence and warfare toward a politics of cultural transformation rooted in love”(65). Transformative love advocates dialogue and discourse rather than oppressive violence. Where as hook’s notion of transformative love would be one extreme end and Singleton’s tactic the middle, GTA: SA subverts all notions of racial uplift and struggle while maintaining the dialectical opposite of transformative love.

The poem that begins this chapter, from *Hip Logic* by Terrance Hayes (2000), conceptualizes the formation of the black body as the site of spectatorship and learning through the perspective of a dreamer. The dreamer seeks to understand blackness by creating a mythologized representational archetype. The end result, as we see in the poem, is death. The same death culture experiences when it becomes a commodifiable text under the circumstance of ‘imperialist nostalgia’. In the American mainstream imagination the black body becomes a commodifiable text that contains several sliding meanings that ultimately result in its cultural/spiritual death. The black body, as a text, is so far from its original position that it can never be reached again. This is reminiscent of Marx’s concept of alienation and the loss of spirituality due to commodity fetishism. In the book *The Destruction of Black Civilization* Chancellor Williams (1976) argues the same notion asserted by Marx. He writes:

> The outlook is distressing because somewhere back down the line of time the effort to advance toward a higher order of life, in something called Civilization, by ever widening the gap that separates men from beasts-this effort failed. And it failed because in his sudden and amazing successes in science and technology man outsmarted himself, concentrating almost entirely on his mind power at the expense of his humanizing spiritual power, became not the master of his machines but their servant; and, in the process of acquiring seemingly limitless power, this segment of the human race became as soulless as it machines and began to destroy or conquer other peoples, seizing their lands and their wealth while reducing them as nearly as possible to a state of perpetual dependency. (380)
Implicated in the failure of civilization is the commodification of the black image. The entire notion of humanity becoming what it mechanically creates is the sole thesis explored in the following chapters. Chapter three examines the fourth stage of black representation as a commodifiable text: the digital world.
Chapter 3

The Digital World

The previous chapter addressed the commodification of the black masculine body across several stages of representation. The different stages represented the mediums in which the economic exploitation of a lesser group is normalized, ritualized, and reproduced. The first stage considered the auction block as a medium where the image of the black body was equated to, and depicted as, a savage or beast. De-humanization thus became the justification for enslavement. The second stage of the analysis examined blackface minstrelsy as a tool used by the dominate class to appropriate the black voice and reinforce the mythologized de-humanizing linkages associated with black masculinity through ritualized cultural production. This stage featured the emergence of several black caricatures like ‘Uncle Tom’ created primarily from the white imagination. These images were engineered to entertain and reinforce the belief that blacks inept children and were best served by the structures and controls of white middle-class America. The third stage addressed the shifting of the black body as a commodified text from the minstrel stage to the radio, film, and televisual stage. In this phase, images of the black body in the various mediums articulated, for all audiences, the meaning of what it was and is to be “American”. In these medium audiences, whether immigrants during the 1920’s or film goers during the blaxploitation era learned what it meant to be American in this country was essentially not being black. Yousman (2003) argues that, “the most consistent and visible other in American civilization has historically been Black Americans, whose identification as a binary opposite has allowed White Americans to define their own Whiteness and justify the privileges that this Whiteness entails” (377). The negative stereotypes linked to bodies of African descent are simply a perpetuation of the dominant ideology of exploitation and subjugation established in stage I. The other stages demonstrate how those signs and signifiers shift over time. It is one of the central arguments of this analysis that, as Gramsci (1967) posits; myths are the “privatization of history” which implies that mythologized artifacts lose their origin or original meaning. Fundamentally this is a cultural death with very real and very tangible implications.
This chapter examines the commodification of the black masculine body in a more contemporary medium of representation, the digital stage. Here the fundamental question of the thesis will be addressed. What are the coded linkages established within GTA: SA that impact the player’s perception of black masculinity? This chapter will analyze the ways in which black masculinity is depicted, structured, and naturalized into a framework of social deviance. In order to understand the ways in which these constructions are established requires first an understanding of the digital world and interactivity through game-play. The digital stage operates as a medium, then, that seeks to shift the gaze of objectification through representation from ‘seeing’ to ‘being’. Consumers of black identity in the earlier stages experienced black life vicariously through watching. In the digital stage the gaze shifts from representation to simulation. After understanding the significance of the digital world this analysis will then seek to deconstruct the elements within GTA: SA that facilitate the illusion of black authenticity, an authenticity predicated upon myth.

The digital stage, similar to earlier stages, utilizes dominant ideologies of subjugation and exploitation of the ethnic Other. This becomes, increasingly, an issue of addressing how power is maintained and what agents control cultural production. Jones (2005) argues that, “The production of myth is ultimately the object of the game. To win this game, to maintain power relationships in the social realm, the dominant majority must deploy images of race drawn from the cultural imaginary” (146). Power is an advantage that is created and perpetuated through ritual. GTA: SA is a game derived from racialized myths and is a ritual of dominance crafted from the earlier stages of representation repackaged as a new product. Stalabrack (1996) argues that, “Computer games are a capitalist and deeply conservative form of culture. Their political content is proscribed by the options open to democracy under contemporary capitalism” (107). Videogames, then, are activities that re-inscribe and reinforce aspects of materialism, patriarchy, and dominance. Finally Newman (2004), who cites Friedman (1995), describes gaming as, “engagement with the apparatus of the simulation ‘beneath’ or ‘behind’ the game” (25). The digital world, as it is realized through ‘play’ and videogames epitomizes a shift from image representation to simulation and is the continuation of cultural death.
Videogames are a type of computer based entertainment medium that utilize computers or personal consoles to construct an interactive environment between an individual and multiple players. The interactivity found in videogames is what differentiates the digital world of videogames from other visual mediums (stage, television and film). Ludology and Narratology are two very different ways of addressing the structure of videogames and how they are used by players. Ludology suggests analyzing the game in terms of how the player uses it or the level of game-play and goal orientation within the game. Narratology considers the structure of a videogame as a storytelling device. Both types of analysis regard videogames as a highly structured and highly rule based system that operates within varying degrees of interaction with the player. Newman (2004) argues that there are seven types of video game structures: Action and Adventure (*Sonic the Hedgehog*), Driving and Racing (*Gran Turismo*), First-Person Shooter (*Golden Eye*), Platform and Puzzle (*Tetris*), Role playing (*Final Fantasy*), Strategy and Simulation (*Civilizations*), Sports and Beat em’ups (*Streetfighter*) (13). As videogames systems become more advanced it becomes more common genres to blend in order to feature more variety during game-play. GTA: SA, for example, utilizes elements of Simulation, Driving, First-Person Shooter, and Beat em’ups. The player can drive and race cars, customize and interact with the game world, engage in hand-to-hand combat with pedestrians, use an assortment of weapons, and play basketball. These activities most of the time are not part of the narrative. The elements of free-roam, narrative, and goal orientation make GTA: SA innovative in terms of videogame structure ludus and paidea.

Newman (2004), who quotes Frasca (1999), argues that ludus, within the study of ‘play’ and ‘games’, is described as “activity organized under a system or rules that defines a victory or a defeat, a gain or a loss”(19). Games organized around the concept of ludus are activities that have pre-established rules and boundaries. Paidea, however, implies a structure that demonstrates the unlimited avenues and goals determined by the player. In other words as, Newman (2004) argues, “Paidea can be described as ‘physical or mental activity which has no immediate useful objective, nor defined objective, and whose only reason to be is based in the pleasure experienced by the player’” (19).
framework establishes videogames as a uses and gratifications medium\textsuperscript{17}. GTA: SA utilizes both elements of paidea and ludus in game play. First, the concept of free roaming is expressed in the player’s ability to explore the virtual landscape and accept or deny missions. Newman (2004) argues that, “videogames may be characterized by a sense of ‘being there,’ rather than controlling, manipulating or perhaps even ‘playing games’” (17). Advancements in technology facilitate this demand for free roaming and the sense of ‘being there’. Newman writes, “stream’ pre-recorded audio and video sequences directly from disc included larger gameworlds with varied levels; and it widened the scope for delivering extended introduction and intermission sequences” (93). The use of cut scenes within the game, which depict narrative and fictional themes borrowed from film, involve production teams similar to that of a movie. Cut scenes are non-playable dramatizations that happen within the flow of the game play. They can be flashbacks, however, most of the time cut scenes happen in relation to something that is currently happening usually incited by the players actions. They are use to communicate parts of the plot to the player. Newman (2004) elaborates on the production of cuts scenes arguing that, “sequences may be created by specialized sub-teams of directors, lighting artists, musicians and cinematographers, for example, who may not work on the playable levels of the game” (93). In other words, there are members of the productions staff who do not influence the play action of the game but are more involved with look and sound of the game. GTA: SA utilizes productions teams as well as famous actors (Samuel L. Jackson as Officer Frank Tenpenny), rappers (Ice T as Madd Dogg), and relatives of famous comedians (Charlie Murphy as Jizzy B). These mainstream stars work with other artists and extras who provided the voiceovers. The producers also create life like movements through the usage of motion capture technology (MoCap).

The use of fiction in videogames establishes the context for the rule based system. In his book \textit{Half-Real}, Jesper Juul (2005) argues that, “fiction in video games plays an important role in making the player understand the rules of the game” (163). San Andreas, as well as other Grand Theft Auto games, reward advancement to other stages

\textsuperscript{17} Uses and gratifications is concerned with how and why different audience members use the media. In other words, instead of constructing the audience as a passive element of the communication process, uses and gratifications researchers assume the audience is actively involved in their own media consumption.
after the completion of several tasks. In this aspect the fictional narrative advances the concept of goal orientation. However, the methods that one uses to get the tasks completed, whether killing people with a car or an assortment of guns, is open to the player’s discretion just as advancement to other levels is predicated upon the player’s willingness to complete missions. Juul (2005) writes, “The player experiences predefined story by completing the missions, while having freedom to solve the task in different ways. Even though the player is in principle free to ignore the missions, most players will try to complete them because they want to” (83). The usage of both elements paidea and ludus demonstrates how GTA: SA innovatively constructs the digital world. Through the usage of paidea (free-roam) the player experiences the illusion of ‘being there’. The usage of fiction, however, establishes a world of limits and boundaries.

In many regards the digital world is analogous to a fantasy or dream world. It represents what Stalabrace (1996) refers to as phantasmagoria.\(^{18}\) He writes, “Computer games, whether offering images of heaven or hell, may be seen as the desires for and fears of an imagined history” (106). The act of participation and play in the digital world represents aspects of Coaillois’ Fundamental Elements of Play, most importantly *mimicry* and *Ilinix* (Dovey 269). These elements of ‘play’ symbolize how the player utilize the medium to induce simulated mortal vertigo. Through the game world the player can simulate constructed situations (mimicry) and test the boundaries while deriving pleasure from desired disorder. Dream like utopian environments are erected which symbolize, even in disorder, what is valued and not valued. Where as the world of *The Sims* is as Juul (2004) argues an, “Open-ended simulation game by removing the goals, or more specifically, by not describing some possible outcome as better than other” (54), GTA: SA is framed as a nightmare world of ethnicity where players can experience ilinix (vertigo).

Consistent with the dream state, art and metaphors operate as reflections of society. Anne Bogart (2001) in her book *A Director Prepares* argues that, “Through metaphor we see the truth about our condition. Art is metaphor and metaphor is

\(^{18}\)Phantasmagoria: A fantastic sequence of haphazardly associative imagery, as seen in dreams or fever. Stalabrace (1996)
transformation” (57). Metaphor helps the audience transcend the mortal bounds of reality, suspend disbelief, and escape into another reality. Metaphor has its uses in theater and similarly in the realm of digital games. Juul’s assertion that videogames are a transmedial phenomenon articulates the concept that videogames are storytelling devices. The use of fiction and narrative to heighten the player’s interactivity with the created environment of structure facilitates a type of fantasy world where rules and boundaries can be tested and broken. Newman (2004), who cites Laurel (1991), argues that, “Computer users not only join the actors on stage, but become actors, abolishing the notion of audience altogether” (101). In other words, Newman and Laurel’s posit the notion that the digital world of video games facilitates a level of interactivity that encapsulates the player in an environment and situation where they are a part of the drama rather than observers. The aspect of interactivity, rather than viewing, coupled with the capacity to test metaphorical limits fashions the digital world as more real than reality or as Juul (2004) asserts “Half-Real”.

In his book Juul (2005) argues that the activity of role playing and interactivity in videogames is a type of adaptation or simulation of real life which, in terms of experience, is actually real. He writes:

Half-Real refers to the fact that video games are two different things at the same time: video games are real in that they consist of real rules with which players actually interact, and in that winning or losing a game is a real event. However when winning a game by slaying a dragon, the dragon is not a real dragon but a fictional one. To play a video game is therefore to interact with real rules while imagining a fictional world, and a video game is a set of rules as well as a fictional world. (1)

Since videogames can not fully simulate rules and mechanics of the concrete world they utilize adaptation and low-fidelity simulation. Games that involve high levels of physics construct the videogame worlds around responding to the player’s input while adapting and keeping track of the changes. The simplification of the concrete world is treated as a ‘low-fidelity simulation’. Low-fidelity simulations remove the mundane task of the

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19 The word metaphor comes from Greek meta (above) and pherein (to carry). Metaphor is that which is carried above the literal ness of life. Anne Bogart (2001)
concrete world and focus interaction in the digital world around the basic idea of the
game. GTA: SA is a game about driving cars, the task of stealing a car is an arbitrary
activity completed with the push of a button. While at the same time activities that effect
driving (like weather) may be given more focus. Low-fidelity simulations suspend
disbelief while presenting the illusion of an activity that is easily done. This is what Juul
(2005) refers to as style and simplification. He argues that, “A game does not as much
attempt to implement the real world activity as it attempts to implement a specific
stylized concept of a real-world activity” (172). Therefore, maintaining control while
driving in the rain is constructed as being more difficult than stealing a car. The notion
that a produced image can be more real than the actual product is similar to Baudrillard’s
theoretical examinations on simulacra and the hyperreal.

For Baudrillard the notion of the hyperreal is predicated upon the notion that
consumption of goods and images is the sole determinant of behavior in society. The
society of the hyperreal reverses the subject-object relationship where individuals are
representations of consumption. Baudrillard (2001) argues that, “Simulation is no longer
that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a
real without origin or reality: a hyperreal” (521). It was Baudrillard’s assertion that, due
to the substitution of signs of the real, reality no longer exists and that there is only the
hyperreal. In that regard simulation is an operational function that replicates a society of
simulacra that no longer measures itself against any ideal or original meaning. Andrews
(1998) in his analysis of Baudrillard’s hyperreal simulacra argues that the metaphysical
tenets of the commodity-sign culture as one that frames the simulated image are more
real than the real one. He writes:

The subject-object reversal of commodity-sign culture, and created a
hyperreal universe in which the human subject no longer creates objects,
but is in fact created by them. “This “metaphysical world view” is a
simulated model of reality that purports that the hyperreality of
commodity-sign culture is more real than reality itself. (189)

Simulation, then, presents the illusion of reality because it does not refer to any
prescribed belief or origin. It neither has to be rational because it presents itself as
normal. Andrews (1998) asserts that metaphysics is, “the creation of a conceptual
universe within the subjective confines of an individual’s imagination” (188). In this view, reality or knowledge is a highly subjective understanding based on previously held beliefs, experience, and societal constructs. For the society of the hyperreal the simulation is the negation of history and the acceptance of manufactured beliefs.

The digital world utilizes boundaries, fiction, and simulation. Establishing rules within free-play manufactures an environment where the player can explore because there are limits. While some games create extensive amounts of fiction and cut scenes, fiction establishes boundaries as well as facilitates role-playing. The levels of interactivity within games establish fantastic environments safe for the player to mimic or create induced disorder. Finally, adaptation or low-fidelity simulation harness the ability of the player’s imagination to create experiences that border on reality. The digital world represents another form of the commodification of the black masculine body because it is the de-contextualization of origin meaning. The digital world concretely conceptualizes a shift from representation to simulation. The next section will deconstruct the simulated world of GTA: SA and explore how it mythically re-conceptualizes black masculinity using space and time.

For most gamers the first introduction to Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas prior to the October 2004 release came in the form of a trailer. The minute long trailer began with establishing aerial views of the games’ landscape while dialogue between the main characters revealed elements of the plot. The defining characteristic of the trailer, however, was the use of the popular song “Welcome to the Jungle” by Guns N’ Roses. The use of the song juxtaposed against cut-scene and gameplay images of racialized violence (black-on-black crime and social deviance) within GTA: SA established the rhetorical assertion that San Andreas represents an environment that houses the savagery of black males. Quick cut images of violence and ‘thug’ lifestyle are cavalierly trivialized as a game, like basketball, and normalized. Primitive and savage rhetorical assertions communicated in the trailer were solidified by the accompanied song lyrics and the action on screen. Certain key lyrics match pictures on screen. ‘Fun and games’ implied Las Vegas style gambling and women, ethnic gang loitering and graffiti implied social disease, and several times the lyrics ‘jungle’ or ‘violent’ correlate to depictions of African American males. Clearly the world of GTA: SA was depicted as one latent with
objectifications of women as objects and framing ethnic characters as savages and beast amid a highly conservative and consumer driven environment.

Tied to the definition of black masculinity in the mainstream imagination is the notion of allegiance to the ghetto. Dyson (2003) argues that, “spaces of black identity are linked increasingly to a narrow slice of black turf (the ghetto). The exclusive identification of the ghetto as the authentic black home is wholly destructive” (154). Bound in the ghettocentric identity is the notion of underground illegal activities (drug-dealing) in relation to the oppressive joblessness and plight of black America. Quinn (2005) argues that, “Eazy E is the idea that street smarts can be converted into mainstream business acumen and lucrative cultural production (a longstanding idea in black ghetto pastorals, and one at the heart of gangsta rap)” (58). The mainstreaming of hip-hop in the public imagination reified gangsta rappers with ghettocentric narratives. Denzin (2002) argues that, “At one level, the hood movies re-enacted the music of the streets, going so far as to turn male rappers into on-screen performers” (115). Ice Cube’s appearance in *Boyz N the Hood* is an example of this phenomenon in film as well as Easy E’s image in GTA: SA. Eazy’s image in the videogame carries the connotations listed above and is also giving new meanings in relation to the plot of GTA: SA. These are messages and illusions of which players, if they are old enough to remember Eazy E, are cogniscent. If not, the character Ryder who is made to resemble Eazy E is just a crack smoking, back stabbing, opportunist and a depiction of black masculinity that reiterates the negative depictions in media. Allegiance and connection to the hood amid the popularized American ideals of individualism and easily gained wealth valorize gangsta rappers as true to life depictions of success. Black masculinity is inextricably linked to narratives that mythologize racialized violence.

From an afrocentric perspective communal transformation is a process engineered by political rap artist for the purposes of reclaiming cultural agency and is contingent upon speaking out against oppression. Dyson (2003) argues that, “In hip-hop culture, although rap has increasingly experimented as well with visual innovation and technique. I think that lyrical imagination is a powerful form of the narrativity that is crucial to the construction of black identities in post-modernity” (31). However, mainstream discourses which manifest utopic social visions of American life focus on the black body
as the method of transcendence and communal transformation. Good and bad images of inner city characters are centered on conservative fascinations with the black athlete, which subvert the intellectual cultural agency of the Civil Rights or Hip Hop movements. Tales of the meteoric raise of the black athlete out of the dangerous and drug infested inner city are etched into the public imagination through television and film. These tales reaffirm hard work Victorian Protestant values which, once again, reward black characters for their hard physical work rather than for their intellectual prowess. These tales, woven into the public consciousness establish a dialectical relationship between images of black masculinity in sports and gangs. The specter of basketball looms in the air of GTA: SA as a playable mini-game but CJ does not play professional basketball and therefore does not rise out of his circumstance. The only other alternative for CJ, then, is a life of crime. The black masculine community and its representation becomes divided, even in the video game world and in society, between extremely talented ball players who, despite their environment, are able to become are of the mainstream through hard work in sports. CJ represents the un-talented masses of black men who can not rap or play professional sports whose only alternative is to resort to a life of crime.

The digital space of the San Andreas world is a crucial element of this analysis because it establishes a framework for understanding the other elements of time, and character. In his book *Race, Sex, and Suspicion* Marvin Jones (2005) elaborates on the socially constructed linkages between black masculinity, the jungle setting, and primitiveness. Jones utilizes former presidential cabinet member Dr. Frederick Goodwin’s comments on the inner city in order to contextualize how biased and mainstream the correlations between blackness and savagery are. Goodwin states:

> Now one could say that of the loss of social structure in this society and particularly within high impact inner city areas, has removed some of the civilizing evolutionary things that we have built up and that maybe it isn’t just a careless use of word when people call certain areas of the city jungles. (Jones 133)

In his analysis Jones examines the social elements that conceptualize blackness as “the Freudian primitive”. The use of space in that regard contextualize the ‘ghetto’ or the ‘hood' as the discursive home of black culture while further asserting that the
environment is a ‘jungle’ implying that the inhabitants are naturally savages. Here again the use of metaphor is a powerful medium because it establishes the fluidity of mythological assertions through simplicity and essentialism. Metaphor is a device used heavily in the contextual development of the GTA: SA digital world. Jones (2005) argues that the correlation between black masculinity and the inner-city is a metaphorical duality. He writes:

The ghetto is a metaphor for “the black community.” Like black identity itself, the urban landscape of the inner city that features prominently in the videos of gangsta rap is situated within duality. The figure of the ghetto represents both the true “cultural home” of all black people, and it represents a killing ground. It is a place of vibrant African ethnicity and a place of hopelessness. (65)

The geographical architecture of the GTA: SA space is an imaginary state created to resemble; in terms of name, style, and landscape well-known West Coast cities. Los Santos, San Fierro, and Las Venturas are virtual metaphors for Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Las Vegas. In similar fashion to earlier Grand Theft Auto games, advancement to other areas of the game map is dependent upon the completion of missions within the narrative. Los Santos is the first level of the adventure whereas Las Venturas (physically stationed above Los Santos) is the pinnacle to which CJ must ascend to. These digital cities embellish all the stereotypes about sex, drugs, and violence for which the actual locations are known. Present in all the locations is a latent satirical and sexual overtone imbedded within both the visual and lingual text. The use of metaphor and satirical humor in the game is a medium for the developers to discuss issues that may be considered taboo in mainstream society. The locations also have other operational functions. Location also represents elements of fiction and game structure. Consistent with Stalabrass’ (1996) assertion that computer games present deeply capitalist and conservative forums of culture, GTA: SA exemplifies this notion by creating playable and non-playable areas centered upon consumption and materialism. One defining feature of GTA: SA, different from other installments, is the ability to completely customize the character CJ. Similar to the game play established in the popular videogame The Sims, the player can determine CJ’s haircut, tattoos, style of
dress, and physique. The sex appeal and popularity of the character CJ is predicated on his physical appearance (not intelligence) and in some part physical appearance impacts where he can and can not go without being attacked.

In her article Murray (2005) examines the implications and depth of the San Andreas space. She writes that, “An interesting new paradigm of virtual public space emerges when one considers what it means to become lost in a city that exists only in the time and space of the simulated” (93). She further describes the San Andreas space as one that has shopping malls, stadiums, factories and, airports. In this simulated world the shopping mall area where CJ purchases clothes, food, and guns, operates as functions that perpetuate consumer desire and capitalism.

Still, there is more to be said by where CJ can not go and what he can not use. There are no other options for CJ to earn money other than violence. The player is presented the need to buy gang clothing and food but no means financial means outside of violence to obtain those things. A quick way to earn money in the game is to shoot a drug dealer on the street because they are known to have at least a thousand dollars. When CJ is in Los Santos his money comes from gang shootings and territory acquisitions. The inability for him to work in a mainstream setting furthers the metaphorical linkage comparing CJ to a savage incapable of inclusion in what is considered mainstream society. There are factories and places of industry that CJ does not utilize to make money within the game. Aside from violence there are few instances where CJ can earn money. Low-fidelity simulation dictates that this is a game about driving and therefore the probability of CJ getting a job at a factory is highly unlikely. However, the designers some how found time to create a game world that is four times bigger than the other versions complete with secret sex files, customizations, and advanced war simulations with weapons that have targeting systems and optical zooms. The GTA: SA environment is a world constructed to be an ideal market conducive to consumption and materialism. However, CJ is incapable of earning money outside of violence. The game establishes categories which naturalize race through consumer conventions while also creating strict ethnic categorical spaces based upon hatred of the ‘Other’.
There are very direct and subliminal xenophobic messages imbedded within GTA: SA that relate to space and territory. When all three levels of the game are reached the boundaries between the different cities are taken down. At this point in the game a radio announcer states that since the barriers are down the general population is free to intermingle and kill each other. These comments come as part of a radio newscast that CJ is listening to as he crosses the border. The talk shows that the player listens to as they drive are absurd satires of American talk radio. The satirical nature of the comments spoken over the San Andreas air waves dictates an overall tone of fear and loathing in society. Similar to Denzin’s (2002) representational categorization of blackness in film, GTA: SA is consistent with 1970’s blaxploitation and 1990’s ‘hood’ films that stressed black separatism. There is a strong anti-integration and anti-mixing stance established within the games’ dialogue. Early in the narrative Kendl (CJ’s sister) is revealed to have a Hispanic lover named Cesar Vialpando (played by Clifton Collins, Jr). CJ and his brother Sean Johnson (Faizon Love) are against the interracial relationship but allow it to happen anyway. Their comments as to why the relationship should not go on are riddled with an old school mistrust of the people who are not black or people who are different from them. It also demonstrates the lesser group’s assimilation of xenophobia and mistrust of the ‘Other’ in mainstream society. The hypocritical nature of racism is apparent here, when people who have faced discrimination in this country perpetuate it toward other ethnicities. Within the rhetoric of the game there is a strong resentment toward difference and cultural mixing. Through the process of war the player is allowed to practice a type of categorical annihilation of the Other.

The practice of war in the game is a fundament allegory used to create discursive spaces where ethnicities based on codified symbols and language are allowed safe existence. In the game world war is a categorizing genocidal device utilizing racialized violence to establish boundaries between cultural identities. Denzin (2002) argues that war is instrumental toward constructing representations of the ‘Other’. He writes:

America’s cinema of racial representation is intimately connected to wars and the military. Virtually every major American war (Independence, Civil, Native American, Alamo, Spanish-American, World Wars I and II, Korea, Vietnam) has occasioned attempts to align minority males with the
American war effort, while often identifying the enemy as the self-same foreign, ethnic other. (24)

The act of warfare in GTA: SA establishes color coded categorical linkages which dictate the annihilation of the ‘Other’. Ethnic boundaries within the game are established first through the construction of an enemy through pre-war rhetoric. Quinn (2005) refers to the gang territories as ‘spectacular subcultures’. Those boundaries are then defined and tested through the act of war, or invasion, in terms of occupation and coded annihilation. Finally, although the enemy is successfully subdued and the land utilized for economic gain, traumatic impulses associated with war-time behavior are still present. The Los Santos gang wars segment of the game is a simulated reenactment of military colonialism, patriarchy, and capitalism which forces the player to read and implement imperialism and dominance.

The framing of the enemy in pre-gang war Los Santos is facilitated through the creation of a rival gang referred to as ‘The Ballas’. The Ballas are characterized in the game as young black males aged teens to mid-twenties wearing white, black, and purple gang colors. The term ‘balla’ is derived from ghetto street slang referring to the sale of drugs, or one-eighth of an ounce of cocaine. Jones (2005) argues that, “Now the term [Ballas] has come to describe status, money, and power in general- the Big Balla, Shot Caller. In other words a man in charge of his own destiny” (133). It becomes clear from this definition that power in this culture is essentially contextualized through wealth and the consumption of material goods. CJ and his gang family do not have money or territory, and unlike the Ballas, CJ as well as his family lack control of external elements (the police). Within the narrative the police are a corrupt force in association with the Ballas. The police are framed as a racist and naturalized omnipotent, relentless and overwhelming force that can not be killed and is a relentless overwhelming force. Ballas on the other hand can be killed and their land taken. They are characters who have more money, more land, and seemingly more influence and control over their lives. CJ/ the player, much in the fashion of American individualism becomes the catalyst of that

20“Spectacular subcultures, as scholars have called such formations, operate first and foremost in the leisure sphere, creating and codifying styles and gestures. Each gang had its own mini-culture: What locations or “hang-outs” it cultivated; which turf was contested; what drinks, drugs, and weaponry it favored; the codes of conduct it deployed; how its cars were customized; and so on” (53).
action. CJ is constructed as the catalyst who will bring about communal change, at least for his gang, through violence. Early drive-bys and shootouts as well as dialogue among the main characters establish the Ballas as the major and most immediate obstacle in the gang world. Ironically when the war is over and CJ has lost, the Ballas take over the area that CJ calls home.

The police in this game symbolize what Foucault phrased, “the carceral city”. Quinn (2005) utilizes this term to describe the police state in the actual Los Angeles area during the 90’s. This term signifies an all encompassing police state, one in which the outside world is made into a prison. He writes, “This famous trope extends well beyond prisons into law enforcement generally (its police everywhere)” (47). Los Santos resembles this world due to the excessive number of police officers on land, sea, and air who enforce the law with a type of brutal vengeance. The technological ability of law enforcement in the game to pursue CJ in any environment is reminiscent of the type of funding used to fight the “war on drugs”. Jones (2005) argues, “From the 1980’s to the 1990’s there was a massive shift of resources from social programs which occurred in tandem with vastly increased policing, surveillance, arrest, and imprisonment of black men”(112). CJ can be seen as the black subject held imprisoned by the omnipresent police force which, through the characterization of Office Tenpenny, only allows passage to other areas of the map for a price. CJ must fulfill his violent nature as a pawn of some higher power. Meanwhile, the police in the game, who are framed a majority of the time as white, perpetrate the most egregious forms of racism and homophobia. Contained within their dialogue, and interaction with the player, the officers repeatedly refer to lynching and anal rape.

Pre-gang war Los Santos is an oppressive environment, one in which the character CJ is thrust into a circumstance of overwhelming oppression, danger, and lack of control. At the same time concrete distinctions are made between acceptable and challengeable dominance. This atmosphere does not represent a ‘jungle’ but rather a controlled prison. Los Santo represents a prison where the institutional killing of black and brown bodies is allowed and in some cases rewarded. Critics of the game challenge the fact that the player is rewarded for brutal criminality against police and prostitutes.
However, players receive greater rewards more frequently in the game for killing people of color.

During the gang warfare, different sects are represented through gang colors. CJ’s gang is characterized by green whereas the Ballas are characterized by purple. The Latin gang is characterized by yellow. Color codification is a device that essentially frames opposing colored people as the enemy. The objective of the war is to kill people of a different color in order to gain their territory. The territories of the different gangs are highlighted in their respective colors on the game map. The Ballas reside in the downtown city area and have the most territory whereas the Latin gang resides around the coastal beach areas. The objective of the war is to claim as much land for your gang as possible. The amount of respect points the player has accumulated from completing missions and claiming territory directly impacts the amount of affiliated gang members CJ can bring with him on a campaign. Like colonialism, once a territory is conquered the equity of that land is used to buy more guns and weapons for further expansion.

Conflicts that result in warfare begin when the player finds members of the rival gang loitering in one spot. Once those gang members have died more rival gang members will come in more waves. Once the resources in that area are depleted then the territory belongs to the Grove Street gang. The police do not get involved in the conflict between gangs, which for the purposes of this analysis serves as a further example of sanctioned ethnic annihilation. Rewarding black-on-black violence and punishing violence in any other circumstance is a clear message as to the value of black lives. The manner, in which the player navigates the rules presented by the game (identifying color and habit), is consistent with Jones’ (2005) new idea of crime. He argues that the methods used to categorize criminal behavior have changed since those used in the past, “The new idea of crime has a radically different orientation. It is concerned with identifying, classifying and managing groups assorted by levels of dangerousness” (109). Ultimately within the confines of warfare the player learns to categorically kill people based on color and cohabitation habits. Within the game this orientation has repercussions that permeate into the post-gang war San Andreas.

Post-gang war San Andreas contains some of the same signifiers which stimulate the impulses within the player to kill people of a different orientation. After the gang
war, when the player is forced to relocate and loses all the treasures gathered during war, there are still remnants of conflict. The area known as San Fierro, which is modeled after San Francisco, in many ways still resembles the constant vigilance of the police state but is not quite as chaotic and violent at Los Santos. In relation to warfare however Stalabrass (1996) argues that, “Vietnam is the genocidal model which lies at the heart of many games, whether they are explicitly based on events there or not. Its vocabulary finds its way into these rewritings of history, where it is of course misused” (96). Similar to the post-traumatic stress disorder of warfare, the player still associates violence with the characters who gather on the streets in San Fierro, the enemy this time is dressed in blue. The conflict or objectives are not the same and yet the impulse and response to color codification innately carry over.

Warfare within in the game offers a look at American fears of integration and immigration by revisiting an era in American history of nativism and reductivism. Through warfare the player fundamentally learns to kill foreign representatives. Gang wars are coded in color cast systems that dictate the killing of people outside of the color group. There is an overwhelmingly strong stance toward annihilation of foreign peoples as well as sentiments against mixing and integration. An integrated and mixed city like Los Santos (exemplified in the relationship between Kendl and Cesar) is depicted as a chaotic and out of control area. Los Santos is the city that is pictured the most in the game trailer and is constructed to represent ‘the jungle’. The act of simulation in the game establishes the ‘ghetto’ or the ‘hood’ as a natural environment where chaos is abundant. The game does not, however, seek to give the social context surrounding police brutality, joblessness, and black crime in an area that is metaphorical to Los Angeles. The next section will consider how the developers utilized time in order to construct believability within the game.

A major component of the setting and character development is impacted by the usage of time in the game. Time serves a number of functions for the player in terms of interactivity and game-play. One defining feature of the game is the correlation between one minute in real time and an hour in the game. The intersection between game-time and real-time is a function that makes the gaming experience half-real and is also known
as ‘projection’\textsuperscript{21}. This is a feature that is consistent in all Grand Theft Auto games. Juul (2005) argues that time in the GTA series carries more meaning because the success of many missions is determined upon time completion. He writes, “Most of the events within the game appear nevertheless to proceed at real-time speeds. Many of the task and missions that the player has to perform have to be completed within a time limit in play time” (152). The usage of game-time and real-time operate as rules which help to construct the boundaries implied by the missions within the narrative. Contextually, time also establishes the setting and circumstances into which the players and CJ are unwittingly thrust into. Time, in this analysis, is one of the most heavily mythologized and commodified aspects of the game. Time in the game is defined by the usage of early gangsta rap music and social circumstances and is one of the most commodified selling points of the game.

Similar to the cultural boundaries established by space; time and music define culture in GTA: SA. The game offers the player multiple radio music stations when CJ steals a car. However, in many cases the skin color of the occupant will determine the genre of music the radio is set to. When CJ steals a car in Los Santos the player will most likely hear early West coast gangster rap from the early 1990’s. Early gangsta rap artist NWA, Ice Cube, and Tupac are featured the most in the game. Other artist from the early 90’s also make appearances which further establish the time setting. Cummings and Roy (2002) categorize some of the early West Coast gangster rap as ‘political rap’ or ‘social critique’. In other words they argue that the music, “is about “the hurt and horror that make urban life a jungle” (61). These urban tales primarily discuss the social plight of joblessness, crime, poverty, violence, and police brutality. Rhetorically and politically more than the commodified forms of hardcore and gangsta rap today, early forms of gangsta rap were simply an extension of a time which conceptualized the slowing Civil Rights movement and the emergence of a generation of political protest.

GTA: SA is modeled after a time that coincides with racially turbulent events in contemporary American history. As music is known to define generations, gangsta rap artists were orators of that history. Quinn (2005) argues that, “The televised beating of

\textsuperscript{21} Juul (2005) argues that, “Projection means that the player’s time and actions are projected onto the game world where they take on a fictional meaning” (142).
Rodney King in early 1991 and the LA riots of April/May 1992, triggered by the acquittal of the police officers responsible, The shocking footage of the black motorist’s beating at the hands of the LAPD was exactly the aspect of “cop culture” that gangsta rappers were at pains to portray” (90). The creators of gangsta rap, in their realness, attempted to depict the harsh circumstances facing black men and women. In some aspects the creation of such an art form is similar to the survival tactics used by colored minstrel performers discussed in chapter 2. Murray (2005) argues that:

The rap music coming out of the era recreated in this game largely represented a break with Civil Rights era strategies for resistance and social uplift. Rather than relying upon assimilation into the mainstream, a young hip-hop generation began to aggressively embrace capitalism and rugged individualism as a means of attaining the American dream. (97)

This is the usage of ‘myth’, to de-contextualize an artifact while simultaneously presenting a dominant ideology that seems normal and unchallengeable. The messages presented by the artists which elude to social histories of plight and oppression, are in turn lost to the images of violence and cavalier drug use presented in the game. The visual playable text and the music operate simultaneously, polarizing the misconception between early rap music and ‘ghetto’ violence. The players while listening to narrative tales about the plight of drugs, racialized violence, and police brutality are simulating those moments, making the metaphorical linkages stronger. This is some of the strongest mythification perpetrated in the game. Literally, the texts of the artists are misconstrued by simulated acts of violence. It’s like listening to Tupac’s Brenda’s Got a Baby and watching porn. This is what Stuart Hall (2001) would define as a ‘failure in communication’.

The misunderstanding stemming from the difference between hegemonic-dominant encodings and negotiated-corporate decodings can best be attributed to perspectives of centricity and periphery. From an afrocentric perspective early gangsta rap music acts as a self-affirming communal discourse which derives some of its rhetorical power form the Civil Rights era. This is best epitomized in Tupac’s, whose

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22“The contradictions and disjunctures between hegemonic-dominant encodings and negotiated-corporate decodings. It is just these mismatches in the levels which most provoke” (175).
mother was a Black Panther, early work. The song *Brenda's Got a Baby* is essentially an examination into the plight of young women in poor urban circumstances. Cummings and Roy argue that, “The ultimate goal of an African American communicator is “transformation.” The Afrocentric public discourse functions to bring back harmony and stability in those problematic areas” (73). It is implied, however, by Dubois’ double conscious theory that Africans in American must look at themselves from two perspectives; both centrally and peripherally. Being black in American is an existence that assumes it is not the center of the universe. Rather, as Jones (2005) asserts, what is meant to be mainstream or ‘white’ assumes the association with universality or normalcy. Jones, when he quotes Potter, argues that, “The central trope of whiteness is, I think, the luxury not to think doubly, to see the world through one eyed vistas of privilege, rather than having to account for one’s identity against a fundamentally multiple culture.” Thus whites, confusing the dancer and the dance, tend to see rap one dimensionally, as a glorification of violence” (67). The association of early gangsta rap with images of racialized violence is a mainstream linkage that seeks to validate essentialized interpretations of black life without addressing the multifaceted variables affecting black life in America.

In the previous chapter I discussed the commodification of the black body as a text, minstrelsy was addressed as a tool used by anti-abolitionist to subvert the black voice as inept and thereby validating enslavement. Similarly, D.W. Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation* framed the masculine black image as a ‘savage’ or social deviant. In his book *Nuthin but a G Thang* Quinn (2005) examines the methods used to create linkages between gangsta rap and social deviance which justified oppressive political policy. He argues that the post-Fordist neo-conservative policies of the Reagan/Bush era instituted ‘slash and burn’ policies amid “sweeping deregulatory and fiscal legislation that helped to instigate an almost unprecedented redistribution of wealth to the top quintile of the population” (44). In other words, less state funding for community aid and educational programs and more outsourcing avenues for corporate business were the causes of poverty in the over populated industrialized cities. Andrews (1998) argues that, “Reagan

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23 “Double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (Dubois 1994)
re-politicized and re-ideologized American society by covertly organizing a hegemonic project under the guise of regenerating popular affective investment in regressive and ethnocentric nationalism” (197). Sensational images of racialized violence associated with inner city life served as the impetus which garnered public approval of aggressive and reductive public policies.

Stemming from the lack of jobs and public resources bell hooks (2004) argues that, “The developing of a vibrant yet deadly drug economy surfaced in black life and was accepted precisely because it was and is an outlaw job arena where money-big money-can be made” (19). To further the correlation between re-distribution of wealth, jobs and public aid for education and community programs; the underground economies that grew out of joblessness and desperation (drug dealing) were met with new policies regarding crime and punishment, rather than attacking the cause of crime at its root, poverty. Quinn (2005) elaborates upon this point when he examines the growing trend in incarcerations during the Reagan/Bush era, he states, “In 1980, drug offenders constituted 22% of all federal prison admissions, by 1988 the figure had jumped to 39 percent. By 1992, astonishing 58 percent of all federal prisoners were drug offenders. The most intense growth period for drug incarceration rates, from 1989-1993 coincided with the “classic gangsta rap” years” (46). People of color faced discrimination in the justice system and unequal punishments for drug offenses. This created an endless cycle of imprisonment for people of color. Recidivism rates for people of color during the early 90’s were more likely due to discriminatory hiring practices because of restriction in employment effected by criminal records and affiliations to gangs as a result of previous incarceration. In real life black men in impoverished communities endured a cycle of incarceration, probation, and incarceration. This is mythically simulated in GTA: SA. When CJ is subdued by police, in the game, he is later released (there are no game over). The world he is released into is actually an extension of prison where he is still constantly under surveillance. The entire city/world is a prison.

Andrews (1998) argues that, “The discriminatory logics of Reaganism; cultural logics (incorporating neo-liberalism, neo-conservatism, and moral traditionalism) reasserted a vision of an America dominated by a white, heterosexual, and patriarchal, middle-upper class” (198). The rhetoric of Reaganism which dictated policies which
favored the wealthy and boasted middle class values classified people who existed outside that paradigm as anti-American. Conversely, as Quinn (2005) asserts, “Gangsta is a social realist, politically oppositional form, documenting the perilous predicaments of an oppressed community” (20). From a mainstream perspective the oppositional nature of the sub-altern culture, like minstrelsy, justified the level of oppression and imprisonment. This is the historical context that GTA: SA does not address but it, however, through mythification reinscribes cultural meaning in the language of the oppressor.

Time is a highly mythologized aspect of the San Andreas game world. The operational function of game-time further establishes authenticity with the player because it correlates timed based fictional events with real-time orientations. Many mission objectives can only be carried out during the cover of night or certain days of the week. Game time in San Andreas has a very visceral meaning. It is also used for its contextual elements which further the conventions of the narrative. Music and social circumstances are the strongest links to the Los Angeles of the early 90’s. However, there is a failure in communication between the messages imbedded in the musical text and the images produced on screen. Images of extreme racialized violence are juxtaposed against the brutally descriptive and realistic political rap of the early 90’s which expressed the need for communal transformation.

In reference to the black body as a commodified text the digital world represents another medium where the dominant ideological constructs are reaffirmed, ritualized, and perpetuated. The digital world is a fantasy hidden behind a layer of low-fidelity simulations and chrome. It can be constructed, like the Holodeck, to be the depiction of heaven or the nightmarish resemblance of hell. Videogames are, because they are created by human agents, primarily ideological functions. The situations and narratives presented in the game carry deep social cultural meaning. GTA: SA is a nightmare world constructed and based in society commodified fascination with ethnicity. It uses satirical humor as a method towards addressing taboo issues. The San Andreas space is a metaphorical model that advocates separatism by satirizing xenophobia and genocide. The satirical humor, however, misses its mark and perpetuates what Jameson (1991)
describes as ‘pastiche’\textsuperscript{24}. Denzin (2002) argues that, “The spectacle is parody, montage, death scenes up-close, dead bodies moving through space, blood on sidewalks, drive-bys in slow-motion. These movies are fitted to the era of post-civil rights” (112).

Interactivity with the simulated nightmare space is an avenue for the player to experience the opposite of a utopic society (hell). The developers utilize time as a function which authenticates experience by projecting correlations between real world time and game-time. It also functions as a mythological de-contextualizing tool which subverts the narrative voice of the sub-altern group and maximizes the dominate rhetoric. The digital world, then, is a shifting of commodified forms from representation to simulation and is the complete loss of original meaning. Baudrillard argues that:

\begin{quote}
Representation stems from the principle of the equivalence of the sign and of the real (even if this equivalence is utopian, it is a fundamental axiom). Simulation, on the contrary, stems from the utopia of the principle of equivalence, from the radial negation of the sign as value, from the sign as the reversion and death sentence of every reference. (524)
\end{quote}

The representations of the black masculine image therefore are nothing more than the machinations of the mainstream consciousness. They are the fabricated images created by the dominate order to induce fear in themselves. Harmless as these representational ghosts may seem they are actually just the opposite. The constructed interpretations of black masculinity carry with them deep social implications that affect actual society. The next chapter will address the implications of simulation.

\textsuperscript{24}“Jameson (1991) calls pastiche, or imitation without satire, a cinema of excess racial violence turned into spectacle” (Denzin 112).
Chapter 4
Implications of Simulation:
The Intersections of Power, Image, and Memory

The difference between the representation of an image and its simulation is that the former has some resemblance to its original meaning whereas the latter is not attached to any origin or ideal. With that context in mind, the digital space of GTA: SA is another socially constructed device which mythologizes the image of the black masculine body in a fashion that repackages old school beliefs about race in a new medium. It is a replication of old school minstrelsy in a digital form. The black image in this game is the socially constructed veneer of blackness that reaffirms mainstream beliefs about black masculinity and crime. It is a deceptive illusion placed over the eyes of the unconscious in order to maintain a utopic vision of society by showing the adverse reality of what the world would look like from the black gaze.

In many respects the perpetuation of the black image as the social deviant correlates to Ernest Baker’s concept the ‘vital lie’ because it serves as the dialectical opposite of whiteness. The white supremist patriarchal system operates as the invisible center point upon which everything is compared and measured. It is the centrist ideology of a dominant class which, through manipulation of social formations, universalizes all of society’s belief structures into an illusory reality. The dramatization of black crime and plight in America serve as a parable in the mainstream consciousness which concretely defines deviation from the values of the upper and middle-class white Judeo-Christian beliefs. The commodification of the black masculine body and the implications of simulation boil down to an issue of power. Whoever controls information and access to the mass mediums has the power to control the minds of the people. In this context power is derived from the ability to claim agency over reality. It is the ability to define a subjective reality as truth. However, contrary to the mainstream illusion of reality facilitated by universal truths, McPhail (2002) argues, “Truth is defined not by privileged basic beliefs, but by coherence between intention and consequence” (93).

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25 Dyson (2003) asserts that the vital lie is a: “A necessary deception that preserves the social fabric and keeps at bay the forces that destroy identity and community” (124).
This chapter will look at the implications GTA: SA has on the larger society. I argue it is another device used by the dominant class as a measure of social control because it re-establishes discursive identifications linking blackness to social deviance and effectively confining identity through representation of the ethnic 'Other'. The hierarchical ritualized position of the dominant class is best explained when looking at the construction of race and power through social formations. Next, I will address how GTA: SA utilizes and perpetuates power through racial profiling. Finally, I will examine how the game operates as a corollary to blackface minstrelsy and why that implies a need for more diverse cultural representation in videogames and cultural production. The objective, here, is to move away from the subjective centrist perspective of truth and culture, and toward a peripheral perspective that attaches multi-layered associations to representations of the 'Other'.

For a videogame, such as GTA: SA, to imbed itself in the racially turbulent time setting of the 1990’s, amid institutions of brutal racism (police brutality and gang violence) and the “telling it like it is” rhetoric of gangsta rap, is to enact and practice a type of racial and gender oppression on a routine basis. Replaying these moments, even for the sake of debate, without attempting to resolve them implies that we are trapped in an endless cycle of repetition where we replay the terrors of oppression without any healing or resolution. Further, this establishes in the public consciousness a reductive racial tautology that implies that racism or poverty is because it is. In her article White (1998) discusses how the particular combinations of narrative concerns, cast in historical terms, produce contradictions that may be irresolvable in the final analysis. She argues that fictionalized racial narratives (shows like Homefront and I’ll Fly Away) which are set in certain historical periods discuss the issue of race without any remediation. It assumes that the racial conflicts have been resolved between the past and the viewer’s present. When in fact there is very little difference between how racial difference is conceptualized today versus thirty or forty years ago. Racial progress is nullified by the constant reminder that blacks are nothing but slaves and servants. In the discussion of race these shows replay racial brutality over and over again for the mainstream audience. Therefore the shows depiction of racial and gender oppression is given validation in a
contemporary setting. The circumstances of the time setting do not allow the show to resolve the issue of race, just discuss it.

GTA: SA contains elements of White’s assertion. First, the game addresses themes dealing with racism and police brutality without seeking to resolve any of those conflicts. The police, when they come into contact with CJ, talk about shooting, hanging, and raping black people. CJ, when he is causing mayhem, utters phrases about not being unable to help himself because “he was born that way” or “a product of his environment”. The game presents these themes as inescapable truths. The police are a violent racist force beyond criticism and true blackness is staying connected to poverty and violence. It allows the player to practice barbarism masquerading as “keeping it real”. Second, the game utilizes the time setting and social circumstances of the early 1990’s to experience or practice patriarchal dominance and oppression. The game is grounded in important social issues but does not address the larger need for transformation. Therefore, the representation of the ethnic ‘Other’ in the game is a stagnate remnant of a highly commodified image. Ultimately the game allows the player to reenact a subjective past from the white supremist patriarchal gaze and exercise power through the re-articulation of history.

Truth and power are concepts that feed off each other because they are tools utilized for creating eternal truths. Power is conceptualized as inherent; while at the same time power must be obtained in order to proclaim truth. They are both similar concepts in the post-modern world because they are derived from subjective individualized experiences. Jones (2005) argues that, “perspective is simply an attribute of power. Power is the ability to define or name phenomena” (56). This is similar to the African oratorical device used by rappers and orators known as ‘Nommo’. Nommo implies the transformative power of the word to shape and define reality. In other words, orators seek to bring life and meaning to events through the usage of the word. Cummings and Roy (2002) argued that early gangsta rappers used the spoken word as a strategic device toward bringing about transformation in the community. However, the word alone does not have the ability to bring about power or transformation. As Jones (2005) points out in his examination of power, Foucault argues that, “speaking is an event that takes place at the locus not only of lexical meaning, but also at the intersection of social setting, and
status. One can speak only when one is privileged by status and social setting with the power to do so” (63). Circumstance and status, then, are central ingredients in the creation and maintenance of power. This is further an illusion to Gramsci’s struggle for power through social formation. The shifting struggle over power is engineered by a dominate group who disseminate their rhetorical validation through the political, ideological, and the economic formations. Status is maintained by the acceptance of implied natural power by the sub-alterned group. The sub-altern group does not have power because it accepts the dominate group’s ideology as superior and natural. It is Hall’s contention that although Gramsci never directly spoke about race, it can be directly applied to issues of class and status.

Black men do not have power because they have neither status nor adequate voice in the social setting to control their representations and identity. In his book Madhubuti (1990) defines power as, “the ability to make life-giving and life-saving decisions, as well as the ability (knowledge, resources and desire) to deliver on the decisions made” (68). Black men do not have the agency to control their lives. Social conditioning by the dominant class has taught people of African descent to hate their bodies and loath their skin. People of color are indoctrinated into a system that glorifies whiteness while demonizing other ethnicities. It is part of the hegemonic process that black men in mainstream society accept this view. The fear induced by the threat of imprisonment (physical and mental death) hinders the necessary type of transformative social movements. Fundamentally institutions of oppression subvert the resources needed to effect change in the black community. The acquisition of power in the black community is predicated upon the acceptance of the dominant ideology.

The term ‘plantation patriarchy’, a term posited by hooks (2004), refers to the learned and accepted system of patriarchal manhood dominance black men have acculturated in order to gain power. This is the type of power that garners respect from fear and oppression rather than love and compassion. Madhubuti (1990) refers to black men as; indoctrinated into the system of patriarchal manhood as imitations of Euro-American madness (61). His assertion is validated by the imitation of violence exemplified by patriarchal figures in Hollywood. At the most susceptible age black youth learn to gain power through acts of violence and manhood demonstrated in
television/film and reinforced by iconic rappers. Madhubuti (1990) argues that:

The mass media, again, has been instrumental in portraying Black men as studs, pimps, super-detective or imitation white men (Bogle, 1973). Films such as *Superfly, The Mack, Shaft, Sweet Sweetback’s Badass Song, The Great White Hope, Blackula, Legend of Nigger Charley, Slaughter, Watermelon Man, A Soldiers Story, The Color Purple, Native Son, Colors* and others represent a profound comment on the type of popular miseducation that a majority of Black youth continue to receive on a daily basis in the Black community. Without permanent and structured positive male education, young Afrikan American males have been left to themselves and the streets.

(79)

In today’s contemporary youth culture, depictions of white Hollywood crime figures are more readily absorbed and imitated by black youth culture because they represent fast money and rebellion from mainstream values. Scarface is an idealized and symbolic figure which conceptualizes fast money for black youth culture. Quinn (2005) argues that, “Tony Montana in 1983’s Scarface is an arresting symbol of rags-to-riches success, especially for young black men in the post-civil rights period” (79). Yousman (2003) supplements this argument, he writes that, “All of these common themes of gangsta rap represent not deviance from but conformity to a particular manifestation of the American Dream” (383). Learning the codes of patriarchal manhood in black culture is the only acceptable form of acquiring power because the images are a corollary to those of the untamed savage and brutal nature already prominent in the mainstream imagination. Patriarchal manhood in society is glorified as an acceptable form of power, one that focuses on physical domination rather than intellectual prowess.

The absence of choice and the avenue of assimilation into the system of patriarchal manhood is an allegorical prison identity for most men and more specifically for black men. hooks (2004) argues that men who refuse to perpetuate the system of patriarchal manhood are, “rare, for the price of visibility in the contemporary world of white supremacy is that black male identity be defined in relation to the stereotype whether by embodying it or seeking to be other than it” (xii). The hyper-masculine
façade, engineered by rappers and mimicked in the public by black youths, is a rearticulated reaction to feelings of powerlessness and hopelessness over social circumstances. West (1994) argues that nihilism is a major threat facing not only black men but the nation as well. Nihilism is the lived experience of coping with the lack of hope and lovelessness. He argues that, “Life without meaning, hope, and love breeds a coldhearted, mean-spirited outlook that destroys both the individual and others” (23). A nihilistic environment, one built on lovelessness, callousness, and patriarchal violence is the type of atmosphere replayed, emulated, and satirized in GTA: SA. The game is an extension of the commodification and consumption of mainstream tropes present in hip-hop and black hyper-masculine culture.

The game builds a highly subjective view of black masculinity from depictions of crime and deviance in mainstream media. In order for CJ to be respected and adored he must have a “gangster physique” (he must be muscular), wear the right clothes (styling and profiling), and he need to be dangerous. The more respect points CJ acquires the more gang member he can call to his street roaming entourage. Those respect points are gained through violence especially with police. Most of what makes CJ a black man is based on consumerism and savage mythology. CJ is a subjective interpretation of black masculinity taken from mainstream market forces. It thereby creates the illusion of authenticity because it borrows from pre-existing narratives already present in the public consciousness. The game uses devices such as language mannerism, and character in order to build the level of authenticity with the audience. GTA: SA facilitates racial profiling through player interactivity, customization, and spectacular consumption. CJ’s identity as a black male is wholly confining because the all players who interact with him must learn to survive in both the digital and real world with that context. The inability to choose, the lack of power and control over livelihood, for CJ symbolizes the plight of colored people in America. CJ is not free, the player is not free, and even though he may enact patriarchal manhood violence (subscribing to his nature) he is still working for somebody else. The biggest lesson that the audience (black and white) learn in the game is that black men are not free.

The usage of mainstream Hollywood themes and narratives imply that players, regardless of ethnicity, approach GTA: SA with the same types of ideas and
interpretations about race and class. Yousman (2003) argues that, “White supremacy in the 21st century now operates primarily “under the radar,” in disguised, coded and often subtle forms” (374). Racism today is equally as prevalent while attempting to subtle and obscure simultaneous. hooks (2004) argues that institutionalized racism is more accepted today by young blacks than previously during the Civil Rights era. The difference in generations allows for what Winant (1998) termed, “period of universalized racial dualism”26. Winant’s primary assertion argues that while race is simultaneously real and illusory, whites and blacks interact with these conditions differently. Yousman (2003) argues that:

Blacks must cope with a society that places barriers in their way while announcing that these barriers do not exist, while Whites struggle to retain their sense of privilege and dominant status in a political environment in which this status is challenged by contemporary movements of resistance.

(374)

It is the trick of this game and analysis to critique the systems of oppression that are opaque and yet prevalent in society. However, deep within the public consciousness exists a knowledge that is the accumulation of personal experiences and prejudices, allied with the lessons learned from categorizing social narratives. The strength of knowledge pertaining to the ‘Other’ is predicated upon the level of support for normative beliefs juxtaposed against the level of cognitive dissonance.

Cognitive dissonance, a term presented by Festinger (1957), contends that the mind formulates new thoughts and ideas based on previously held beliefs. Dissonance refers to the resistance of the mind toward accepting information that is contrary to its previously held belief structure. Yousman (2003) utilizes this model as an avenue toward critiquing of white youths consumption of hip-hop music. He argues that the same commodified image of blackness is used by dissenters and admirers of the culture for the maintenance of white supremacy. Both love/hate consumers of black culture maintain a purely Euro-centric and white supremist mind set. What is deceptive about white youths

26 Yousman (2003) argues that, “By this he [Winant] meant that Americans now live in a society where White supremacy is a daily presence in all of our lives, and yet it is simultaneously proclaimed that we have achieved the “end of racism” ideal” (374).
who love and consume black culture is that they accept the stylizations of the culture (the vernacular, dress, and exoticism) and reject the deep cultural formations (the connections between art and spirituality), practices, and plight. It is an exemplification of hook’s (1994) term ‘eating the Other’. Yousman (2003) writes that white consumers of hip-hop culture, “refuse to engage with, any ideologies, social movements, or public policies that challenge the foundations of White privilege and the basis of White racism” (382). Applying Festinger’s assertion, coupled with Yousman’s analysis, articulates the notion that the construction of race is a deeply held belief system in a white supremacist patriarchal society. It further exemplifies how viewers/players of commodified black expressions like GTA: SA attach meaning and profiles to black masculinity.

Audiences learn to code black masculinity through essentialized beliefs used to objectify ethnicity in the mainstream mediums. Black masculinity is constructed and profiled in GTA: SA in a manner that is consistent with the perpetuation of dominant cognitive beliefs. Black men are dangerous, over sexualized, inept children incapable of civilized behavior or acceptance into the mainstream. The symbolicity linking blackness to brutality is the mythification described in the process of ‘eating the Other’. Black culture, more specifically black masculinity, is commodified in an aspect that de-contextualizes the social circumstances that affect the archetype in order to sell the simulacrum of the image. Jones (2005) defines racial profiling as:

A performance of the received meaning of identity. It is a performance of how the “black male” appears through the dominant gaze. The practice of racial profiling presupposes that race and criminality are knotted together. This practice itself in turn becomes an argument for its own legitimacy: by treating and making black men appear to be dangerous, it suggests that the black male is in fact a “dangerous character.” Not only does the racial profile inaugurate a new regime of surveillance and social control of black males, it reinscribes in our own era image of the dangerous “black male” that are as old as the story of Henry Bibb. (110)

There are several ways in which the game attaches criminality to black masculinity. The behavioral assertions are present in the performance of the game. CJ is an unthinking and unfeeling thug who other characters in the game use to carry out missions where either
stealing or violence is involved. Further, both black and white consumers of the constructed black image are seeking power and dominance by subscribing to the same racial code inscribed in the ideology of patriarchal dominance. hooks (2004) argues that, “Lots of young black men are walking around assuming a gangsta persona who have never and will never commit violent acts. Yet they collude with violent patriarchal culture by assuming this persona and perpetuating the negative racist/sexist stereotype that says “all black men are carriers of the violence we dread.”” (56). Black men are held captive by a socially constructed code of identity. Similarly white audiences who consume gangsta culture are suffering from what Norman Mailer termed “coolness envy”. Consuming black masculinity and profiling it as dangerous inscribes it with the allure of power and patriarchal dominance. White youth audiences learn to take on certain constructed black conventions in order to compete for power. Yousman (2003) argues that, “Wiggers” (white wannabe niggas); probably belong to the “thrilled” group. They appropriate the sub-cultural styles, transmitted to their home via music television” (374). The imitation produced by the consumption of the patriarchal dominance in black masculinity by white audiences is fear and hate masquerading as love. hooks (2004) argues that, “Of course part of the brainwashing that takes place in a culture of domination is the confusion of the two. If black males were loved they could hope for more than a life locked down, caged and confined, they could imagine themselves beyond containment” (xi-xii). The universalized racial codes imbedded in patriarchal dominance and glorified in the mainstream media is a nihilistic threat to society because it constructs identity in the rubric of lovelessness and hopelessness. Within the narrative of the game CJ is constructed as the protagonist. The focus on CJ as a main character validates his behaviors and actions as attributes that are later admired and mimicked in society. In other words, behaviors that usually labeled as criminal or deviant are valorized by players of the game.

Audiences (black and white) learn the codes of manhood and dominance from dramatized narratives which use essentialized and recognizable codes on TV and film, from characters that symbolically embody those ideological beliefs. The messages are presented in a way that reinforces society beliefs and therefore remain unquestioned. The character customization options in the game, which is a feature different from other GTA
games, is a device that presents further dimensionality to the game and reinforces allied beliefs about black masculinity. The game links social deviance to black masculinity by suggesting that this is how a thug looks, dresses, eats, has sex, drives cars, and behaves.

Real life dialogue and language such as slang or vernacular are another added level of authenticity to dramatizations of ghetto life. CJ and the supporting characters make many slang references referring to drugs and locations. After one mission CJ’s older brother Sweet tells him to get a “gangster physique” referring to a muscular build. Denzin (2002) discusses the usage of ghetto vernacular in 90’s hood movies as an attempt by the filmmaker to create believability between the audience and the events on screen. I would argue that GTA: SA utilizes some of the same techniques during its cut-scenes. He writes, “The use of vernacular speech, rap music, and hip hop fashion further authenticated the visual text and the spoken narrative, giving them an even greater aura of realism’ (176). This form of speech, however, is imbedded with social inscribed meaning. Quinn (2005) contends that, “Vernacular implies “home-born slaves” and describes the culture of those impelled, through their insular perspective, into developing makeshift, stylized, local forms of expression” (53). Dyson (2003) further solidifies this notion when he argues that black intelligence in the mainstream imagination is confronted by racist assumptions. He writes that, “Right away, one comes up against the bulwark of racist assumptions about black being and intelligence: It’s not authentic for blacks to speak articulately. It’s not authentic for them to engage in intellectual performances” (30). In these story genres black language and vernacular are strong devices used by filmmakers and videogame developers to establish an aura of realism or an authentic relationship with the audience. Language is a strong determinate in how character is established. Jones (2005) argues that, “Like all myths, the black male is product of our language and culture” (146).

The game recreates a perceived level of authenticity by utilizing real to life language and dialogue amid restrictive codes pertaining to dress and behavior. The signifiers reinforce the profiling of black masculinity to criminal behavior. Profiling black masculinity with criminality, even in cultural productions, can have regressive implications for people of color. Yousman (2003) argues that, “What is most important is not authenticity but the appearance of authenticity. For Whites who grow up imaging
the Black world as a world of violence and chaos, the more brutal the imagery, the more true-to-life it seems to be” (378). Consumption and Othering leads to de-centering which becomes a justification for social inequality. Powerlessness implies a lack of agency and control over identity and representation. Yousman (2003) asserts that, “Race would not exist if social inequity did not exist—it is the conditions of life that determine the way we perceive the world” (377). The hypocrisy of race as a social formation can be seen not as the cause but the result of inequality. Race is another form of class oppression. Mainstream de-centering of the other operates under a framework that conceptualizes the essence of blackness as a correlation to what is taboo or obscene in society.

I would argue that any semblance of original meaning or authenticity for the commodified black masculine image is fabricated categorization that hold no true discursive meaning. The process of mythification, eating the ‘Other’, imperialist nostalgia, simulation, and nihilism all have the concept of loss embedded in their meaning. The product that black masculinity has become is a simulacra or mask that is itself burdened with meanings that are both true and illusory. Race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and ability are socially constructed categorizations that carry with them implications of status and power. More specifically, representations of the black image on television, film, and videogames are a construction facilitated in order to reaffirm the power of the dominate culture. Even in this era of universalized racial dualism, where the public pretends that race does not exist or that people are colorless, institutions of inequality and injustice still exist for the ethnic ‘Other’. However a larger part of the hegemonic process is the sub-altern group acceptance of their own oppression.

Gangster rappers who have first hand experience of black plight and oppression reject the communal empowerment rhetoric of the Civil Rights movement for personal wealth and power. Producers like DJ Pooh (co-producer of GTA: SA), represent ideals that prioritize greed and individualism over group progress. They are implicated in the socially destructive representations of black life because they practice the patriarchal domination demonstrated in the Euro-centric and anti-ethnic mainstream culture. These cultural productions shape and define reality as an existence that is filled with xenophobia and hopelessness. Effectively rap artists/producers who perpetuate the image of the ‘thug’ or ‘gangsta’ are similar to black performers who put on blackface to
entertain white audiences during the 1800 and early 1900’s. hooks (2004) contends that, “Much hip-hop culture is mainstream because it is just a black minstrel show—an imitation of dominator desire, not a Rearticulation, not a radical alternative” (84). Gangsta artist today lack any of the rhetorical subversive devices of ‘parody’ or ‘signification’ which sought to rearticulate and reverse the language of the dominate culture. Rearticulation, as Quinn (2005) argues is, “The process of realignment of political identities and interests, through a process of recombining familiar ideas and values in new ways.” (31).

Commodified gangsta rap art-forms, ones like GTA: SA, do not perform satire for the purposes of communal transformation. After the credits role the game does not tell the player/viewer to “Stop the violence” or “Don’t use drugs”. There are no lessons about gentrification or the absence of fathers in the home like in Boyz N the Hood. Rather GTA: SA has no rhetorical overture or lesson learned because it is simply the ritualization of mainstream pastorals linking race to brutal greed and materialism. Power is reinterpreted strictly through the articulation of wealth and materialism. Gangsta rap and youth culture acceptance of materialistic and savage societal stereotypes in order to gain power and respect is an expression of mythologized coherence.

Mythologized coherence is predicated upon the notion of gaining respect through the acceptance of stereotypes that induce fear and intimidation, rather than garnering respect through communication and love. This is a theory that is based in the rhetoric of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, assimilation versus revolution. It presupposes that fear is a stronger emotion than love and by default oppressed people adhere to their constructed stereotypes in order to gain power. Through fear, it fundamentally opposes spiritual militancy (which articulates ‘love’ as the solution to war, economic exploitation, and racism). It is an allegorical equivalent to fighting fire with fire. The codes of patriarchal dominance are being confronted with codes of patriarchal dominance. Power is a perpetual cycle of creating and imitating oppressive fear, hatred, and callousness toward humanity. Many socio-cultural scholars are alluding to the learned nature of white supremacist patriarchal dominance in black youth culture. In effect these scholars are arguing that our contemporary volatile situation is the house that hate built. This is what West (1994) alludes to when he talks about nihilism and why the effects will reach the whole of society. Audiences, with members black and white, are imitating the nihilistic
codes of consumption masquerading as fetishized race. Society engineers and recycles a repressive and conservative model of reality, through Othering, in order to validate the dominate class. In other words, mainstream society formulates its own monsters, ones that use fear as a method toward maintaining power. That is the real terrorism, not the people who respond violently but the society that creates the extreme nature of violence that causes those things into being. Dyson (2003) articulates this fundamental notion well, he states:

Frankenstein is not the name of the monster but the name of the monster’s creator. The real terror, then, is the mechanisms of reproduction that sustains and rearticulates ideologies of white supremacy, and that sanction the violent attack on black and other minority identities. (110)

Today the consumption of black masculinity, and patriarchal dominance on a sub-textual level, is so pervasive that everyone has acculturated and imitated the universalized and essentialized (black/white) codes of race and power. White and black youths who dress-up in hip-hop clothes and imitate physical mannerisms in order to look tough validate this assertion. The commodified form of the black masculine image is equated to an object in the mass imagination as a tool or supplement. To escape the deprecating effects of commodification and de-humanization requires a change of perspective. Multiculturalist perspectives challenge the essentializing monolithic interpretations of ethnicity and serve to debunk Othering.

The corrosive effects of commodification and de-humanization of the ethnic 'Other' demonstrates the necessity for multicultural perspectives in cultural production. Similar to the concept of centrist versus peripheral perspectives, I alluded to in the previous chapter, multiculturalist perspectives in cultural production seek to represent and expand the multi-layer facets of culture in society. Further diversified representation in the mediums of stage, radio, television, film, videogames, and new media offer more democratic involvement in the formulation of culture and identity.
Herman Gray’s article *The Politics of Representation in Network Television* is an allusion to Gramsci’s ‘war of position’\(^{27}\). The efforts of black producers in television can be seen as continuation of the struggle for equal rights because they seek to change the negative depictions of African Americans on television. The influence of television is very important in constructing of identity and agency because, as Dyson (2003) argues, “When people look at television, they are looking for a reinforcement of who and what they are. They are looking for some sense of possibility represented on the small screen” (227). The dramatism in media production, as Burke would argue, helps to shape, define, and constrain social behavior as well as depict culture and identity. Gray’s analysis regards many black entertainers and their influence as producers in the mainstream mediums as having a positive influence on the depictions of black life in America. These representations help to break the monolithic cast of black representation in television. Gray’s analysis, although its central view is afrocentric, is not limited solely to black representations. He breaks depictions of ethnicity into three categorizations; assimilationist, pluralist, and multicultural discourses. These three categorizations examine representations of the ethnic other as ethnicity being either fully integrated in white society, separate but equal from white society, or transgressive in the sense that ethnicity is a multi-faceted and intricate existence.

Imbedded in the multicultural discourses is the concept of identity and power. Gray (2001) argues that, “Such programs create a discursive space in which subject positions are transgressive and contradictory, troubling, and pleasurable, as are the representations used to construct identity” (299). In multicultural discourse ethnicity and culture defy essentialism and commodification. This defiance is in conflict with Euro-centric mainstream dominance and is a re-articulation of power. By defying categorization multiculturalist discourses practice the same power forming habits of the dominant culture. In their article *Whiteness: A Strategic Rhetoric* Nakayama and Krizek (1995) contend that, “The invisibility of whiteness has been manifested through its universality. The universality of whiteness resides in its already defined position as

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\(^{27}\) Hall (1996) examining Gramsci argues that, “‘War of position’ which has to be conducted in a protracted way, across many different and varying fronts of struggle; where there is rarely a single breakthrough which wins the war once and for all in a flash, as Gramsci puts it.
everything. Thus, the experiences and communication patterns of white are taken as the norm from which ‘Others’ are marked” (293). It is the categorization as universal or norm that has allowed whiteness to be the standard by which other races are compared. In effect, being everything also implies being nothing at all. It is Nakayama and Krizek’s contention that it is a strategy of white dominance which resists being labeled and remains universal (simultaneously). In other words, through this strategic rhetoric, whiteness implies its validity as being normal or human. By defying categorization whiteness eludes objectification. This is the same objective multiculturalist discourses seek to obtain through the use of the narrative voice.

The use of the narrative voice in multiculturalist discourse is an attempt to reappropriate the identity that was lost during mythification by creating a new un-obscured cultural artifact. The cultural narrative voice operates as a device of the ethnic ‘Other’ to recapture identity while simultaneously resisting the dominant ideology. Dyson (2003) considers the narrative voice as a form of exercising nostalgia. He writes that, “Nostalgia, is the attempt to rescue ethnical agency and hence manage and control the perception of suffering-from the fateful forces of racial terror” (158). In assimilationist and pluralist representations of race in television the ethnic other is still categorized as help mate or social deviant. Either way the body of the ‘Other’ is conceptualized within a purely inhuman framework. Multiculturalist television themes that dealt with prejudice among upwardly mobile black professionals in *Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* or discrimination between light and dark skin blacks in *Frank’s Place* depicted black life as contradictory and multi-layered. It assumes to say that there are more levels here than previously articulated in the mainstream imagination. By default representation defines categorization in multiculturalist discourses because they break from the stereotypical depictions in the mainstream imagination.

Producers from diverse backgrounds and perspectives needed to create multiculturalistic discourses in videogames that challenge the representations of the ethnic ‘Other’ in the medium. Multicultural representations would offer more democratic conceptualizations of culture and ethnicity in the digital stage. They seek to give all people a voice in society, rather than maintain assertions of the dominant majority. They would offer more perspective in an art form that relays a monolithic view of culture and
ethnicity. Multiculturalistic discourse should aspire to have the same goals as the Black Arts Movement. Black art, as Denzin (2002) argues, “comes from people, and must be returned to the people in a form more beautiful and colorful than it was in real life…art is everyday life given more form and color” (175). In other words, videogames as an art form, ought not be elistist or mythologized articulation of a dominate group or class.

The implications of stereotypical de-humanizing representations and simulations in the digital world are similar to the ones from the earlier stages of representation. The digital world is a re-staging of the commodification of the black masculine body. In replaying the past GTA: SA first, is an opportunity to practice brutal racial and gender oppression on a routine basis, and second satirizes racial themes without attempting to resolve the conflict. It reaffirms individualist and materialist ideologies within a digital world that symbolizes an ideal market. In creating this digital world developers exercised their power by presenting their perspective as a dramatized truth. That truth is a universalized and racialized code with which all audiences are familiar but interpret differently. The alternatives of power are based in essentialized rhetoric in racialized consumption and patriarchal dominance. Therefore represenations of the ethnic ‘Other’ are de-humanized as a product for public consumption. In order to escape these de-humanizing representation of the ethnic ‘Other.’ Multiculturalistic discourses reclaim the agency and voice of the ‘Other’ lost during essentializing mythification. As a strategic device multiculturalistic discourses present a wider array of ethnic representation in order to defy essentializing categorization and commodification.

Epilogue

We wear the mask that grins and lies
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes
This debt we pay to human guile
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile
We wear the mask!

-Paul Lawrence Dunbar

Mythology has been the focus of this analysis. Through the mythology of storytelling our reality is socially constructed as parables that help to define, shape, and
confine social behavior. Mythology is the great distorted veneer, facilitated by a dominant ideology, through which we see and interpret our contemporary situation. Like a mask it is a deceptive distortion of our true face. The mask can be preserved as any illusory façade that we put on to validate ourselves and deceive others and make linkages between Otherness and savagery or gender and objectivity. Perhaps most socially destructive is the notion that all the while we are wearing these socially constructed masks and fulfilling the obligations of our nature, our souls are dying. We are becoming the very things that we are creating. Effectively we lose the basic tenets of equality and humanity necessary for civilization.

Almost one year after the hidden sexual content was discovered, and two years since the game came out, the impact of GTA: SA on young impressionable minds is still hotly debated. On June 8th 2006 Take Two Interactive, parent company of Rockstar Games, settled charges with the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) over the hidden sex scenes within the game. Harris (2006) states that, “The deal requires Take-Two and Rockstar Games Inc., the developer of the game, to properly notify consumers of racy content on future games and not to misrepresent rating or content descriptions”. As was discussed in Chapter 1, mainstream criticisms of the game pertain only to the depiction of sex and violence and its effects on younger viewers. I, however, argue that, there should be additional concern regarding the manner in which the linkages between crime, brutality, savagery, and objectification are associated with those in society who are constructed as the ‘Other’. Those representations reinforced countless times in the public consciousness reaffirm cultural stereotypes that are de-humanizing and dangerous. The issues and debates which surrounding GTA: SA establish a framework for what society considers pertinent and what it does not. Protecting the minds of white middle to upper to middle-class children is important but categorically de-humanizing and objectifying people of color, women, and homosexuals is not.

A historical perspective from slavery to the present inequality in America’s justice system illustrates that people of color are given their mythological representation in order to justify their de-humanization and virtual enslavement. Slavery, sharecropping, out-sourcing of labor, and imprisonment are all part of an economic formation utilized by the dominate class to substantiate and maintain their own power.
Cultural productions such as GTA: SA, gangsta rap, blaxploitation, and blackface minstrelsy are chapters in a long history of storytelling that maintains the dominate ideology in a manner that is seamless and natural. The myth has become so seamless and so invisible that it is hard to discern the origins of the true artifact. This is where the simulation of real becomes more real than real.
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