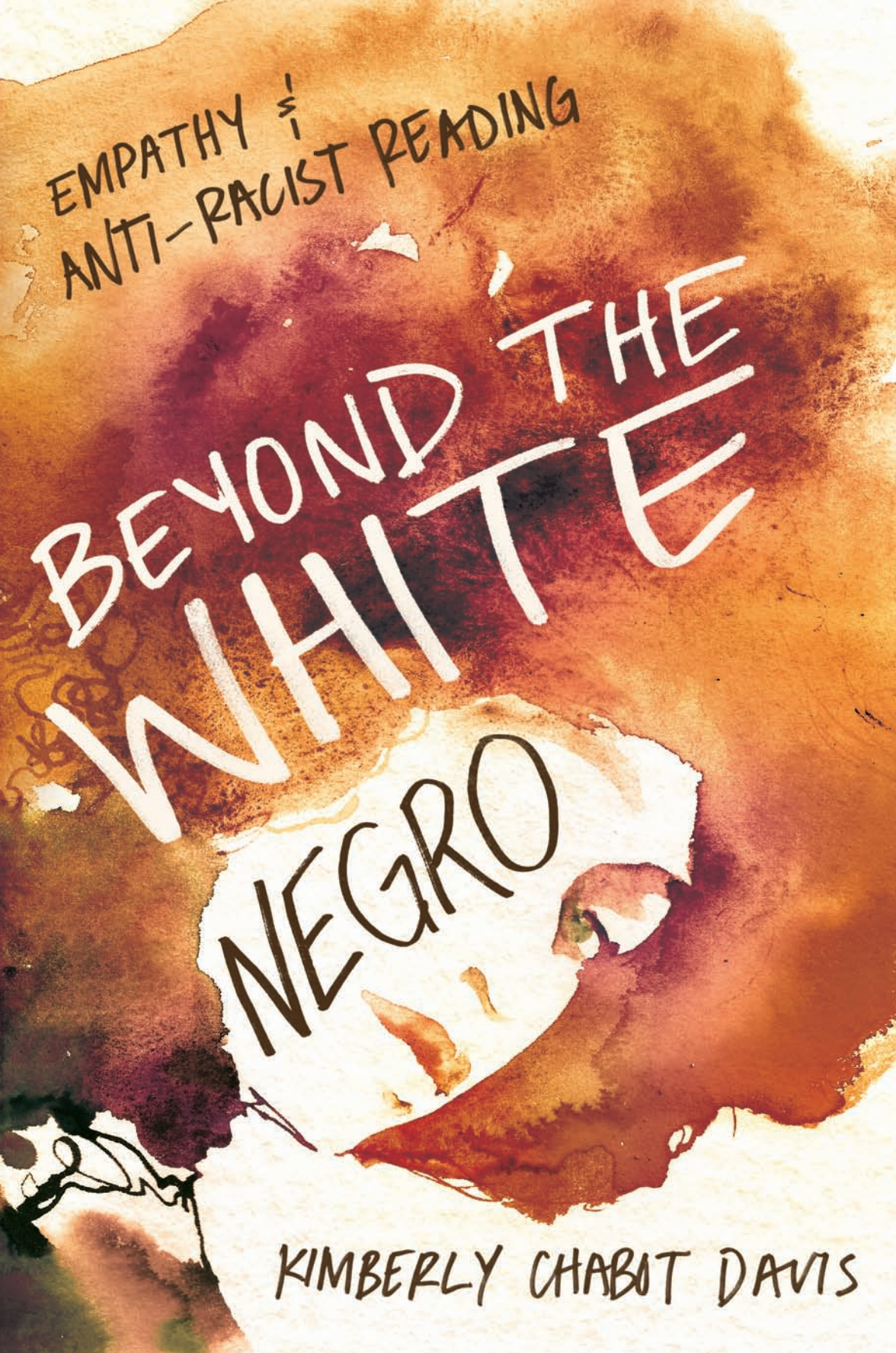
EMPATHY & ANTI-RACIST READING
BEYOND THE WHITE NEGRO
KIMBERLY CHABOT DAVIS

Beyond the White Negro

Beyond the White Negro

Empathy and Anti-Racist Reading

KIMBERLY CHABOT DAVIS

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS PRESS
Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield

Part of chapter 1 appeared in a different form in *At Home and Abroad: Historicizing Twentieth-Century Whiteness in Literature and Performance.* Copyright 2009 by the University of Tennessee Press. Reprinted with permission.
Part of chapter 2 appeared in a different form in the *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 7.4 (2004), by Sage Publications Ltd. All rights reserved. © Kimberly Chabot Davis.

© 2014 by the Board of Trustees
of the University of Illinois
All rights reserved
Manufactured in the United States of America
1 2 3 4 5 C P 5 4 3 2 1

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Davis, Kimberly Chabot, 1968–
Beyond the white negro: empathy and anti-racist reading /
Kimberly Chabot Davis.
pages cm
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-252-03843-3 (cloth: alk. paper)
ISBN 978-0-252-07994-8 (pbk.: alk. paper)
ISBN 978-0-252-09631-0 (ebook)
1. Whites—United States—Attitudes. 2. Anti-racism—United States.
3. United States—Race relations. 4. African American arts—Influence.
5. Empathy.
I. Title.
E184.A1D2828 2014
305.800973—dc23 2013050780

Contents

List of Illustrations vii

Acknowledgments ix

Introduction. Cross-Racial Empathy:
Viewing the White Self through Black Eyes 1

1. Wiggers or White Allies?
White Hip-Hop Culture and Racial Sincerity 27
2. Oprah, Book Clubs, and the Promise
and Limitations of Empathy 79
3. Reading Race and Place:
Boston Book Clubs and Post-Soul Fiction 111
4. Deconstructing White Ways of Seeing:
Interracial-Conflict Films and College-Student Viewers 149

Conclusion. Black Cultural Encounters as a Catalyst
for Divestment in White Privilege 201

Notes 211

Index 247

List of Illustrations

Figure 1. Cover of Norman Mailer's *The White Negro* (1st separate ed.; San Francisco: City Lights, 1967) 2

Figure 2. Nineteenth-century advertisement for a blackface minstrel show 4

Figure 3. Danny Hoch as Flip in *Jails, Hospitals, & Hip-Hop: The Film* (Kicked Down Productions, 2001) 43

Figure 4. Chalk drawing, *Do the Right Thing* (40 Acres and a Mule Filmworks, 1989) 155

Figure 5. Radio Raheem's brass knuckles, *Do the Right Thing* (40 Acres and a Mule Filmworks, 1989) 172

Table 1. Racial/Ethnic Demographics of Cities and Towns in Greater Boston 114

Table 2. Median Household Income for Localities in Greater Boston 115

Table 3. Book Clubs Discussing *The Known World* 118

Table 4. Book Clubs Discussing *Caucasia* 133

Acknowledgments

I owe many thanks to the people who have supported me throughout the past decade spent working on this book. Since *Beyond the White Negro* focuses on the reception of African American literature and culture among white audiences, my biggest thanks go out to the twenty-one book clubs who generously welcomed me into their homes and to the many students at Bridgewater State University, Bentley College, and Harvard University who participated in my study of film reception. Their participation vastly enriched my understanding of the connections between empathy and cultural consumption. I am also grateful to my senior-seminar and graduate students at Bridgewater for sharing their feedback on my work in progress. Particular thanks are due to the novelist Adam Mansbach for being such an insightful and funny interview subject.

This book might never have been completed without the intellectual and emotional support of my writing-group comrades, Lori Harrison-Kahan and Shilpa Davé. For seven summers, they read scores of drafts, gave brilliant editing advice, and cheered me on through every stage of my career. Special thanks to Lori for her expertise in black/Jewish relations and for introducing me to Mansbach's work, and to Shilpa for her insights on neoliberalism and race in media culture. I am deeply grateful to the anonymous reviewers at the University of Illinois Press, whose smart revision suggestions clarified my argument in myriad ways. Thank you to my editor Larin McLaughlin and to Dawn Durante for guiding me through the publication process with grace, and I appreciate the efforts of all the staff at Illinois Press who worked on the production of this book. Thanks are owed to Patsy Schweickart, La Vinia Jennings, Cecilia Konchar Farr, and Jaime Harker for including my research in their edited collections and journal issues. Part of chapter 1 appeared in a different form in *At Home and Abroad: Historicizing Twentieth-Century Whiteness in Literature and Performance* (University

of Tennessee Press), and earlier versions of chapter 2 were first published in the journals *LIT: Literature Interpretation Theory* and the *International Journal of Cultural Studies.*

Institutional support in the form of a Mellon Postdoctoral Fellowship at Cornell University was instrumental at the genesis of the project, and a Faculty Research Grant and a CARS Small Grant from Bridgewater State University allowed me to finish it ten years later. I appreciate the support of the following colleagues who heard presentations of the work in progress or whose ideas have influenced my thinking: Biodun Jeyifo, Shirley Samuels, Tim Murray, Paul Sawyer, Hortense Spillers, Liz DeLoughrey, and Nancy Wadsworth at Cornell University; Mike Frank, Bruce Herzberg, Traci Abbott, Samir Dayal, Linda McJannet, and Ken Stuckey at Bentley College; and Steven Biel, Andy Romig, Karen Flood, Stephanie Lin Carlson, Amy Spellacy, Jeanne Follansbee Quinn, Robin Bernstein, Lisa Szefel, and Tim McCarthy at Harvard's History and Literature Program. I am indebted to all my generous and inspiring colleagues in the English Department at Bridgewater State University, but especially to Ben Carson, John Kucich, Ann Brunjes, Molly Robey, Heidi Bean, Matt Bell, and John Mulrooney for the rich conversations we have shared about empathy, African American literature, American studies, and film studies. Many thanks to my graduate-school mentor, Rita Felski at the University of Virginia, for encouraging me twenty years ago to pursue reception studies and to read and think across disciplinary boundaries. I am also profoundly grateful to Toni Morrison for writing such powerful books that were the first to disrupt my white adolescent ways of looking at the world.

Thanks are due to family members Zoë Davis and Rebecca Deeks for reading chapters, to Beth Davis for inviting me to attend her book club, and to Josh and Emma for keeping me well grounded in the "real world" outside of academia. And finally, my deepest gratitude to Jon for the collaboration of our lives, and for making absolutely everything possible.

Beyond the White Negro

INTRODUCTION

Cross-Racial Empathy: Viewing the White Self through Black Eyes

At the start of the twenty-first century, critics concerned about white appropriation of black culture reached back into their cultural lexicons to resurrect a term that Norman Mailer had popularized in 1957: "The White Negro."[1] An article about *Black and White* (1999), a film featuring white teenage fans of urban hip-hop music, declared "The Return of the White Negro."[2] Between 1999 and 2003, nearly every media journalist and scholar writing about the rise to fame of the white rapper Eminem felt obliged to use Mailer's phrase to describe the hip-hop star who claims to be "chocolate on the inside."[3] Revealing the stereotyping logic often lurking beneath white attraction to African Americans, Mailer's famous essay "The White Negro" typified the white bohemian fascination with the supposed sexual potency, anarchic wildness, and hip poses of black men. Desiring escape from a 1950s white culture of conformity and anxiety, the hipsters that Mailer describes sought an antidote in the swagger and "primitive" emotions of "the Negro": "He lived in the enormous present, he subsisted for his Saturday night kicks, relinquishing the pleasures of the mind for the more obligatory pleasures of the body, and in his music he gave voice to . . . his rage and the infinite variations of joy, lust, . . . [and the] scream and despair of his orgasm. For jazz is orgasm."[4] The jazz-consuming White Negro has now been resurrected as the "wigger," a term for suburban white kids who dress in ghetto style and consume gangsta rap music to stoke their fantasies of macho power and violence.[5] Of course, whites' impersonation and appropriation of blackness has a much longer, multimedia history, encompassing blackface minstrel shows, modernist poetics, and Hollywood film.[6] With good reason and ample evidence, many scholars read this cultural history from blackface to wiggers as a long and repetitive story of the imperialist and racist nature of whites' desire to possess the black "other."

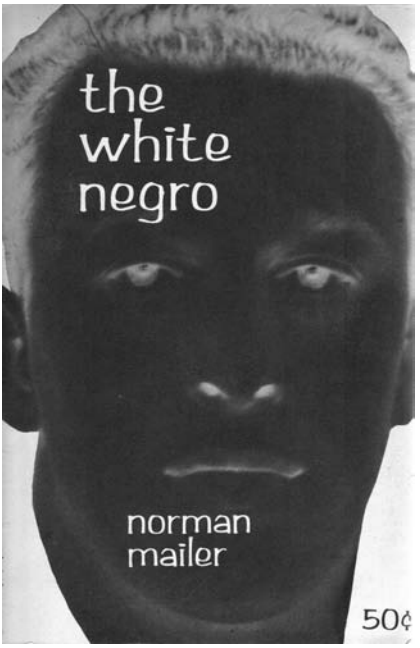

Figure 1. Cover of Norman Mailer's *The White Negro,* 1957 (1st separate edition, City Lights, 1967)

Beyond the White Negro: Empathy and Anti-Racist Reading complicates this history of white appropriation by analyzing white audiences consuming African American literature, film, theater, and music in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Extending the cultural sphere of the debate beyond hip-hop music, I argue that the White Negro paradigm is inadequate to describe the varied politics of cross-racial identification in the past decade. The "beyond" of my title signifies the temporal space of the twenty-first century and also the evolution of whiteness in our contemporary moment. To question the often pessimistic and cynical scholarly view of cross-racial empathy and affiliation, I examine encounters with black literature and culture that foster the development of "white allies" who are divesting from, rather than investing in, white power and privilege.[7] I investigate how whites respond to politically progressive forms of African American culture that aim to expose and undermine white supremacy, and thus are less easily repurposed for white needs and desires. How might the scholarly narrative of appropriation change if we were to examine white audience responses to a Toni Morrison novel, a Spike Lee film, or politically oriented hip-hop? To address that question, chapters of this book are focused on white hip-hop artists, white women discussing black women's fiction on the *Oprah Winfrey Show,* Boston-area book clubs reading African American literature, and college-student viewers of the racial-conflict films *Do the Right Thing* and *Crash.*

In his book *Everything but the Burden: What White People Are Taking from Black Culture,* editor Greg Tate brings together essays examining white fascination with blackness as a "fetish object" in the realms of music, sports, fashion, comedy, art, cinema, and politics.[8] As his title implies, Tate reductively assumes that white people take everything from black culture except the burden of living in a racist society, and that black culture "remains the most co-optable and erasable of cultures."[9] In contrast to Tate, *Beyond the White Negro* contends that African American literature and culture can be productive catalysts for the development of cross-racial empathy and anti-racist identities among white audiences. In response to critics who believe that the forces of commodification render cultural consumption a tainted vehicle for cross-racial understanding, I argue against a too-hasty dismissal of white consumption of black cultural texts as a potential conduit for social change. Although "cultural consumption" is a term commonly used to describe reading, viewing, and listening to texts, the word "consumption" is ill-fitting for my purposes because it signifies purchasing and eating, implying that the culture in question is commodified, easily digested, and disposable. Instead, I highlight experiences of cross-cultural encounter that can profoundly alter the self-conceptions of white readers, viewers, and listeners of black-authored texts. Although white co-optation is an undeniably potent force in the present, the possibility remains for white audiences to do more than simply consume and copy black style but to experience a perspective shift by being exposed to African American ways of seeing and interpreting the world, including racist structures of power. While my research confirms that cross-racial sympathy can often resemble a colonizing appropriation of blackness for white needs, the evidence also suggests that cross-cultural encounters can stimulate radical acts of treason against white privilege. In her book *White Women, Race Matters,* Ruth Frankenberg concludes that "whiteness changes over time and space and is in no way a trans-historical essence," yet critical race scholars such as Noel Ignatiev continue to essentialize whiteness as "nothing but an expression of race privilege."[10] Rather than treating whiteness as a transhistorical essence synonymous with domination, I explore how encounters with African American literature and popular culture help whites to develop and strengthen anti-racist sensibilities. The nouns "White Negro" and "wigger" are inadequate to describe this reception phenomenon because they imply that blackness is a state of being that can be embodied by white people—a false premise, given the tenacity of white privilege in the United States. In contrast, *Beyond the White Negro* emphasizes that cross-racial empathy is a state of mind and an aspirational process, a struggle that is ongoing and never complete.

In his award-winning book on the history of blackface minstrel performances, Eric Lott provocatively suggests that white attraction to blackness involves an ambivalent dance between "love and theft," yet the critical literature has been

Figure 2. 19th century advertisement for a blackface minstrel show

preoccupied primarily with "theft." Furthermore, Lott's definition of the love experienced by white performers who "black up" becomes nearly indistinguishable from theft. Their "love" for blackness is a perverse pleasure in the supposed excesses of black bodies, a feeling that echoes the "dominative logic of imperialism."[11] In Lott's analysis, "love" signifies desire rather than identification. In common parlance, however, "love" is often understood in the platonic or familial sense as connoting respect, understanding, admiration, and investment in another's well-being. My book sheds light on the relatively unexamined complexities of "identificatory love" across racial boundaries, arguing for the crucial role of empathy in fostering anti-racist coalitions.[12] While sympathy can connote a condescending pity that preserves racial hierarchies, empathy has the potential to be a radically destabilizing emotion. Black-authored representations can enable white audiences to look at their own whiteness from the outside in, to read themselves through black viewpoints, and to gain a self-implicating understanding of systemic racism and white-skin privilege. While remaining wary of the failures and problematic deployments of sympathetic emotions, this book recuperates feeling as a progressive tool and emphasizes the power of empathy-inducing literature, film, theater, and music to shape social and political attitudes about race.

Beyond the White Negro was inspired by and attempts to intervene in the field of critical whiteness studies, which aims to make visible a racial category that has long been ignored or perceived simply as the "universal human." Whiteness scholarship has emerged largely within the disciplines of sociology, history, literature, law, and education, yet few books in the field have merged the textually focused analytical methods of the humanities with a sociological, ethnographic attention to white encounters with black culture, as this book does. Such a hybrid methodology sheds light upon interpretive blind spots in narrow disciplinary approaches. While traditional textual analysis can yield a complex understanding of the ways that whiteness and blackness are represented by writers and filmmakers, formalist analysis ignores the fact that texts are not static but are used and interpreted by readers and viewers in dynamic and diverse ways. The field of audience studies, however, tends to ignore the important role of the text in circumscribing interpretive possibilities. In contrast, my book analyzes texts and their audiences as they work hand-in-hand to create meaning. Another problem is that reception scholarship, particularly in communication studies, has been dominated by attention to gender and class analysis; scant work exists on the impact of race upon reading and viewing.[13] A problematic consequence of this absence is that white identity often gets reduced to a singular, stereotyped essence, little more than a caricature of racist reading practices.[14]

A more nuanced understanding of the changing terrain of whiteness is necessary in order to move beyond the defeatist conclusions that racism is inevitable and race itself intransigent and fixed. In her book *Racechanges,* which documents hundreds of instances of racial crossover in twentieth-century art and culture, Susan Gubar despairingly concludes that "even the most high-minded, idealistic motivations will not save white impersonators of blackness from violating, appropriating, or compromising black subjectivity in a way that will *inevitably* rebound against the ethical integrity of whites" (italics mine).[15] Similarly, in his groundbreaking book *Blackface, White Noise,* Michael Rogin discusses Jewish affiliations with blackness on film and in civil-rights activism as unequivocal "form[s] of appropriative identification" that ultimately reinforce white supremacy.[16] To complicate these blanketing generalizations, I attend to variations in audience reception that imply the presence of fissures in the edifice of whiteness. My book thus responds to Henry Giroux's calls for a "rethinking [of] the subversive possibility of 'whiteness.'"[17] Aided by their engagement with African American culture, some of the white progressives in my study are moving beyond the paradigm of the White Negro, with its implications of appropriative impersonation, and are attempting to forge "multiracial coalitions based on an engagement [with] rather than a denial of 'whiteness.'"[18] African American cultural texts can enable white audiences to feel a self-implicating sense of outrage and empathy, emotions that can be important in galvanizing anti-racist actions.

Defining and Defending Empathy

I focus on the progressive potential of empathetic feeling to redress a scholarly bias against compassion, empathy, and sympathy, particularly in American studies. Many contemporary cultural critics disparage these humanizing emotions, denying their efficacy as tools in the fight for social justice. Although eighteenth- and nineteenth-century philosophers and writers of sentimental fiction viewed these related emotions as key to the development of benevolence, morality, and justice, American studies and critical race scholars often take a more cynical view, regarding these feelings as imperialist tools that affirm rather than erode hierarchies of race and class. Sympathy and compassion are regularly equated with a condescending form of pity, a "selfish and cruel wallowing in the misfortunes of others."[19] Cultural critics often argue that crying over the plight of disempowered people does little to challenge the status quo, since the emotional catharsis afforded by literature and film all too often results in political inertia and complacency. Although her own analysis is more ambivalent, the philosopher Elizabeth V. Spelman voices the predominant concern that "compassion, like other forms of caring, may . . . reinforce the very patterns of economic and political subordination responsible for such suffering."[20]

Any discussion of sympathy, empathy, and compassion is also fraught with the difficulty of definition. The terms are sometimes viewed as synonyms for an experience of feeling or suffering in response to another person's pain or need, but more often scholars spend an enormous amount of energy shaving hairs to differentiate what are essentially similar concepts. Those who distinguish between the terms offer quite varying definitions. "Sympathy" is most often used as an umbrella concept, meaning a feeling of concern for another's suffering. Some psychologists, philosophers, and cognitive scholars define "empathy" as "a vicarious, spontaneous sharing of affect" wherein the empathizer experiences the same or similar emotions as that of another.[21] Most agree that empathy, more so than sympathy, signifies a strong element of co-feeling, identification, or what the psychologist C. Daniel Batson calls "perspective-taking"—imaginatively experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and situation of another.[22] Others view sympathy as the more complex, second-order emotion, whereby empathetic sharing of feeling is transformed into sympathetic moral concern for and a desire to help a person in need.[23] In her book *Upheavals of Thought,* the philosopher Martha Nussbaum defines compassion as being of a higher moral order than empathy or sympathy because it involves a cognitive component of judgment and action. In her view, compassion entails more than a sympathetic or empathetic consciousness of another's situation but also a judgment that that person is in distress and a desire to alleviate the suffering.[24] One critic's definition of compassion, however, is another's definition of sympathy or empathy, and much scholarly effort is

wasted on wrangling over terminology. In my view, the terms are less important than the experiences they describe and the value and consequences attributed to them. Nonetheless, I have chosen to privilege the term "empathy" (rather than "sympathy" or "compassion") because of its association with the concepts of perspective-sharing, identifying with the emotions and experiences of others, and walking in another person's shoes or seeing through another's eyes.

A significant problem with scholarship on empathy and sympathy is that it is often based upon a narrow disciplinary framework, ignoring productive insights in other fields. This is especially true of humanities and American studies scholars who ignore work in sociology and psychology that might complicate or deepen their discussion of empathy. This section of the introduction synthesizes a diverse, multidisciplinary body of knowledge in order to question prevailing views about cross-racial sympathy and empathy in the fields of critical race and whiteness studies, where critics tend to overstate the case against these related feelings. The debates about empathy can be boiled down to the following questions:

- Is empathy a colonizing emotion that incorporates the other into the self and promotes complacency and self-satisfaction?
- Is empathy an anti-egoistic, altruistic emotion that allows recognition of difference and fosters a sensitive understanding of power and hierarchy?
- Is empathy a passive feeling that inhibits action, or can it stimulate actions such as political activism or altruistic helping of people in need?

Examining these opposing positions in this larger interdisciplinary conversation about empathy allows me to carve out a judicious middle course, to avoid overgeneralization, and to attend to the variety of experiences and effects of empathetic feeling.

The main targets of my critique are those cultural critics and race theorists who treat sympathy and empathy as inherently colonizing drives to consume and incorporate the other into the self. This standpoint, typified by bell hooks's essay "Eating the Other," is often informed by postcolonial theories exposing the quest for power within the seemingly innocent desire to "know" the other.[25] Psychoanalytic critics often arrive at this same conclusion, since they are influenced by Freud's conception of identification as a hostile erasure of the other, "in which the object that we long for and prize is assimilated by eating and is in that way annihilated as such."[26] In critical race theory, studies of cross-racial sympathy and empathy offer a decidedly pessimistic view of the possibilities of coalition.[27] Focusing on the narrative strategies that ethnic writers use to refuse access to white readers, Doris Sommer dismisses the sympathy of white liberals as an egocentric "appropriation in the guise of an embrace."[28] In *Racechanges,* Susan Gubar sadly concludes that cross-racial imitation "inevitably leads to the disappearance of

the other's otherness."[29] These writers shed light on a problematic possibility of sympathy and empathy: that the privileged sympathizer will ignore differences in his or her zeal to connect emotionally with another person, usually a suffering one. Erasing the subjective experience of people of color, the white empathizer falsely claims someone else's particular pain or joy as his or her own. While I agree that critics should remain wary of these negative possibilities, I object to the exaggerated claim that they are "inevitable" or intrinsic to the functioning of the sympathetic emotions.

While some critics focus on this desire for sameness as an erasure, others are more critical of the hierarchy that they wrongly believe is *implicit* in the operation of empathy, sympathy, or compassion. As Lauren Berlant puts it, "compassion is a term denoting privilege: the sufferer is over there," and the observer has the power to either help or turn away.[30] The critical race scholar Richard Delgado argues that white empathy is paternalistic and "reproduces power relations" because it can lead to misguided forms of help that ignore what minorities really want and need.[31] Abandoning hope for cross-racial empathy, Delgado urges whites to avoid empathy and become "race traitors" instead, enacting Noel Ignatiev and John Garvey's exhortation to resist white privilege and racist structures.[32] The flaw in Delgado's logic, however, is that whites will rarely arrive at the decision to commit themselves to anti-racist work without first experiencing an emotional response to the situation of African Americans. The sympathetic emotions may sometimes be rooted in a power differential between subject and object, and may keep hierarchies firmly in place by granting the sympathizer a feeling of self-satisfied benevolence and by denying agency to the sufferer. These consequences, however, are not implicit to the operation of sympathy, empathy, or compassion. Rather, they depend upon identities and ideologies that are culturally constructed and therefore subject to change. Identifying with the vantage point of a person experiencing a different lived reality can lead to a recognition of that person's unique subjecthood and agency, and can lead the white empathizer to a deeper understanding of racial injustice and the need for public action. As Rajini Srikanth argues in *Constructing the Enemy,* empathy may begin with an asymmetrical power imbalance but can lead to a "condition of true equity."[33]

Rather than denouncing sympathy or empathy in a decontextualized fashion, my reception study suggests that the colonizing, egotistical, and complacent effects of these emotions are not intrinsic to their structure but merely one possible deployment thereof. By offering evidence of the failures as well as the more radical possibilities of empathy among white audiences, I do not claim that the critics of sympathy and empathy are wholly wrong, but merely that they are diminishing the complexity of the sympathetic emotions. One could argue that Martha Nussbaum puts forth a similarly one-sided argument when she optimistically implies that

compassion is the cure for what ails modern society. Predicated on the assumption that reading multicultural literature produces empathetic and moral people, Nussbaum's philosophical reflections ignore the considerable diversity of reader responses to texts.[34] My book, however, exposes both negative and positive strains of empathy, while drawing attention to previously underappreciated progressive effects. It strikes me as particularly ironic that such despairing conclusions about cross-racial empathy are often voiced by *white* anti-racist scholars whose own critical work attests to the progressive potential of some acts of cross-racial affiliation. In our zeal to avoid celebratory analyses that underestimate the power of white hegemony, we need to avoid throwing out the proverbial baby (empathy and compassion) with the bathwater. In the context of an alarming rise in hate groups, terrorism, and anti-immigrant xenophobia, progressive scholars cannot afford to give up on empathy's promise of fostering cross-cultural understanding and a desire for social justice and equality.

As opposed to those scholars who view empathy as an egocentric emotion involving a metaphoric substitution ("I am you"), I concur with theorists and researchers across the disciplines who argue that true empathy can involve recognition of both sameness and difference, particularly differential access to power. In her manifesto on the "uses of literature," Rita Felski writes of an anti-egoistic reading experience of "recognition" that "brings together likeness and difference in one fell swoop."[35] Countering Freud's view of identification as a narcissistic incorporation of the other, the feminist psychologist Jessica Benjamin's formulation of "identificatory love" stresses a reciprocal sharing of feeling in which a communion of selves can occur without ignoring differences or seeking to control the other.[36] The psychoanalytic film theorist Kaja Silverman also rejects Freud's formulation in favor of a model of identification that refuses "the imperialism of the self."[37] In the field of social psychology, I draw upon C. Daniel Batson's concept of empathetic "perspective-taking"—imaginatively experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and situations of another. Exploring the anti-egoistic possibilities of empathy, Batson emphasizes the leap of imagining how *someone else* is "affected by his or her plight," including any oppressive conditions that person might face.[38] His formulation is especially applicable for my discussion of racial crossover because it highlights taking on another's viewpoint or ideological framework and destabilizing one's own lens for looking at the world.

Although I draw upon theories of the anti-egoistic potential of empathy in my book, I am also particularly interested in the capacity of empathy to provoke a critical kind of self-focus for white audiences. Rather than egotism, this self-reflexive gaze involves acknowledgment of the white person's own complicity with institutional racism and white privilege, systems that are a direct cause of African American suffering.[39] Social-science researchers and humanities theorists

have called these kinds of emotions "self-modifying feelings," "self-scrutiny," or "self-estrangement."[40] As the philosopher Janine Jones has suggested, many liberal "goodwill whites" lack "an ingredient essential to empathy: an appreciation of *their own situation*" (italics mine).[41] In my analysis of cross-racial empathy, I attend to instances where white audiences come to understand not only the structure of African American experiences but also their own situation of white privilege. Judith Butler similarly calls attention to the importance of such self-reckoning, wherein "I am compelled and comported outside myself. I find that the only way to know myself is precisely through a mediation that takes place outside of me."[42] Knowing oneself and how one is positioned in the world is the crucial first step towards taking greater responsibility for rectifying unequal distribution of resources and opportunities.

The theater and theorizing of the African American playwright and performer Anna Deavere Smith offers an inspirational model for the progressive possibilities of cross-racial empathy, even as she offers intense scrutiny of the racial differences that continue to fracture urban communities. Smith's documentary theater involves interviewing people from a wide variety of ethnic groups, races, and social locations and re-presenting their words on stage, mediated through her own chameleonic voice and body. Her philosophy of acting is a form of identification that involves "travel from the self to the other," as opposed to a self-oriented acting technique in which "you create a character through a process of realizing your own similarity to that character."[43] Smith's plays focus on moments of racial and ethnic conflict—*Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* records white, black, Latino, and Korean responses to the 1992 L.A. Riots; *Fires in the Mirror* documents black and Jewish responses to the Crown Heights Riot in Brooklyn; and *Let Me Down Easy* explores both Hutu and Tutsi views of the Rwandan genocide—because she believes that these moments "highlight for us the tragedy of the unmerged and stand as an inspiration for the merge."[44] By bringing together starkly opposed viewpoints and rendering these different speakers with her own body and voice, Smith hopes to underscore common human fears of difference, to encourage critical self-reflection about how we view others, and to enable "building bridges between places."[45] The final lines of the closing monologue of *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* sums up the project of Smith's career, as she speaks in the persona of Twilight Bey, a black former gang member turned peace activist: "In order for me to be . . . a true human being, I can't forever dwell in darkness. I can't forever dwell in the idea [of] just identifying with people like me and understanding me and mine."[46]

Although she champions empathy, Smith's theater work serves as an instructive reminder of the pain of racial difference and the discomfort that empathy *ought* to produce. As Anne Cheng argues, Smith's "work speaks simultaneously

to a desire for and a failure of community."[47] In performing disparate points of view, Smith is simultaneously critical of and empathetic toward her characters. Although she strives for human connection, she continually calls attention to difference and the operations of power that complicate any claims of solidarity: "I resist mushes of identity. I don't believe that when I play someone in my work, that I 'am' the character. I want the audience to experience the gap . . . [to] appreciate my reach for the other . . . for something that is very clearly not me. . . . Race is also not arbitrary here."[48] Smith's effort to build bridges is not a feel-good, self-satisfying experience, for it involves pain, discomfort, and self-critique on the part of the audience. When she performs the prejudices and racist ideologies of some of her interview subjects (including the prejudices of people of color against other minorities), viewers are encouraged to feel outrage as well as the shock of self-recognition. Smith's unsettling theater creates the possibility for self-alienation by encouraging viewers to read themselves and to critique their own social position and alliances. This kind of destabilizing reception experience is exactly what *Beyond the White Negro* aims to highlight.

In addition to the debate about empathy's egoistic or anti-egoistic qualities, scholars have disagreed about whether empathy inhibits or catalyzes pro-social actions such as altruistic helping or political activism. Nussbaum argues that a just society depends upon an education in compassion fostered by reading multicultural literature, but many leftist cultural critics in the field of American and ethnic studies are less optimistic about the effects of the humanizing emotions.[49] Many contend that sympathetic emotions can take a narcissistic turn, wherein feeling virtuous becomes an end in itself. Doris Sommer, for example, believes that sympathetic feeling is politically anemic, lasting "hardly longer than the reading of a novel."[50] Some extend the point even further, suggesting that sympathy is actually an impediment to social and political change. Emphasizing the commodification of feeling within capitalism, Lauren Berlant leaves little hope for the "passive ideal of empathy" to "move people . . . into identifying against their own interests."[51] Berlant doubts whether "changes in feeling, even on a mass scale, amount to substantial social change."[52] While her more recent work on compassion is less damning, she reiterates her concern that emotional "private responses are not only insufficient but a part of the practice of injustice."[53]

Rather than viewing empathy as a "passive ideal" and an impediment to political change, I argue that it is an active cognitive process that can play an important role in changing attitudes and self-perception or even catalyzing action.[54] Implicit in Berlant's argument is a familiar hierarchy of emotions, in which the power of rage reigns supreme. Despairing about the ability of sympathy to foster structural change in the public sphere, she places hope only in "political rage, a discourse of demand and radical critique."[55] While rage may certainly generate

radical action, political movements would quickly burn out without reserves of hope. Among the emotions motivating political action, sociologists include not only outrage but also moral shock, guilt, shame, and pride, all of which can be stimulated by sympathetic feelings.[56] The fact that people may feel sympathy or empathy without becoming political actors is not a fault inherent in the emotions, I contend, but rather stems from multiple factors common in contemporary U.S. society, including a pervasive distrust of the political sphere, waning communitarianism, and a loss of faith in the power of the individual to effect change. Given the pervasive political apathy in the United States, I suggest that more attention needs to be paid to the role of affect—and emotionally engaging encounters with cultural texts—in galvanizing efforts for radical change.[57]

Research in social psychology and the sociology of political movements confirms the connection between empathetic emotion and pro-social action. Many psychological studies have attested to the fact that empathetic experiences improve attitudes towards marginalized groups, and a few experiments have documented increased helping behavior toward members of an out-group after stimulation of empathetic feeling.[58] Numerous social-science studies have also established that a *lack of empathy* is correlated with antisocial or oppressive actions, such as sexual aggression, child abuse, homophobia, and intergroup violence.[59] In the essay collection *Passionate Politics: Emotions and Social Movements,* sociologists argue that "emotion . . . is a vehicle of political learning" and that "personal change and public activism [are] potentially constitutive of each other."[60] Offering a useful counterpoint to Lauren Berlant, the sociologist John Lofland has studied how cultural consumption of songs and stories motivates and sustains movements for social change.[61] Although my own conclusions about the direct relation between empathy and action are more tempered, some evidence from my study of white audiences suggests that there is indeed a correlation between engagement with African American culture, attitude shifts toward self and others, and politicization toward social justice causes.

Yet it is also clear that such politicization after encounters with African American culture does not automatically (or even routinely) occur. Why do some audience members empathize when others do not? Some formalist critics falsely assume that the text itself controls the empathy of its readers. Although textual strategies of narrative technique, plot, and characterization certainly play an important role in encouraging empathetic reactions among audiences, those strategies may fail to elicit the desired response.[62] The literary scholar Suzanne Keen convincingly argues that we should not assume that the text controls empathy, since a greater role might be played by a reader's innate degree of empathic ability; psychological research confirms her hypothesis.[63] Although Keen is skeptical that novels cause empathy, she does admit that "perhaps the circum-

stances of fictionality enable exploration of negative feeling states that might otherwise be avoided or repressed for personal or social reasons."[64] Likewise, I argue that fiction, film, and music can be useful *catalysts* for cross-racial empathy that might otherwise be avoided. Yet it's also clear that many other individual circumstances—political ideologies, an ability to be self-critical, witnessing of discrimination, previous encounters with people of color, other cross-cultural encounters, and innate variations in empathic ability—all play a role in making empathetic responses possible. To further explore the conditions under which empathy fails, sections of chapters 2 and 4 address non-empathetic responses to African American novels and to Spike Lee's film *Do the Right Thing.* Rather than making too-hasty generalizations about the effects of empathic feeling, I show how such failures of empathy are contingent upon the ideologies of particular respondents, who employed color-blind, postracial, neoliberal, or other white ways of seeing to discount the existence of antiblack racism.[65] Yet I contend that the likelihood of progressive forms of empathy can, in some cases, be increased by more reading and discussion of African American texts.

The circumstances in which an African American text is encountered may be nearly as important as the text itself. Thus, my case studies attend to sites and communities of readers, film viewers, and hip-hop devotees as they interpret and respond to texts in conjunction with others. Discussion about texts within a community thus becomes another opportunity to develop or reject empathetic possibilities. Chapter 1 examines white hip-hop artists whose youth was spent consuming and producing hip-hop in interracial neighborhoods or friendship groups; their cultural immersion facilitated and strengthened social ties to black people. Chapter 2 discusses the mediating effects of television and Oprah Winfrey's leadership upon Oprah's Book Club discussions, while chapter 3 examines book-club discussions influenced by the readers' local neighborhoods and by the monoracial or interracial makeup of their groups. In chapter 4, I examine another site of consumption: the college classroom as a community of film viewers who are also influenced by the teacher's pedagogy. My ethnographic emphasis on groups talking about texts within particular situations gives some credence to Suzanne Keen's judgment that "reading alone (without accompanying discussions, writing, or teacherly direction) may not produce the same results as enhanced reading that involves subsequent discussion."[66] When discussions of texts involve or engender communication with actual African Americans, the potential for further perspectival shifts is enhanced.

While my book attests to the importance of sites and communities in which reading/viewing/listening occurs, the kinds of texts that are encountered—or rather, the *racial ideologies and thematics* expressed by those texts—also matter. First I want to address the question of whether empathy is contingent upon the

form, genre, or media specificity of texts. In constructing the project, I made some assumptions about the kinds of texts that would be conducive for a study of cross-racial empathy. First of all, I chose to examine novels and fictional films that set up realistic environments and narrative situations for their black characters.[67] But beyond that most basic kind of text—a fictional narrative—I wondered if genre, or medium, or the relative difficulty of a text might induce different degrees or kinds of empathy. When I first conceived of the project, I chose to investigate both popular and high-cultural narrative texts across multiple media to examine how the media form or context might make a difference in empathetic possibility. Some of my initial questions were these: Does visual culture and the sense of sight lead to stronger empathy, or do visible reminders of racial difference impede cross-racial empathy? Is popular hip-hop music less likely to produce cross-racial empathy because of the rampant commodification of music within capitalism, accompanying stereotypical visual imagery of videos, and the ease with which listeners can appreciate or appropriate dance, beat, and clothing style while ignoring the meaning of the lyrics? Does reading a lengthy novel produce a more intense emotional connection, or can reading facilitate shallow color-blind reactions because visual racial difference can only be imagined and possibly ignored? My research convinced me, however, that these media-based questions were impossible to answer conclusively. Although media form sometimes influences audience response, media-level generalizations about empathy quickly fall apart due to the variability of audience members' ideologies, consumption circumstances, and the racial politics of the individual texts within each medium.

My research questions the idea that any one medium is more likely to produce empathy, or that popular texts like hip-hop songs are necessarily inferior catalysts for politicization as opposed to difficult, high-cultural novels. Suzanne Keen is similarly skeptical of the assumption that reading "literary novels" is more conducive to immersion and empathy than popular or middlebrow texts.[68] So when I say that the "kind of text" matters, I do not mean the medium or the genre. The way that an individual text represents race in America, however, does make a difference. Some texts enable white self-scrutiny and progressive politicization, while others offer stereotypes that leave racism and white supremacy unchallenged. Although much commercialized hip-hop music trades in such stereotypes, so do a good number of novels and films. Racially progressive texts or complacent texts that support the status quo can be found within any medium. Thus, I have chosen to examine the effects of progressive film, literature, and music texts that aim to expose audiences to the realities of institutional racism, that question racial essentialism by disrupting racial boundaries, and that upend neoliberal assumptions that racism is a thing of the past. Choosing texts with such political designs on readers, viewers, and listeners allows for a more logical test of Greg Tate's assumptions about whether white audiences are "taking up the burden" expressed

by African American cultural producers. Not all African American culture is invested in exposing that burden in the first place, so it is not surprising if white consumers fail to absorb an anti-racist message from a rap song glorifying the "gangsta-pimp-ho trinity."[69]

Since so much scholarly work on cultural crossover focuses on hip-hop and other African American musical forms, I begin with a chapter on white production and consumption of hip-hop culture, a phenomenon that has alternately been vilified as cultural theft or celebrated as a sign of multicultural fusion. While many critics flatten out differences among so-called White Negroes or wiggers, this chapter underscores the widely varied politics of white hip-hop by comparing three white consumers-turned-producers of hip-hop culture: the rap star Eminem; Danny Hoch, a white Jewish playwright and actor who created New York's Hip-Hop Theater Festival; and Adam Mansbach, a Jewish novelist and journalist who coined the term "lit hop." Hoch and Mansbach represent the possibility that white fans may be materially transformed into traitors against white privilege through their encounters with activist forms of hip-hop culture. I analyze Hoch's plays and films and Mansbach's novels as evidence of the blackening of their perspectives via immersion in progressive interracial hip-hop communities. I also consider the role that their Jewish identities play in their cross-racial identification. While Eminem's songs reveal that he has not internalized radical hip-hop's imperative to protest racial oppression, Hoch and Mansbach have indeed taken up the burden in their creative work and political activism as white allies. This chapter also draws scholarly attention to a neglected arena of hip-hop culture—"lit hop" and hip-hop theater.

While much attention has been given to white male attraction to African American music, chapter 2 addresses a relatively unexamined group: college-educated female readers of African American fiction. Investigating the promise and limitations of cross-racial empathy, I analyze Oprah Winfrey's Book Club as well as twenty-one private reading groups in the Boston area. The chapter draws evidence from a variety of consumption and discussion sites: Oprah's televised book-club chats, the discussion boards of Oprah.com, and the book-club sessions of 159 Bostonian readers of African American literature. I treat book clubs as discussion spaces in which cross-racial empathy can have variable results, generating a complete failure of empathetic perspective-taking, a problematic color-blindness that ignores the particularities of black experience, or the strengthening of political alliances between blacks and whites.

Chapter 3 extends my work with Boston-area book clubs by focusing on the reception of two African American "post-soul" novels that deconstruct essentialist ideas about race. Inviting readers to reconsider binary understandings of blackness and whiteness, Edward P. Jones's *The Known World* (2003) focuses on free blacks who own slaves in the antebellum South, while Danzy Senna's *Caucasia* (1998)

details the coming of age of a mixed-race girl in Boston in the 1970s and 1980s. The chapter examines how the reading of a racially charged text is influenced by the readers' locality and the communities in which they live and participate. To explore the relationships between reading, race, and place, I compare the conversations of racially mixed book clubs to those with all white or all African American members. Concentrating on the dynamic relationship between the private sphere of reading and the public sphere of political practice, I analyze the connections and disjunctions between empathetic reading and the readers' political lives within a metropolitan area with a long history of racial antagonism.

Chapter 4 turns to the medium of film and a different demographic group and reception context: the college classroom. I analyze the responses of college students to two films about interracial conflict: *Do the Right Thing* (produced by the black director and screenwriter Spike Lee) and *Crash* (produced by the white director and screenwriter Paul Haggis). Lee's film scrutinizes the causes of race riots by exposing domestic colonialism and the economic disenfranchisement of the black urban poor. Yet the majority of the white students in my introductory-level film courses refused empathy for its African American characters and evaluated the events by employing neoliberal and racist discourses that "blame the victim." *Crash,* in contrast, appealed to their neoliberal sympathies and white biases and enabled a complacent view of racism as simply a "universal," inevitable aspect of human nature. This chapter also examines how white students' responses to *Do the Right Thing* became increasingly empathetic when Lee's film was viewed in context-rich ethnic-studies courses, where students were exposed to numerous African American writers and filmmakers. Although this chapter addresses formidable roadblocks to cross-racial empathy, this comparative study of non-empathetic versus empathetic viewers suggests that white ways of seeing, particularly among young adults, are open to revision rather than fixed.

Beyond the White Negro treats literature and popular culture as reflections of the current state of race relations as well as agents of potential social change. Complicating current understandings of whiteness and cross-racial empathy, my research explores not only the binding and limiting effects of white racial identity but also the challenges to the racial order taking place through engagement with African American literature and popular culture of the past two decades. Although these ethnographic case studies acknowledge the way that whiteness continues to serve as a force of domination and co-optation, they also suggest that white audiences of progressive African American culture can not only become aware of the tragic consequences of racial hierarchy but can become motivated to work against the system wherein their own power resides. Cornel West makes a useful distinction between a naïve optimism that denies the tenacity of racism and an enabling and sustaining hope, a "deep democratic vision of a better

world."[70] Navigating between the disabling extremes of despair and optimism, I examine both the promise and failures of cross-racial empathy in order to locate such avenues of hope for inspiring social change.

Ethnographic Methodology: Multiplex Subjectivity and the Insider/Outsider Debate

You may be wondering whether I am black or white or another race, or considering whether my racial identity matters (it does). Since I am a white female researcher studying both whites and people of color, an examination of my own social positioning in regard to my subjects is necessary. In the field of ethnography, current scholarship regularly includes a discussion of the social identities of the researcher, particularly when differences of race, gender, or class are involved. For the past forty years, qualitative researchers in sociology, anthropology, and cultural studies have been engaged in debate about the possibility of objectivity in ethnographic research, about the merits or liabilities of an ethnographer's "insider" or "outsider" positioning relative to his or her subjects, and about the operations of power in the ethnographic field. Many ethnographers acknowledge the importance of addressing how the social identities of the researcher may impact the researcher/respondent dynamic or even compromise the viability of the knowledge gleaned from the study.[71] As the anthropologist Pat Caplan argues, "being an ethnographer means studying the self as well as the other."[72]

The insider/outsider debate, and the case favoring the insider position, was fueled by James Clifford and George E. Marcus's volume *Writing Culture,* which exposed the culturally biased perspectives of Western "outsider" anthropologists studying native populations.[73] Nonwhite and female anthropologists argued that insiders or cultural "natives" produce superior ethnographic research because they can easily establish trust with their subjects, and their intimate knowledge of the habitus and discourse communities can minimize misinterpretation.[74] Those who championed the insider position also believed that it would minimize the imbalance of power between subject and researcher. As a result of this debate, the social sciences experienced an inward turn as researchers began studying their own communities and selves.[75] However, the assumption that the insider position is more effective or free of methodological drawbacks has also come under fire.[76] Anti-essentialist thinkers object to the belief that an insider anthropologist necessarily has a more authentic and unbiased perspective, and they note that less visible categories of identity, such as class, can still create distance or conflict between an insider-researcher and his or her subjects.[77] Another possible drawback is that being inside and overly familiar may blind the researcher to social processes that might be better understood from a critical distance.

Although the outsider position can be an impediment to trust and honest communication with research subjects, scholars have also defended its most important benefit: social distance may enhance one's ability to read "against the grain" in an effort to see entrenched social practices with a new perspective. Robert Merton defends the importance of outsider objectivity: "[I]t is the stranger, too, who finds what is familiar to the group significantly unfamiliar and so is prompted to raise questions for inquiry less apt to be raised at all by Insiders."[78] Alford A. Young, a middle-class African American sociologist who studies the black underclass, argues that any academic researcher is automatically an outsider because his or her educational training affords him or her "different cultural practices and ways of thinking in comparison to other community members"; without such differences, analytical social science research would be impossible. Like Young, I believe that the viability of my own research is more dependent on my "outsider" training in critical race studies than my "insider" position as a white person studying white people. Young argues, "[I]t is not always the case that occupying outsider positions necessarily inhibits a researcher from acquiring rich and insightful qualitative data," provided that the researcher is self-reflexive and rigorous in examining potential blind spots or effects of power differentials.[79]

Current methodological theory suggests that neither the insider nor the outsider position is necessarily a superior or inferior position from which to conduct research. In his book *What's Wrong with Ethnography?* Martyn Hammersley notes that "no position, even a marginal one, guarantees valid knowledge; and no position prevents it either."[80] In their study of Chinese immigrants in Britain, for example, Miri Song and David Parker conclude that the researchers' commonality or difference from their interview subjects "did not consistently or predictably result in either 'good' or 'bad' effects, in terms of the richness or validity of the interviewees' accounts."[81] The respondents' commentary could be just as revealing in either case, although difference or shared identities might have affected what they chose to reveal to the interviewer and how they did so. Furthermore, anti-essentialist theories about identity have led some scholars to question the validity of the insider/outsider binary itself. Nancy Naples, for example, convincingly argues that "outsiderness and insiderness are not fixed or static positions, rather they are ever-shifting and permeable social locations. . . . As ethnographers we are never fully outside or inside the community."[82]

Some scholars have cited the fluidity and permeability of the insider/outsider boundary as a reason to discount its importance as a methodological concern. In *Thug Life,* a study of black and white male hip-hop fans, Michael Jeffries makes the case that "it is impossible to account for each of the insider/outsider methodological factors that influence qualitative data collection and dangerous to allow these suspicions about researcher/respondent relations to become explanations for data

sets."[83] While I agree with Jeffries in part, I contend that we need to remain aware of biases and dishonest or guarded communication created by trust barriers, and to consider the possibility that these may distort results. Instead of simply trying to be as "inside" as possible, a researcher should try to be cognizant of differences and commonalities—always unpredictable and ever-changing—that may impact conversational dynamics. Perhaps most importantly, researchers must continue to draw attention to any "power dynamics in ethnographic encounters."[84] Yet Jane Ribbens usefully reminds us that a power imbalance is nearly inevitable between any two people; researchers in a social position of power can only acknowledge and own up to power, but can never completely erase it. Furthermore, the existence of power does not necessarily mean that it will be used in exploitative ways.[85] Following ethical guidelines for non-exploitative research with human subjects, I aimed to be sensitive to the operations of power that might impact my own qualitative research.[86]

In response to Pat Caplan's charge to ethnographers to study the self as well as the other, I offer a brief account of the ways in which I am positioned by various and sometimes conflicting vectors of identity and power, any of which may play a role in my interaction with subjects in the ethnographic field. I am a white woman who grew up in an overwhelmingly white and frequently racist community in Massachusetts, but I have also spent fifteen years of my academic career teaching and researching African American and ethnic literature and film and critical race theory. Raised in a halfheartedly Catholic family, I married a Jewish man, and we are raising our two children as Jews. Although I was raised in a lower-middle-class home, my extended family is working-class, and my current class status is upper-middle class. I attended public high school and was the first person in my extended family to graduate from college; generous scholarships allowed me to benefit from a privileged education as an undergraduate at Harvard University. As a child I was exposed to the Republican ideology of my parents, but I registered as a Democrat at eighteen and became increasingly progressive over time. The shifts that I have experienced in class status and privilege, ethnic/religious identity, political identity, and racial affiliations complicate any attempt to fix me as an insider or outsider in relation to the people I study. Although I occupy a powerful position in terms of race, class, and education, my gender and family affiliations with working-class people and religious minorities align me with marginalized perspectives and disempowered positions. As the anthropologist Kirin Narayan notes, "every anthropologist exhibits what [Renato] Rosaldo has termed a 'multiplex subjectivity' with many cross-cutting identifications."[87] Ethnographers bring a variety of selves to the field, and respondents may be reacting to any one of those perceived selves or other imagined selves.[88] Research subjects may also misrecognize or essentialize

the researcher as someone just like or different from themselves on the basis of the most visible surface identities. Ethnographers should aim to be cognizant of how any of their multiple selves may be either assets or liabilities in the field, but ultimately researcher/respondent interactions are highly contingent and variable due to the complex nature of subjectivity itself.

In addition to addressing the politics of researcher/respondent interactions, ethnographers are also faced with the issue of choosing a qualitative methodology appropriate for their goals, whether it be in-depth interviews commonly used by anthropologists in the field, questionnaire-driven interviews, written surveys, participant observation, or the "lurker" method of watching from the sidelines unbeknownst to participants.[89] In my first book, *Postmodern Texts and Emotional Audiences,* I employed questionnaire-based oral interviews as well as written questionnaires to offer a qualitative reception analysis.[90] Some of my questions were open-ended and others more pointed, and the combination yielded complex results. With any question-driven method, however, there is always the possibility that the terms a researcher employs will limit the range and type of responses given, no matter how carefully the questions are worded to avoid leading the respondent to a particular answer. In *Beyond the White Negro* I experimented with a range of methodologies to study audience reception. In some of my case studies I was an observer and in others a participant; some were highly mediated by a controlling presence and others relatively unmediated; and some were shaped by my questions, while others were driven solely by the respondents' concerns and language choices. To offer a more complex picture of the reception of African American culture, I employed a wide variety of methodologies appropriate to each context—participant-observation of book clubs and college classrooms with varying levels of researcher participation, oral and written questionnaires, textual analysis of Internet postings on Oprah.com and of student writing, and analysis of televised book-club discussions on the *Oprah Winfrey Show.* In each case, I have aimed to be mindful of the particular drawbacks and benefits of each type of reception methodology and to the levels of mediation and power relations that may be involved. The different methodologies, reception sites, and populations studied yielded a complex rather than a monolithic picture of cross-racial empathy and white responses to African American culture. Yet the repetition of certain kinds of discourses across these different case studies adds further validity to my study, because the findings can not be dismissed as contingent upon one particular methodological choice.

For chapter 1 on white hip-hop artists, I used a questionnaire-driven method to interview the novelist Adam Mansbach in person.[91] Although I had the power to direct his responses through my pointed questions, Mansbach also held some power in our exchange because he is an "expert" in his field and was doing me a favor by consenting to be interviewed. Treating the interviews as a form of pub-

licity, he exercised his power to reveal or conceal information in his construction of a public persona as author. Although Mansbach and I are white racial progressives of the same generation, I am not an ardent fan of hip-hop music but rather a casual and often critical listener. In that respect, and especially as a white *woman,* I am distanced from the predominantly male hip-hop cultural world in which he is immersed. My chapter on Hoch and Mansbach may appear distinct from the other reception-focused chapters because I foreground my own textual analysis of their theater, fiction, and essays; however, I consider their creative work as a kind of reception document in itself. Since they are consumers-turned-producers of hip-hop, I read their "lit hop" and hip-hop theater as a record of their reception of hip-hop culture and the questions and concerns that cross-racial consumption and identification raise for them. Because their fictional works explicitly address white and Jewish characters who identify with black culture, these texts offer rich critical reflections concerning the authors' own experiences with racial crossover.

Chapter 2 examines and compares a variety of reception sites where white and black readers discussed African American fiction—televised "Oprah's Book Club" (OBC) discussions of invited readers on the *Oprah Winfrey Show,* anonymous postings from the OBC reading public on Oprah.com discussion boards, and private book clubs discussing African American fiction in the Boston metropolitan area. In my study of Oprah's televised book club and the online discussion boards, I was a lurker or unidentified observer with no connection to the subjects, since I was analyzing publicly available postings and programs. These sites range from less mediated Internet chat boards to highly mediated televised conversations deliberately shaped by Oprah's self-help philosophy. The methodological questions raised by these Oprah reception sites are discussed in detail in chapter 2.

Chapters 2 and 3 both draw heavily from my ethnographic research with Boston-area book clubs. My decision to study readers of African American fiction within book clubs was informed by the sociological premise that "social interactions [are] the locus where people perform, reject, or respond to racial identities."[92] Private book clubs are also a preexisting social site rather than one constructed by the researcher; thus they offer a "natural" setting, which ethnographers prefer.[93] Conversations between multiple subjects who are friends also reveal fluidity and contradiction in racial ideology and discourse and a complex interplay of performances and self-revelations influenced by their preexisting relationships. To solicit participants for the Boston-area book-club study, I placed advertisements asking for permission to visit book clubs discussing African American fiction and noted that I was studying "if and how fiction-reading fosters empathy and informs people's political sensibilities and ideas about race." I posted these solicitations in urban and suburban public libraries, university Web sites, and online newsletters of independent bookstores in the suburbs of Newton and Brookline. I also contacted three library facilitators who were planning a public discussion of an

African American–authored novel. The online nature of the solicitation meant that many people forwarded my initial message to friends, creating a snowball effect. Twenty-one book groups totaling 159 participants allowed me to attend and record their book clubs discussing an African American novel of their own choosing. Ten additional book clubs expressed interest but eventually declined to participate because some members felt uncomfortable with the idea of talking about racial issues in my presence, or they didn't want to invite a stranger with a tape recorder into their homes. In this instance, the research subjects exerted power over me because they had the right of refusal.[94] Of the twenty-one clubs that participated, the large majority were all-female and all-white, with men involved in a few "couples" book clubs and a few groups that met at public libraries and a senior-citizens center. Three of the groups were racially mixed, and two were comprised solely of African American women.

For most of the book clubs that I visited, I would be classified as an insider. Like me, most of the readers were white, female, middle-class, college-educated professionals, and they welcomed me warmly as a peer or an invited guest rather than a stranger. I also shared a Jewish affiliation with a number of book clubs with mostly Jewish members. The fact that I was teaching at Harvard University at the time may have also influenced the groups favorably toward me, given that many had earned advanced degrees and value educational attainment. They included me in the food sharing that accompanies book-club meetings and offered unsolicited details of their own personal and professional lives. At the conclusion of the book discussions (during which I did not speak), when eating and friendly conversation took over, they asked questions about my research, teaching, and family life, as one would do upon initiating a friendship. My experience echoes that of many self-reflexive studies of white researchers who reported an attitude of open sharing among white subjects hailing from similar social locations as themselves.[95]

Despite my seeming insider status with the white groups, I also shifted at some moments into an outsider position. Some groups or individuals treated me as an esteemed expert, asking me for suggestions of other African American literature to read. For about half of the book clubs, I was significantly younger than the participants by twenty or more years, and some of the elderly readers treated me in a motherly fashion. The major difference between myself and the book-club readers, a difference that only I was cognizant of, was my training in critical race studies and the fact that my ideas about race were more progressive than the neoliberal viewpoints that some expressed. Several participants revealed failures of empathy or color-blind forms of racism but did not seem to recognize them as such or felt safe expressing them because I was a white "insider." In perhaps the most uncomfortable instance, one group of seniors waxed nostalgic about

the "harmless" Sambo stories of their childhood, while I struggled to stop my eyebrows from rising.

My decision to remain silent during the book discussions was rooted in the concern that sociologists have expressed about the "deficits of active participation"—the more you as a researcher reveal about yourself, the more you might inadvertently lead subjects into saying what they think you want to hear.[96] I aimed for a limited participant-observer role, noting that I would not contribute to the conversation until after they were finished discussing the book, at which time I would answer any questions they had about my research. Before the discussion, I told them via email that I was investigating cross-racial empathy and the role of reading in the development of readers' attitudes about racial and political issues. I also asked each participant to fill out a one-page survey with questions about their occupation, education, reading habits, and participation in political causes or activism. Most of the participants seemed to see my research as nonthreatening and "fascinating," perhaps because they were proud of or comfortable with their liberal or progressive racial attitudes. Assuring them that I would not use their names in any publications possibly increased their candor. My vow not to speak during the discussions meant that I had to pass up the chance to question some of the problematic statements that I heard, ones that I would have challenged in most social situations. The benefits of my relative silence were that I didn't determine the direction or language of the conversation, although they might not have used the word "empathy" so frequently if I hadn't mentioned it as a subject of my research. Given that the novels in question explicitly thematize racial identity and racial conflict, it is highly likely that the groups would have discussed their ideas about such matters even without the prompting of my research question.

It is nonetheless important to consider whether my presence in the room might have led the book-club members to "perform" more progressive racial attitudes than they in fact held. Song and Parker note the importance of a "social desirability bias—that they will say what they think the interviewer would approve of." The sociologist John Hartigan also notes that "there is a widespread recognition that expressing racist beliefs is socially unacceptable."[97] In the conversations that I witnessed, readers rarely made comments that were blatantly racist, but they did reveal attitudes that were more subtly rooted in white privilege. Although it may be clear which kinds of derogatory racial statements are "socially unacceptable," which attitudes are "socially desirable" is definitely an open question and highly contingent upon particular discourse communities. Indeed, some whites may view color-blind discourse as socially desirable, whereas a critical race scholar or progressive activist might not. Furthermore, although the subjects may be performing for the researcher, or performing for other members of the book club, those performances may nonetheless reveal sincerely held feelings and beliefs. In

his book *Real Black: Adventures in Racial Sincerity,* John L. Jackson Jr. notes that ethnographers must accept that conversations they have with subjects are "real and fake at the same exact time" and that "what we think about as fake may not be fake at all."[98] Even if statements that appear racially progressive have an element of performance or "social desirability" motivating them, that nonetheless could represent a significant shift in racial attitudes with potential to impact the real world.

Although I was largely an insider with the all-white book clubs, my whiteness made me an outsider visiting two clubs with only African American members. This visible difference did not seem to impede our communication, but it certainly shaped it. One group of professional black women asked the most questions of any group about how the research would be used, indicating that they were more wary of the ends to which a white ethnographer would use their words.[99] The group leader, a journalist, contacted me over a year later to ask if I planned to publish any of their comments. Upon meeting the two African American book clubs, I had to work a bit harder to establish friendly rapport with them. For example, I felt it important to demonstrate my black cultural knowledge by sharing my impressions with some who had recently attended an August Wilson play that I had also seen. The other book club of lower-middle-class black women were pleased by my willingness to come to the meeting in a black working-class section of Boston; they noted that other whites whom they had invited to their club had declined out of fear. Both of these groups were very cordial and welcoming to me personally but nonetheless quite outspoken in their commentary about racism and white privilege. Perhaps they saw it as an opportunity to speak their minds about race and white privilege in a safe, home environment in which they held some power over me, the only white person in the room. My experience with these African American groups echoed what Song and Parker noted in their study of Chinese immigrants: "[S]ome interviewees seemed emboldened in speaking about themselves when they claimed difference" from the researcher.[100]

Chapter 4 analyzes a reception site in which I was a more powerful participant-observer. In nine college courses in which I was the instructor, I analyzed the written and oral responses of 130 students at three institutions to the racial-conflict films *Do the Right Thing* and *Crash*. Compared to the ethnographic situations analyzed in earlier chapters, I held more power and played more of an active role in my own classrooms. My role in this case study is typical of the "teacher-as-researcher" movement in the field of education, where educators draw conclusions from their classrooms as a practical laboratory.[101] Professors obviously have a good deal of power in their classrooms, but my goal is to use my position to empower students to think critically about texts, their social world, and themselves. Teachers determine what students read, construct writing assignments or exams, and

assign grades. Although the existence of a power differential between teachers and students can not be denied, my pedagogical style is nonauthoritative. My discussion-based classes aim to give students a voice and a safe space in which to test out and develop their own interpretations and close-reading skills. I encourage students to set the agenda with their own questions and written responses, and I take on the role of a nonconfrontational devil's advocate to spark debate and sharpen their critical thinking. Such a nonauthoritative, discussion-based approach increases the likelihood of candid student responses to the texts. White students offered many opinions that reflect the racist underpinnings of neoliberal and color-blind positions, thus testifying to the fact that they were not strongly influenced by my own racial politics.

Nonetheless, because it is always possible that some students shaped their written and oral responses in order to echo my ideas, I grant more validity to the reception documents that were produced *in advance* of our classroom discussions of each film—to critical reaction papers written after students had watched the films on their own but before they could hear my own questions or ideas, and to public online blackboard posts that reflect student debates in which I did not participate (much like the book-club discussions). Questionnaires that the students in my Race in Film course filled out after the course's completion also gave me access to anonymous comments that were not written to earn a grade. The most mediated reception documents were final papers and exams written for a grade after our discussion of these films had already taken place, and when students had time for measured reflection; in many cases, however, having time to think did not necessarily alter their opinions. Oral comments made in class or posts on a discussion board are obviously subject to the pressure to avoid socially undesirable statements of outright bigotry, yet once again many statements were made revealing unreflective white privilege that the students did not see as undesirable. My analysis in this chapter focuses predominantly on written texts of student response, because recording hundreds of hours of discussion over eight semesters would have been impractical.

The fact that I am a white teacher of ethnic and African American studies also played a role in my interactions with the student subjects. Since students of color may be understandably wary of a white teacher of ethnic culture, I make a concerted effort to establish rapport and trust with those students. Because I occupy an outsider status in relation to the material I teach, I must work actively to establish empathetic bonds with students of color, to earn their respect, and to model respectful conduct as an ally of people of color. I use my position as a white teacher of ethnic studies to provoke all students to question their desires for fixed racial and ethnic boundaries and to think critically about the vexed question of authenticity. I also work hard to educate white students out of racist habits of

thought in an empathetic way that leaves their dignity intact. Taking advantage of the trust afforded by my insider position among white students, I push them to question their white biases perhaps harder than a nonwhite instructor would be able to do without engendering defensive reactions.[102]

Given that my study explores the development of a critical understanding of whiteness among white audiences of African American culture, I strove throughout my ethnographic research to be mindful of my own position relative to my subjects and of any power that these identities might confer. Although I was a relative insider among many of the white groups I studied, I aimed to use both my insider and outsider status for productive ends—to establish trust and empathy with my research subjects while maintaining a critical perspective to understand their racial discourses and ideologies from a vantage point that might differ from their own. The ideal of empathy, as I have defined it, involves understanding how the other's situation has impacted his or her selfhood, and a self-reflexive ability to look at oneself through that other's eyes. I have tried to live up to this empathetic ideal in my ethnographic practice, simultaneously seeing from the perspectives of self and other, insider and outsider. Through researching and writing this book, I have sought to better understand how white individuals, including myself, have shaped and revised their own sense of self through cultural encounters with African American others. The parts of the book that highlight the development of an anti-racist consciousness through cross-racial empathy speak to Pamela Perry's concern that "our analytical foci may need to be less on what makes white people 'racist' and more on what makes them actively non- or anti-racist," in order to nurture anti-racist consciousness in others.[103] In a similar spirit, *Beyond the White Negro* was written to hold up a mirror to whiteness and to provide tools for shattering it. I foreground the processes of white racial formation while simultaneously testifying to the importance of African American cultural agency. Since the genesis of whiteness studies can be traced to black intellectuals and writers like W. E. B. Du Bois, Langston Hughes, James Baldwin, and Toni Morrison, who dared to analyze the "souls of white folk,"[104] I have also tried to follow their lead by placing black voices at the center rather than the periphery, thus celebrating African American truth-telling and its cultural power.

1

Wiggers or White Allies?

White Hip-Hop Culture and Racial Sincerity

An investigation of white attraction to African American culture should logically begin with music, since "White Negroes" have often been drawn to musical forms as if they are the essence of black creativity. The history of popular music and performance is full of white musicians and singers appropriating and profiting from styles originated by African American performers—slave spirituals, jazz, rhythm and blues, reggae, and hip-hop. A long line of ethnomusicologists and cultural critics have scrutinized this form of co-optation, putting under the microscope such artists as George Gershwin, Sophie Tucker, Mezz Mezzrow, Elvis Presley, Janis Joplin, the Police, Mick Jagger, Vanilla Ice, and the Beastie Boys.[1] The journalist Armond White, for example, lambasts the Beastie Boys for evacuating hip-hop of its cultural specificity and political edge as protest music. He contends that "white appropriation attempts to erase the culture it plunders," a conclusion echoed by the vast majority of cultural critics writing about white identification with blackness.[2] In a journalistic essay on the "Y2K white negro," Josh Ozersky argues that the contemporary wigger is a "devil without a cause . . . unconflictedly all about the benjamins," unlike his more bohemian ancestor, Mailer's anti-establishment hipster.[3] In her acclaimed work *The Hip Hop Wars,* Tricia Rose concludes that the vast majority of white fans of contemporary hip-hop are simply replicating the "ugly history of racial tourism."[4]

While this valuable body of cultural criticism has drawn much-needed attention to the imperialist dimensions of whiteness, it also risks treating whiteness as a monolithic signifier of domination. This oft-repeated narrative of appropriation has inadvertently led to the obscuring or repression of other kinds of stories about white attraction to blackness. By relegating all white artists working with African American cultural idioms to the same pejorative category as Mailer's

White Negroes, we underestimate the potential of some instances of crossover to function as radical acts of "race treason" against white privilege, such as Noel Ignatiev and John Garvey encourage in their journal *Race Traitor.* While blanket condemnations of White Negroes are problematic, so are facile celebrations of crossover as inherently subversive.[5]

Rather than falling into essentializing generalizations about the politics of White Negroism, this chapter attends to particularity by comparing three white performers and writers who employ the aesthetics, themes, and/or ethos of the hip-hop arts movement: the internationally famous rap star Eminem (Marshall Mathers); Danny Hoch, an actor/director and founding figure in hip-hop theater; and Adam Mansbach, a writer of "lit hop" novels and poetry.[6] I begin with Eminem, the controversial white hip-hop artist who catapulted to fame with *The Slim Shady LP* (1999), *The Marshall Mathers LP* (2000), and *The Eminem Show* (2002), and the semi-autobiographical film *8 Mile* (2002) in which he starred. Eminem's bombastic disaffection with whiteness offers a useful comparison to the more politically radical artists Hoch and Mansbach, who turn a more self-reflexive eye upon white attraction to black culture. A Jewish actor/writer of off-Broadway hip-hop "solo theater" and founder of the Hip Hop Theater Festival, Danny Hoch received acclaim for his shows *Some People* (1994), *Jails, Hospitals, & Hip-Hop* (1998), and *Taking Over* (2008), comprised of a series of monologues in the personae of black, Latino, and white characters, each rendered with bone-deep empathy. Adam Mansbach's satirical novel *Angry Black White Boy* (2005), whose protagonist is a white hip-hop aficionado turned anti-racist vigilante, offers an unflinchingly honest portrait of the psychology of white hip-hoppers. Ruminating on alliances between blacks and Jews, Mansbach's novel *The End of the Jews* (2008) focuses on three Jewish writers and artists inspired by jazz and hip-hop, as Mansbach was himself.

Voicing a strong disidentification with white privilege and a deeply felt affiliation with nonwhite cultures, Eminem, Hoch, and Mansbach require a reconsideration of the stereotype of the White Negro as a romanticizing appropriator. Since Eminem and Hoch hail from racially mixed, working-class, inner-city neighborhoods (Detroit and Queens) where hip-hop is the dominant cultural idiom, they can not rightly be accused of stealing what is, in a sense, their own "native" language.[7] Adam Mansbach presents a more complex case, since he grew up white and Jewish in an upper-middle-class suburb of Boston. However, since the age of eleven, Mansbach's immersion in hip-hop and jazz culture has informed his political and cultural worldview, his friendship communities, his creative and collaborative work in music, literature, and journalism, and even his own speech patterns. Mansbach was "reared" not only in the Jewish suburb of Newton but also in the creative practices and communities of hip-hop. As David Roediger reminds, "[T]he challenges

of disentangling the imaginary and the lived are great, and thinking in terms of . . . authentic/inauthentic does not help us."[8]

In analyzing these white artists and their connection to black culture, I draw upon the anthropologist John L. Jackson Jr.'s concept of "racial sincerity" as an alternative to the essentializing discourse of "authenticity." In his brilliant book *Real Black,* Jackson critiques hip-hop's obsession with authenticity, with "keeping it real," arguing that it engenders a culture of policing that constricts subjectivity and locates "realness" solely in externally verifiable signs—gesture, swagger, walk, street lingo, dress, or geographic origins in the 'hood. As an alternative to authenticity, he theorizes "racial sincerity" as a non-essentialist form of racial realness that is based on "social solidarity" with other black people and on the internal realms of "intention, faith, belief, inclination, and commitment."[9] Sincerity, he posits, "is more difficult to falsify" than authenticity because it depends on "interpersonal knowledge" and mutually respectful relationships with others who "presume one another's humanity."[10] Jackson uses "racial sincerity" to theorize an alternative way of being "really black" for people already recognized as phenotypically black. Yet his goal to reimagine race makes the concept especially useful for a discussion of empathetic white artists with long-term commitments to black people and black culture, precisely because sincerity addresses "the elements of self not totally expressed in social phenotype."[11] In its connection to feeling, to internal identifications, and to political and social commitments, Jackons's "racial sincerity" is akin to my conception of more radical forms of cross-racial empathy.

Moving beyond race-essentialist and class-essentialist debates about authenticity, this chapter offers an ideological textual analysis aimed at differentiating the politics of these three individual white hip-hop artists. I uncover long-term manifestations of racial sincerity—of a deeply felt commitment to black people and culture and the work of combating racism—but I also register moments of failure, when one or another succumbs to the privileges of whiteness or opts for the easier postures of authenticity rather than the ongoing work of struggle against racial injustice. Treating these three artists as consumers and producers of hip-hop culture, I analyze the racial politics and sincerity of their rap lyrics, theater performances, film, fiction, essays, interviews, and social activism. Without reducing the artistic complexity of their imaginative work, I consider their creative products as reception documents that reflect their understanding of the meanings and significance of hip-hop culture. Although Eminem has been alternately vilified as a minstrel in Phat Farm sweats or celebrated as a progressive symbol of multicultural fusion, I argue that he is neither a White Negro (in Mailer's terms) nor a race traitor (in Ignatiev's). While Eminem claims that his presence in the hip-hop world is helping to erode racism, the cultural work of Danny Hoch and Adam Mansbach presents a far more radical iteration of the

hip-hop ethos. Abounding in racial sincerity and the "ethical integrity" that Susan Gubar finds lacking among White Negroes, Mansbach's fiction and Hoch's theater performances offer a powerful deconstruction of white privilege and institutional racism and serve as models for the development of anti-racist identities.[12]

Eminem: Whiter Than He Wanna Be

While Hoch and Mansbach are less well-known outside of hip-hop circles, Eminem has been the subject of much debate since he burst onto the music scene in the late 1990s. Fearing that hip-hop might "slowly becom[e] bleached," a black writer in a 1999 *Village Voice* piece called Eminem a "talentless exploiter . . . who's using our form and not trying to contribute artistically to the black community."[13] Numerous critics have disparaged Eminem as a contemporary White Negro, a latter-day Elvis who "ultimately replaces us [African Americans]."[14] Despite the initial backlash, Eminem quickly gained the respect of the black hip-hop world, partly due to the endorsement of his producer, the hip-hop impresario Dr. Dre (formerly of NWA), and partly because of his virtuoso skills in clever rhyming, wordplay, and lyrical flow. Eminem's semiautobiographical film *8 Mile* further cemented his street credibility and the legitimacy of his connection to African American musical culture. The film's plot is based upon Marshall Mathers's own poverty-stricken youth, his series of unfulfilling low-wage jobs, and his immersion in the black community near Detroit's 8 Mile Road. The title of the film literally refers to a color line, as Mathers himself notes: "[B]oth sides [of 8 Mile Road] had pretty much the same income, but when I was growing up, it was literally black on one side, and white on the other."[15] Mathers, however, had lived on both sides of the road during his childhood, and *8 Mile* similarly defines its protagonist, Rabbit (Jimmy), as a renegade crosser of borders struggling to fit in and survive. The film culminates in Rabbit's dramatic victory in a freestyle rap battle at a black hip-hop club, thus vindicating the act of racial crossover itself. Rabbit/Eminem clinches the victory by exposing his black opponent to be a prep-school kid rather than an authentic voice of the 'hood; thus, class momentarily trumps race as a sign of "realness." By emphasizing Eminem's class solidarity with African American urban youth, the film distinguishes him from Mailer's middle-class hipsters or today's suburban white teens who fantasize about "slumming" in the ghetto.

The film *8 Mile* provides a visual analog to the gritty story of urban poverty already detailed in Eminem's lyrics. The song "If I Had," for example, speaks poignantly of the pain and rage experienced by millions of have-nots who are "tired of being white trash" or homeless, of being too broke to afford a phone and having to scrounge for change by returning bottles for the nickel deposit.[16] Even Stephen Hill, the vice president of Black Entertainment Television (BET),

lauds Eminem for "keepin' it real": "[I]n terms of rapping about the pain that other disenfranchised people feel, there is no one better . . . than Eminem."[17] While his street credibility is undeniable, a working-class background should not simply absolve him from the charge of co-opting and romanticizing black culture. The historian David Roediger makes a similar point in his analysis of the racism of nineteenth-century white working-class men in pursuit of "the wages of whiteness."[18] People who have experienced poverty and class oppression are not necessarily sensitive to other forms of domination, particularly racial domination. Kid Rock, another self-dubbed "white trash" rapper, has been criticized for caricaturing ghetto life and slang.[19] Josh Ozersky describes Kid Rock's rock-rap fusion as "completely reverential toward the 'old-school' clichés of Blaxploitation," evident in his appearance in furs at the MTV music awards.[20] In contrast, Eminem avoids a caricature of ghetto style often performed by White Negroes, preferring an understated hip-hop regulation outfit of sweats, T-shirts, body tattoos, and a "do-rag." It is also important that "Eminem makes no effort to sound black"[21] in his diction, and he has even publicly refused to use the word "nigger": "It's not my place to say it. There's some things I just don't do."[22] Rather than resting on his street credibility alone, Eminem is clearly conscious of the political importance of distinguishing himself from a latter-day minstrel. By avoiding outward displays of stereotypical blackness common to other white pretenders, Mathers suggests that his affiliation with black culture runs deeper, a point implied by choosing an emcee moniker that recalls not only his initials but also M&M's, the candy that is chocolate on the inside. With his emcee name, Eminem explicitly affirms Jackson's conception of racial sincerity as an internal state rather than an externally verifiable form of realness.

Of course, the most famous "white chocolate" performer in American music history was Elvis Presley, and it is instructive to compare Eminem to his legendary predecessor, who was similarly accused of co-opting black culture. Eminem deliberately invites such a comparison in his barbed track "Without Me," mocking those who see him as just another White Negro: "I am the worst thing since Elvis Presley / To do black music so selfishly / And use it to get myself wealthy."[23] While Eminem equates Elvis with co-optation, many cultural critics have defended the "King of Rock and Roll," arguing that he "didn't so much steal the blues as live up to them."[24] Even the black-nationalist rapper Chuck D of Public Enemy, who once labeled Elvis racist, later conceded that he was no thief: "Elvis had to come up through the streets of Memphis and turn out black crowds before he became famous. It wasn't like he cheated to get there. He was a bad-ass white boy. Just like Eminem."[25] Just as Elvis showed respect for the black sources of his blues style, Eminem frequently acknowledges his indebtedness to black artists and to his mentor, Dr. Dre. His song "Marshall Mathers" mourns the deaths of Tupac

Shakur and the Notorious BIG and slams other rappers who exploit the images of these hip-hop martyrs. Chuck D praises him for having "more respect for black artists and black people and culture than a lot of black artists themselves."[26]

Paying homage to one's African American sources, one could argue, is not enough to repay the debt incurred. As Salim Washington argues in the pages of *Race Traitor,* "[T]o acknowledgement [of one's sources] must be added economic and cultural democracy."[27] More important than paying tribute to his forerunners, then, is the fact that Eminem has used his industry power to promote black protégés like 50 Cent, D12, and Royce Da 5'9". His frequent collaboration with many black artists has undoubtedly boosted the sales of these emcees among white fans. In his song "White America," he notes that he and Dr. Dre "swapped" white and black fans, enlarging each other's fan bases. One multiracial Howard University student, Jozen Pedro Cummings, concurs: "[T]hink of how many new hip-hop fans know who Dr. Dre is, thanks to Eminem. He's opening doors."[28] The critic Paul Garon believes that white blues music has been "economically crippling to black artists through loss of jobs and critical attention,"[29] but Eminem has actively drawn attention to black rappers and contributed to their economic success.

Although most music critics concede that Eminem is not guilty of exploiting black culture, one could still argue that he romanticizes the image of black macho, as did Norman Mailer. While Eric Lott reasons that "nobody . . . can dismiss Presley as merely a case of racial rip-off," he nonetheless suggests that "fantasies of 'blackness' [as sexually potent] were unquestionably crucial in shaping [his] persona." If, as Lott argues, "to put on the cultural forms of 'blackness' was to engage in a complex affair of manly mimicry," then Eminem's attraction to black culture might simply reflect a desire to possess the hypermasculinity associated with black men.[30] In the lyrics to his song "Just Don't Give a Fuck," witness Eminem's identification with a glorified image of violence and misogyny associated with famous black men such as O. J. Simpson and Mike Tyson. Addressing a woman referred to only as "Bitch," Eminem raps, "You getting' knocked the fuck out like Mike Tyson / . . . I'll slit your motherfuckin' throat worse than Ron Goldman."[31] Clearly, a glorification of violent masculinity is a contributing factor in rap's popularity among white teenage boys, who are attracted to the thug posture of defiance and power.[32] Yet how can one determine whether Eminem's fantasy of "black macho" is any more disingenuous than the macho posing of black emcees such as 50 Cent? That line of reasoning would depend on an essentialist premise that the thug persona is somehow natural to black rappers rather than learned. Eminem's assumption of the gangsta pose may simply be attributed to the streets where he grew up, an environment in which hypermasculine violence, anger, misogyny, and homophobia are strategies of survival and group acceptance.

I certainly do not mean to condone these violent fantasies of male power, but rather to suggest that race is not the central problem in Eminem's glorification of

male domination, given its ubiquitous presence in American culture, both black and white. It was telling to watch how easily Eminem extricated himself from the 2004 controversy that erupted over the discovery of a racist track he once wrote disrespecting black women, made after Mathers was dumped by a black girlfriend in high school. On the "Yellow Brick Road" track of his CD *Encore,* he guiltily apologized to the black community while maintaining his sexist position: "I singled out a whole race and for that I apologize / I was wrong cuz no matter what color a girl is, she still a hoe."[33] Perhaps the backlash was so short-lived, contends Ta-Nehisi Coates, because his pathetic adolescent misogyny "failed to meet the level of bile that [black] rappers have been slinging toward black women for two decades." Drawing comparisons to the misogyny of Snoop, 50 Cent, Ghostface Killah, and Slick Rick, Coates reminds that "the house of hip-hop was built on the broken backs of black women."[34]

Although Eminem should be viewed as a racially sincere practitioner of hip-hop rather than a White Negro who ventriloquizes a fantasized image of black culture, it is much less clear whether his own racial crossover act succeeds in deconstructing white privilege or destabilizing the color line. Eminem draws a utopian picture of hip-hop's power to integrate: "There's millions of white kids and black kids coming to the tour . . . having the common love—and that's hip-hop. Me and Dre are changing the world right now. I feel that we are making racism less and less and less."[35] In bombastic hip-hop fashion, Eminem here claims agency for a blurring of cultural boundaries far beyond his own making, but it is still worth considering his claim. Is Eminem's music and star persona helping to erode racism or white privilege?

Eminem's angry denunciation of the white elite could be seen as participating in some aspects of *Race Traitor*'s multifaceted project aimed at the "abolition of whiteness." Eminem certainly engages in "outrageous acts of provocation" that "violate the rules of whiteness," a strategy of defection that Ignatiev and Garvey hope will lead to the end of the white race.[36] In "The Way I Am," Eminem strongly disidentifies with "cocky Caucasians" who accuse him of being "some wigger who just tries to be black."[37] While one might assume that African Americans would be more likely to question his credibility, Eminem imagines his chief antagonists to be Caucasians threatened by racial transgression. Although he rarely targets black rappers for ridicule, his songs have contained many barbs directed at other white recording artists, such as Everlast, Insane Clown Posse, and Moby. Aiming to disidentify with whites whom he suspects of being middle-class pretenders, he trashes the disingenuous Insane Clown Posse for "claimin' Detroit, when y'all live twenty miles away" in the suburbs.[38]

Beyond these squabbles with other white rappers, Eminem offers a biting critique of the white establishment and the "moral majority" in his brilliant track "White America." The song rocks with fury against activists like Tipper Gore

who are lobbying the government to censor offensive lyrics by attaching Parental Advisory stickers. Eminem alternately views himself as a rebel "dumping it on white America" and a victim of an oppressive "democracy of hypocrisy."[39] Once again identifying himself with black Americans, he compares censorship to a lynch rope choking his voice. He also rightly points out the racist hypocrisy of the white elite, who were indifferent to the bad influences of gangsta rap upon *black* youth, but only became concerned when their own white daughters became fans. "White America" suggests a profound disidentification with white power, yet Eminem is also fully aware of his own complicity with the system of white privilege. He admits in the song "I'm Back" that "I'm a commodity because I'm W-H-I-T-E / cuz MTV was so friendly to me."[40] In "White America," he offers an astute analysis of the racism fueling his own sales: "If I was black, I would've sold half. . . . my skin is starting to work to my benefit now." His words imply that as long as we live in a racist country, even those who aim to be ex-white men will still benefit from their skin color. Eminem does not so much renounce his whiteness as own up to it ironically. In "White America," he further calls attention to himself in the act of bleaching his hair. By going blonde, he is deliberately heightening the white star image to give the fans what they want—someone "who look[s] like them"—and perhaps to provide an ironic contrast with the "chocolate" underneath. By drawing attention to the fakeness of his platinum hair in a song about white America, Eminem also hints at the artificiality of whiteness itself, and of the whole system of race classification.

Race as a signifier of difference is something that Eminem loves to hate. Unfortunately, however, his desire to do away with racial categories often gives way to a color-blind ideology that minimizes the continued presence of power and inequality in American society. Eminem has made several public statements that echo the color-blind agenda of "polite" liberalism: "I look at myself as a white person who raps. Everyone else looks at me like I'm a white rapper. I don't understand it. Why can't we just get past the color issue and just deal with the music?"[41] He also commented that "the best thing a guy ever said about me was after an open mic in Detroit. He was like, 'I don't [care] if he's green, I don't [care] if he's orange, this [kid] is dope!'"[42] Eminem's desire to "get past the color issue" is a tactic that Ruth Frankenberg has described as "power evasiveness," a blindness to the realities of racism.[43] Michael Jeffries notes that white hip-hop fans tend to avoid discussion of "race or racialized experiences," and Paul Garon has similarly criticized color-blind blues fans for ignoring the issue of white appropriation and arguing that "the music is all that counts."[44] Even more problematic than this naïve liberal wish that race and racism can be willed away is Eminem's deployment of the discourse of "reverse racism" common among conservative racist whites. Invoking the victim card, Eminem remarked, "I get offended when people say,

'so being a white rapper . . . and growing up white. . . . ' It's all I ever hear. I'm at a boiling point. Anybody who pulls the race card is getting it back in their face."[45] The anti-racist activist Tim Wise argues that when whites invoke the phrase "playing the race card," they falsely imagine that whites are victims without any cards to play, but as Wise so eloquently reminds us, "race is not a card. It determines who the dealer is, and who gets dealt."[46] Although it is undoubtedly difficult to fit in as a white man in a black cultural scene, surely there are much more devastating kinds of racism—the dealt cards that affect the life chances of people of color—at which Eminem ought to be taking offense. Henry Giroux argues that the best anti-racist strategy for whites would be to eschew color-blind rhetoric and instead "locate themselves within and against the discourse and practice of racism."[47] Eminem certainly locates himself within the discourse of racism, but he does not do enough to speak out *against* it, particularly in its institutional forms.

The journalist Josh Ozersky praises Eminem for steering clear of "black lifestyle issues" in his lyrics, but one could interpret this omission as a liability rather than an asset.[48] Despite his claim to be black on the inside, Eminem rarely uses his music to draw attention to the consequences of racism for African Americans, a long-standing theme of "old school" hip-hop music. The culture critic Armond White defines the hip-hop ethos as a "muckraking imperative" to protest against "racial and social affronts"; similarly, Danny Hoch praises hip-hop for "how it has articulated the complaints of oppressed peoples, of people of color, in a way that's unprecedented."[49] By these measures, Eminem's self-involved rap falls far short of hip-hop's oppositional ethos, since it speaks only of his own (white) pain rather than "black pain"—social injustices that are racialized as black.[50] Although he calls the United States a "democracy of hypocrisy" in "White America," he is protesting against the censorship of his own free-speech rights, not the historical legacy of African American disenfranchisement. He urges his fans to vote against President Bush for launching us into the Iraq War in his song "Mosh" but neglects to address how Bush's domestic and foreign policies have disproportionately harmed the lives and livelihood of black Americans. Compared to his earlier work, Eminem's 2004 album *Encore* is at once more overtly political (in "Mosh") and less sensitive to the racial dynamics of power, as he wastes energy satirizing easy African American targets such as the alleged pedophile Michael Jackson. Even "Mosh" offers a facile fantasy of color-blind unity: "A sea of people some white and some black / don't matter what color, all that matters we gathered together / to celebrate for the same cause don't matter the weather."[51]

Eminem's color-blindness leads him to pay insufficient attention to the lived reality of being black in America, of being visibly marked as subordinate. At a 2003 Detroit hip-hop summit, which Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick described

as a convention about "social, economic, and political consciousness," Eminem advocated for more opportunities for new rappers and declared that "hip-hop is about poverty. The people who take the mic have the most influence. They are reflecting the people's will."[52] While hip-hop is often about experiences of poverty, with this reductionist definition Eminem seems to erase the rich history of rap as a black cultural form of enunciation, of voicing racial grievances. One might ask, Who are the people whose will Eminem claims to be reflecting? The Spelman professor William Cobb has similarly criticized *8 Mile* for implying that class oppression trumps race oppression, in the climactic scene in which Rabbit is portrayed as more authentic than his middle-class black opponent. Adam Mansbach also finds this scene "problematic, because class is mutable and race is not—Eminem can make money and transcend his class position, but the black kid he battles will always be black."[53] Cobb further points out that Rabbit "has no racial reckoning of his own to do because racism is black people's problem" in *8 Mile*.[54] These criticisms could be applied to Eminem himself, who impatiently hopes to "get past the color issue" but does very little to help bring about an anti-racist future. Because Eminem does not use his power and influence to advocate for change in the racial order, he falls short of Ignatiev's definition of a race traitor working toward the abolition of whiteness. While his angry disidentification with white privilege is a subversive move, that alone is not enough to bring the racist house down. Eminem's music is refreshing because he aims to speak truth to white power, yet his notion of truth remains limited. His color-blind rhetoric, failure to speak out against racial injustices, and false optimism about the erosion of racism brought about by white rappers are signs that Eminem is whiter at heart than he wants to be.

Straining to Live Black: Danny Hoch's Anti-Racist Theater

Marshall Mathers seems like a navel-gazer without political vision when compared to Danny Hoch, whose theater work envisions hip-hop as anti-racist, democratic activism. While both Hoch and Eminem disidentify with white domination and self-reflexively critique an industry that commodifies black cultural styles, Hoch aims to move beyond complaint to forge political coalitions and work actively against racism and white privilege. The affective register of Eminem's rap is that of personal pain transformed into anger, directed more often at women (black and white) than at institutional racism. In comparison, Danny Hoch's theater and film work is full of humor, pathos, and empathy for the human casualties of racism and capitalism and demonstrates his commitment to working against all forms of social domination. Occasionally, however, his anti-essentialist

premises, defensiveness, and hip-hop battling spirit lead him into some public-relations interview blunders, in which he underestimates the precariousness of the position of white ally.

Danny Hoch's biography underscores the importance of hip-hop, class, and a racially mixed habitus in his self-formation. In *Real Black,* John Jackson Jr. notes that "hip-hop demands of its fans and practitioners alike a geographical grounding for all identities," a sense of where you are "from" as well as "where you are at" in the more figurative sense.[55] In interviews, Hoch establishes his belonging in the world of hip-hop by frequently citing his origins as a poor kid from the multiethnic Corona neighborhood of Queens near the Lefrak City housing project, a community in which "there was no racial majority or minority."[56] He spent his youth as a graffiti warrior writing on trains, breakdancing, and rapping (three of the four key elements of hip-hop culture) with a multiethnic group of friends; his favorite rapper was Doug E. Fresh. In hip-hop's formative period in the early 1980s, Hoch notes that "everybody in my neighborhood . . . was consumed with hip-hop culture, no matter what color they were or which language they spoke at home."[57] He asserts of his formative years, "Hip-Hop formed my language and my entire worldview."[58] In addition to acquiring the language of hip-hop, Hoch learned fluent Spanish from a Cuban American "godmother" figure. Remarking on his polyglot identity as a young boy, he said: "I didn't know I was a white Jewish kid. . . . I thought I was a white-Jewish-black-Latino-Russian-Georgian-Senegalese kid."[59] Although he does not deny his Jewish identity, which I will discuss later in this chapter, Hoch conceives of "his people" far more broadly than any single ethnic identification could encapsulate: "Your people are a combination of ancestry and where you live—your geography."[60]

Hoch's experiences with cultural fusion and a multiracial friendship group led him to develop an anti-essentialist understanding of race as socially constructed and mutable. Yet he also received a street education in the realities of institutional racism and unequal advantage for whites that challenged any naïve beliefs in a so-called post-race society. He details this self-realization in an essay he titled "Straining to Live Black." When the cops caught Hoch and his crew "writing graffiti or doing drugs, they arrested my black and Latino friends and told me and the young Indian and Russian thugs who were my friends to go home. . . . [A]s a 13-year-old in New York City, I found the distinctions he was making incomprehensible."[61] Although his youthful response of incomprehension implies that he was race-blind, Hoch's adult self is deeply cognizant of the ways that race and ethnicity determine access to safety and resources in America. These lessons in racial inequity were reinforced by the hip-hop culture he listened to and practiced. In his essay "Toward a Hip-Hop Aesthetic," Hoch defines hip-hop as a polycultural movement created by African Americans, Puerto Ricans,

Dominicans, and Jamaicans who drew upon their cultural heritages and nationalist political movements to respond creatively to devastating conditions of poverty and powerlessness, to "urban blight and the advent of Reaganomics, . . . an exploding prison population, and epidemics of crack, guns, and AIDS." In his view, hip-hop is a culture of resistance, creative reappropriation, and communal survival developed by urban people of color and a "handful of working-poor whites."[62] Although Hoch is invested in hip-hop's polycultural elements and its potential to bring diverse people together into a worldwide community, he recognizes its limitations: "[H]ip-hop is a cultural unifier, not a social unifier."[63] Hoch does not romanticize hip-hop as a panacea for racism and segregation as does Eminem.

In Hoch's case, his simultaneous immersion in hip-hop culture and multiracial social worlds led him to develop solidarity with underprivileged people resisting racism and creatively struggling to survive. When he briefly enrolled in a largely white college, the North Carolina School for the Arts, he disidentified with his white classmates who were ignorant of hip-hop and the struggles of life in the inner city: "I didn't understand them; they didn't understand me. Here I was in North Carolina and I couldn't even pass for white!"[64] When Hoch went back to New York, "where he was from," he began to put more emphasis on "where he was at" (in black slang, a more figurative notion of positionality) by doing volunteer work to benefit the urban poor and to protest police brutality and the mass incarceration of black and Latino youth. As a young adult, Hoch worked for several years with the Creative Arts team, a theater group that "reaches out to at-risk adolescents in prisons, detention centers and schools . . . [by doing] structured improvs about AIDS, racism, and abuse."[65] He became a founding member of Active Element Foundation, which raises money for youth-led, grassroots activist groups such as Refuse and Resist, involved in the fight to free Mumia Abu-Jamal, convicted for the murder of a police officer. He also began to develop his hip-hop theater as a form of creative activism that would become his full-time career.

Hoch's award-winning off-Broadway shows *Some People* and *Jails, Hospitals, & Hip-Hop* demonstrate not only his hope that cross-cultural fusion can lead to a transformative social solidarity but also a deep awareness that systemic racism and white privilege continue to thwart the possibility of a more equitable nonracist world. He gained a national audience by showcasing his work on HBO's *Def Poetry Jam* and founded the Hip Hop Theater Festival in 2000, serving as its artistic director for five years. The Hip Hop Theater Festival has since expanded to other cities and produced over one hundred hip-hop-generation plays, most written or performed by people of color.[66] In the dramatic monologues of his 1998 show *Jails, Hospitals, & Hip-Hop,* Hoch sympathetically embodies (rather than impersonates) a black rap star doing a guest spot on David Letterman, a Cuban

street vendor speaking in Spanish, a racially ambiguous entrepreneur jailed for lacking proper permits, a disabled Puerto Rican man shot by police, a racist white prison guard undergoing psychotherapy, a white prison inmate with AIDS, and a teenage wigger from the rural Midwest. In his earlier show *Some People,* Hoch performed in the personae of a Puerto Rican woman, a Jewish mother, Jamaican and Latino DJs, a white racist yuppie, and two black teens trapped by ghetto codes of male behavior. He has also written a more standard two-act play, *Till the Break of Dawn* (2007), which follows hip-hop-generation teachers and activists who travel to Cuba and grapple with the delusions of their liberal idealism. His newest set of solo theater monologues, *Taking Over* (2008), examines the gentrification of Brooklyn by middle-class whites and the resulting displacement and alienation of people of color and the poor. While Eminem's disidentification with whiteness is a posture of defiance that involves little empathy for African Americans, Hoch's performances enact a transethnic and transracial consciousness and underscore the power of empathy as a political tool. By envisioning a complex subjectivity for people of color and individuals living in poverty or in prison, Hoch's work promotes identification with people who are often devalued by the media, while offering a stinging critique of racial essentialism and the power structures that maintain white privilege.

The risks inherent in Hoch's cross-racial monologues are arguably higher than those for Eminem or Mansbach because Hoch uses his body and voice to perform *as* black and Latino characters and thus immediately invites associations with minstrelsy. On stage, Hoch uses scant props (usually one item of clothing) but largely accomplishes his masterful shape-shifting with the use of culturally specific accents, dialects and languages (e.g. Trinidadian patois and untranslated Spanish), speech patterns (from Yiddish inverted grammar to the rapid cadences of Dominican Spanish), and body language (ghetto swagger and uptight white gestures). He credits his mother, a speech pathologist in a Bronx hospital, for teaching him "how to really listen."[67] While some of these cultural markers of class, race, ethnicity, and gender may occasionally veer close to stereotype, Hoch's affectionate performances imbue his black and Latino characters with a rich individuality and an intelligent sociological understanding. Although his skits are often hilariously funny, the humor is not achieved at the expense of the nonwhite characters, as in minstrelsy, but is in fact created by the black and Latino characters' ironic perceptions about the tragic-comic circumstances of life in a racist country. If any characters are the butt of the joke in his performances, it is most often clueless white characters who are oblivious to their own racism and sense of entitlement. Although there is humor to be found throughout his work, there are also poignant expressions of pain, frustration, and grief, as prison inmates explain their paths to jail or family members mourn victims of police brutality.

Drawing upon John Jackson Jr.'s theorization of "racial sincerity," I view Hoch's work as rooted in solidarity with people of color, establishing a liaison between "social interlocutors who presume one another's humanity, interiority, and subjectivity."[68] The fact that his shows have received overwhelmingly positive responses from black and Latino audiences, and from black activists and politicized hip-hop artists such as Mos Def and Talib Kweli, is a testament to the fact that his theater envisions them as "social interlocutors."[69] For his latest show, *Taking Over,* the Hip Hop Theater Festival set up free performances and "talk back" sessions in which black and Latino New Yorkers responded enthusiastically to his show about the negative forces of gentrification. Hoch's show became a catalyst for local activists to gather support and strategies for their efforts to create community cohesion and equitable public policy.[70] *Taking Over*'s greatest critics, in fact, were whites who objected to his "one-sided" view of gentrification as having largely negative effects upon people of color.[71]

Although his 2008 show *Taking Over* criticizes neighborhood integration that operates more like colonization, Hoch's earlier solo shows from the mid-1990s exhibit more of an integrationist, multicultural Clinton-era ethos. In the introduction to the printed text of his 1990s shows, he optimistically argues that hip-hop is a unifier that "crosses all lines of color, race, economics, nationality, and gender."[72] The anti-essentialist perspective he displays in his shows, emphasizing the fluidity of race, was reflective of the 1990s critique of the essentialism of liberation movements from the 1960s through the 1980s. Like the editors of the 1990s journal *Race Traitor,* Hoch questions the "natural existence of 'races.'"[73] The introduction to his 1990s shows enumerates instances of cultural (con)fusion and borrowing that complicate the simplistic narrative of white appropriation of hip-hop: "[R]appers don themselves with Italian mafia names . . . urban youth clothe themselves with expensive sailing, skiing, camping, and hiking apparel and suburban youth copy the fashions, trying to be like the urban youth. . . . Hip-Hop backspins in irony."[74] A black character in *Some People,* whom Hoch calls "Flex," reflects on this bewildering disruption to a racially segregated universe: "It's already 'nuf white kids out here that's tryin' to be black . . . but what you call them white people that don't wash theyself . . . them punk-rock anarchy niggas, right? I seen a bunch of them walkin' . . . and I seen this one black son in there. . . . How a brother gonna be in that shit? . . . How a sister gonna sing opera? How a black man gonna sing backup for some Kenny G?"[75] Flex remains distrustful of this cultural confusion, but Hoch questions Flex's essentialist, segregationist worldview. The only black character in all of his shows that Hoch depicts as self-deluded, Flex has sadly bought into a false idea of the "place" of blacks in America, as he pockets money from his work building a jail and cares nothing about his complicitous role in the system. As he is buying Chinese food, thus re-

vealing his own participation in cross-cultural exchange, Flex demeaningly insults the Chinese immigrants who sell it to him, demanding that they "know [their] place" as he knows his own.[76] In this monologue, Hoch suggests that "knowing one's place" can be a framework that undermines critical thinking, resistance to power, and coalition-building across racial lines.

Hoch refuses to "know his place" as a white man, if that identity requires him to accept the color line. Envisioning race and ethnicity as functions of culture and environment rather than simply biology, Hoch begins his show *Jails* with a rapped prologue investigating his own cross-racial identity and speech: "People be like shut the hell up when I talk / Like I shouldn't be talkin' 'black' even though I'm from New York / But what's that? A color, a race, or a state of mind? / A class of people? A culture, is it a rhyme? / If so, then what the hell am I, you might be sayin'?"[77] Suggesting that his use of African American idioms is an expression of his own native language—New Yorkese—Hoch raises provocative questions about whether "being black" could be considered a "state of mind" or a cultural affiliation rather than simply a state of nature. This statement echoes John Jackson Jr.'s nonessentialist formulation of "real blackness" as determined more by internal feelings of sincerity and solidarity than by skin color.

Not surprisingly, this anti-essentialist assertion of racial fluidity got him into trouble with the hip-hop journalist and black nationalist Harry Allen, who is profoundly skeptical of white motivations. In the mid-1990s, at what Hoch glibly described as "one of those angry panels about racial opprobrium," Allen confronted Hoch, demanding that he answer the question, "Are you white?"[78] Hoch actually does own up to his whiteness at several moments in his shows, but this PR skirmish reveals that Hoch can occasionally be prickly and defensive, upset at not being recognized as an ally. In Goldstein's 1998 *Village Voice* interview, Hoch is clearly frustrated at being penned by Allen into the box of whiteness and reacts with disdain. Significantly, his shoot-from-the-hip rhetorical style, reacting aggressively when threatened, is typical of hip-hop's competitive "battle aesthetic."[79] Yet as a white hip-hop practitioner with sincere anti-racist goals, Hoch might have listened more respectfully to this African American leader in the movement, rather than dismissing him as an "angry" enforcer of the color line.[80]

Hoch was similarly defensive in 2006 when the African American theater scholar Nicole Hodges suggested that Anna Deavere Smith has more authority to play cross-racial roles because she is African American. Hoch replied to Hodges in a somewhat self-righteous fashion: "[I]t is a projection of liberal racism to infer that people of color (actually just black folks) have the 'right,' the 'ability,' the 'sole talent' to play others, because it is assumed that they have suffered the worst and therefore are the biggest victims and the biggest victims get to play everybody. This liberalist victimization only bolsters racism."[81] Although he is

aiming to critique "liberal racism," Hoch seems to echo Eminem's statements of annoyance at African Americans who "play the race card" and supposedly reap benefits from their position as victims. Hoch's jealousy of Anna Deavere Smith's success and unquestioned authority is evident in several comments he made to distinguish his work from her more "anthropological" theater. Offering what I would argue is a false understanding of Smith's goals and her plays' effects, Hoch believes that her shows refuse to offer any opinion, so the "audience is allowed to detach themselves from any responsibility. So people walk out of her shows saying, 'Well, now I don't have to do anything about racism, because I came and saw this show.'"[82] At the end of performances of *Taking Over,* he reads letters of critique he has received; one letter from a white audience member implies that Smith's work is less challenging than Hoch's: "Dear Mr. Hoch, I go to see theater all the time and this is the first time I have ever felt alienated and excluded. Why can't you be more like Anna Deavere Smith? She deals with difficult racial and social issues but we all feel great when we walk out of the theatre. Plus she has the ability to play different characters because of her mixed heritage. You, Mr. Hoch, are simply mixed up."[83] This supposed "audience" letter suspiciously echoes Hoch's interview comments, which bombastically paint Hoch as a superior artist with more provocative things to say about race than an African American recipient of the MacArthur "genius grant."

Hoch's public-relations work clearly reveals self-congratulatory and defensive elements, but his shows themselves offer more carefully expressed insights about the dangers of racial essentialism. In *Jails, Hospitals, & Hip-Hop,* Hoch performs as a racially ambiguous character named "Bronx" to imply that identity can be shaped more by environment than genes. As Bronx himself says, "I live in 163rd Street, I got a certain look," which echoes Hoch's own comments about "sounding black" because of his neighborhood origins.[84] Although his racial identity is never revealed, Bronx describes how he got arrested for selling "Black Bart" Simpson and O. J. Simpson t-shirts without a license:

> So this cop . . . he had sunglasses, so when he look at me first from the car, I look darker. When he get out, he get confused. 'Cause if you put me next to the cop, I'm whiter than the cop. . . . Next thing, he throw me down in the ground. . . . He say, 'What are you, what are you?!! Are you Puerto Rican, are you Puerto Rican?' . . . I mean my color is white like Bill Clinton, but that's not good enough for him, you know, in the way that I'm speaking, or I don't even know.[85]

It seems as if Bronx is being arrested not for breaking the law but for troubling the color line. Although occasionally those policing the color line are black (such as Harry Allen), Hoch chooses to draw attention here to a more devastating consequence of essentialist thinking—racial profiling practiced by white police.

A further irony is that the cop wants to fix Bronx as Puerto Rican, which is already an unstable racial category, given that many Latinos are of mixed race. In Bronx's monologue, Hoch implies that unstable identities can disturb the normal operation of a racist system dependent upon essentialist logic, but that certainly doesn't prevent Bronx from getting thrown in jail because his dress and speech, and his selling of bootlegged "Black Bart" t-shirts, proclaim his affinity with people of color.

Although Hoch explores the possibility that racial identification can be fluid or chosen rather than simply ascribed, he clearly aims to expose the problematic essentialism underlying some acts of crossover identification. In *Jails, Hospitals, & Hip-Hop,* Hoch humorously satirizes the White Negro complex in his monologue as Flip, a white teen infatuated with gangsta rap. Imagining himself as a famous rapper being interviewed by Jay Leno, Flip contends that "I got this rare skin disorder where I look white but I'm really black . . . see this birthmark, Jay? Well, it's not really a birthmark, see that's the real color of my skin, and the rest of me is a birthmark. . . . even though I live in Montana, I still got the ghetto in my heart." Flip's romanticized image of the ghetto is one "where the people just kick it every day and keep it real. And chill in their BMWs and rap, and all the girls got on bikinis, and everybody just . . . parties . . . and raps." While Flip's myth of blackness rests on a capitalist, MTV-fueled fantasy as opposed to Mailer's anti-establishment idealism, both essentialize African Americans as hypermasculine

Figure 3. Danny Hoch as Flip in *Jails, Hospitals & Hip-Hop: The Film* (Kicked Down Productions, 2001)

and "cool": "If I had a choice between bein' like you—Jay Leno—or Tupac Shakur, who you think I'ma choose? . . . At least he went out like a true thug nigga. He's cool."[86] A frequent refrain of Flip's ghetto-speak is the phrase "keep it real," which Hoch employs artfully to comment on the problematics of mimicry and racial essentialism. The last words of Flip's monologue are "keep it real, Jay," as he dons his Hardee's cap and sets off for his dead-end job. Here Hoch ironically draws attention to Flip's own depressing reality as the chief motivator behind his desire to imitate the more thrilling lifestyle of the black gangsta rapper. The audience is prompted to question not only Flip's distorted sense of ghetto reality but also the pursuit of racial "realness" itself.

By emphasizing the commodification of the gangsta pose, Hoch further underscores the artificiality of a stance often associated with an essential blackness. In his show *Some People,* Hoch performed as a black teenager named Floe who shares Flip's infatuation with gangsta rap, although Floe is more concerned about proving his street credibility: "[I've] never been to Riker's Island [jail], but I almost went." Both the black Floe and the white Flip rap about a similar macho thug fantasy: "I'll shoot you point blank in the head, then fuck your sister."[87] But these lines are no more "authentic" for the African American Floe than they are for the white Flip. Hoch's Floe is actually a sensitive guy heartsick over being dumped by a college-bound girlfriend. The masculine bravado and stoicism of the gangsta is clearly a façade for him, since he "had like almost started like, cryin'" while making love to his girl.[88] As Laurie Stone argues in *The Nation,* Hoch reveals that hip-hop masculinity can sometimes become a "gorilla suit that keeps at bay emotional expressiveness . . . and vulnerability."[89] In Hoch's performances as Floe and Flip, "keepin' it real" in ghetto terms is thus exposed to be an artificial mask, donned by both black and white boys yearning for power and acceptance. In his monologue as black rap star Emcee Enuff, Hoch further highlights how the entertainment media commodify the black thug image. Emcee Enuff complains that his antiviolence and antidrug message "wasn't sellin," so in order to avoid laying off his staff he started rapping about "runnin' up in niggas' cribs and puttin' fifty bullets in they head." Of course, he notes the depressing irony that those "bullshit" records "made me more money than I ever made in my life," and the sheer repetition of this narrative on the airwaves makes fans like Flip and Floe believe in its "realness."[90] Hoch certainly does not deny the reality of violence in the ghetto, but what he does deny is the equation of such violence with a black "nature." Michael Jeffries notes that none of the white hip-hop fans in his study "discuss the potential harm of hip-hop representations of black masculinity to black people"; Hoch stands out in distinct contrast to them.[91]

Not only does Hoch dispel myths of a black essence, but he also deconstructs essentialist notions of whiteness. In an article he wrote for *The Nation,* Hoch

questioned the idea of monolithic whiteness by qualifying the statement "America is mostly white people" with the following aside: "whatever that means."[92] Hoch echoes the concerns of the cultural critic Henry Giroux, who laments that early scholarship in critical race studies simply equated whiteness with oppression and thus did not "capture the complexity that marks 'whiteness' as a form of identity and cultural practice."[93] Admittedly, Hoch's 1994 show *Some People* voices a righteous disdain for racist whites. The epilogue to Hoch's show invokes the familiar dichotomy between "Us" and "Dem" and places Hoch firmly on the side of the othered "Dem." Thus, his title "some people" can be read as a retort to the white racist disdain for "those people" (i.e. nonwhites) who "shoot each other" and "riot," according to the Jewish suburbanite character Doris. Hoch's strong disidentification with racist whiteness is also evident in his monologue as Bill, a white yuppie-wannabe who spews hateful comments about Shiite Muslims, Chinese restaurateurs, AIDS victims, and Black Panthers. Typical of conservative "new racists" who feel "besieged" and bitter over "imagined racial injuries committed against whites,"[94] Bill fears being victimized by terrorist bombs and "crackhead murderers in the street."[95] He also imagines he's being targeted for parking tickets because he's white and from New Jersey: "[T]hese *whatever* meter maids . . . [must be] connected to those [antiwhite] hate groups that were on *60 Minutes*."[96] Hoch spins out the supreme irony of "reverse racism"—that this one-man hate group believes himself to be the true victim of race hatred.

Whereas most of his skits in *Some People* treat whiteness as synonymous with oppression, *Jails, Hospitals, & Hip-Hop* devotes more attention to working-class whites and to the possibility of an oppositional white identity. In his later and more mature show, Hoch even gives us a surprisingly empathetic treatment of a white prison guard (Sam), who was reprimanded for using excessive force against an inmate. Sam directs his rage at the prisoners he calls "pollutants" because he lacks power in his own life; he was recently denied custody of his children in a divorce court and restricted to one visit per month.[97] Bitter about the lack of "justice in that court decision" and doing time in a job he hates, Sam is more like the inmates than he would care to admit: "I did twelve years already with this [job]. I got eight more. Then I'm out."[98] While a violent white prison guard would seem to represent the white establishment, Hoch treats Sam as an object of pity, because his racist actions are a sign of desperation and frustration at his inability to access power on his own behalf. Hoch's empathetic portrait of Sam is not an apology for racism but an elucidation of its ability to trap whites by giving them a false sense of power and agency.

To offer a contrast to Sam, who denies his similarity to others struggling against a biased justice system, Hoch gives voice to Andy, a white prison inmate whose whiteness belies his solidarity with the underclass. A heroin-addicted Vietnam vet

who suffers without proper medical attention for his AIDS, Andy has experienced life as a perpetual servant rather than a member of the privileged class: "Lemme tell ya somethin,' I SERVED! I served in Vietnam and I served in McDonald's, and I'm servin' sweepin' this fuckin' room all day. . . . And I want SERVICE! I want SERVICES because I'm DYING!"[99] Despite his rage at being disempowered, Andy doesn't scapegoat racial others as does Sam but instead has built a strong kinship network with prisoners of color, including an imam who runs Muslim services and a young black inmate who is angry at the recurrence of blackface minstrelsy on television. When the black youth cries in frustration at his inability to effect change while in prison, Andy helps him to channel his anger by writing protest letters to the networks: "Dear Fox, I think Martin Lawrence is fucked up."[100] With his portrait of Andy, Hoch reminds his audience that class and race are intersecting vectors of identity and that lower-class whites have the potential to become allies in the fight for justice and equality. Andy's efforts to build supportive coalitions with people of color offer a powerful alternative to Flip, the wigger who wants to be black but lacks "racial sincerity" or true solidarity.

Hoch's monologue as the midwestern wigger Flip is an important self-reflexive attempt to reckon with Hoch's own working-class identification with blackness as a young teen. Flip struck such a chord with audiences that Hoch expanded his monologue into a feature film called *Whiteboyz* (1999), cowritten with his childhood friend Garth Belcon, who is black. Hoch admits that Flip "could have been me when I was 12," and Belcon mockingly recalls that the preteen Hoch used to boast, "I'm blacker than you."[101] Although the adult Hoch's skit lampoons Flip's fantastical stereotypes of blackness, Hoch also sensitively explores how class complicates Flip's whiteness, which he experiences as an economic liability rather than an asset. In *Jails* as well as *Whiteboyz,* Flip's romanticized view of ghetto life is fueled by an experience of whiteness as not merely boring but an economic dead-end: "I hate it sometimes . . . servin' burgers to some damn tractor-drivin' motherfuckers. . . . All they do is hang out at the mall every day . . . and then they go home and watch *Friends* and *Cops.* Yippee. . . . I don't really aspire to that in my life, man. . . . What the hell I wanna be white for?"[102] The film version adds rich detail to Flip's experience of "white trash" poverty, as he shops for groceries with food stamps, watches his father's degradation after being laid off from a factory job, and becomes a small-time drug dealer in search of the "American dream." A central irony of the film is that Flip and his friends associate whiteness not with power and domination but with economic stagnancy and emasculation; for them, blackness and the hip-hop life represent financial empowerment, agency, and voice. As the critic Paul Bravmann notes, Flip's "desire to be black, strange as it may seem, is nothing less than the desire to better himself."[103] Despite Flip's identification with black culture, he can hardly be called a race traitor, because he

does not fully comprehend the national and global power of whites and mistakes an illusion of power for the real thing. When Flip and his buddies take an ill-fated road trip to a real ghetto, Cabrini Green in Chicago, they are disabused of their illusions, but not before their actions result in the police-shooting death of a black man who was trying to help them. Flip's disidentification with whiteness is even more politically anemic than Eminem's because it rests on a romanticization of blackness and a distorted understanding of the distribution of power in a racist episteme. One senses that Hoch is exorcising the problematic possibilities of one side of his young self, the part that was attracted to hip-hop masculinity without really understanding hip-hop as a form of resistance to white supremacy and epistemic racism.

If part of Hoch's project is to offer an anti-essentialist deconstruction of both blackness and whiteness, his larger goal is to attack the structures of racial inequality to which Flip is blind. Like the post-soul writers that I will discuss in chapter 3, Hoch's anti-essentialist effort to show race as a socially constructed fiction is accompanied by a simultaneous commitment to exposing the ways that race is still painfully real in an America ruled by white power. In the powerful prologue to *Jails, Hospitals, & Hip-Hop,* Hoch first establishes that he "ain't no cracker" but then deliberately shifts from the position of White Negro to one of white power-broker.[104] His goal in assuming the "I" of white privilege is to wield it in ironic self-critique:

> I can take [black] culture, soup it up, and sell it back to you
> And I can sell crack to you and smack to you if you let me
> I'm the president, the press, and your paycheck, you sweat me
> You never even met me or can fathom my derision
> You try to buck my system, son, I'll lock yo ass in prison
> . . . This is my game, I can't lose
> When I wanna see the score I just turn on my news.[105]

In addition to calling attention to white control of the major avenues of power—government, media, entertainment, and business—Hoch is particularly disdainful of whites who profit from a commodification of black culture. While whites sell goods that equate blackness with powerful revolt, Hoch argues that such commodification equals containment: "This revolution lookin' like junk, and it sunk / with all the X caps that I sold you out my trunk / You bought my revolution and you wear it on your head. / . . . You got your X cap but I got you power / less."[106] It's crucial that he directs this message about white institutional control to an audience of urban youth and people of color—the "you" with whom he identifies.[107] Like the Race Traitor project, he uses such provocation to spur audiences to take action against the "institutions that reproduce race as a social category."[108]

One of the institutions most deserving of attack is the criminal justice system, which Hoch singles out with the first word of his show's title, "jails." Intimately familiar with the prison industrial complex, Hoch has devoted many hours to leading workshops for inmates about conflict resolution and racism, and he created a moving film version of *Jails, Hospitals, & Hip-Hop* that includes footage of the show being performed for prisoners. Several of the monologues in Hoch's show argue that people of color are not inherently criminal but are often led by structures of inequality into misguided life choices that land them behind bars. His sketch as Bronx points out the bitter irony of being jailed for trying to pursue the American capitalist dream, just like a girl with a lemonade stand. But racism predetermined Bronx's fate, restricting his access to the American dream: "That cop see somebody that's a entrepreneur . . . and 'cause he feel threaten, that day he gonna decide that capitalism is illegal. . . . I feel like suing them lemonade motherfuckers, man . . . for false advertising."[109] Even more disturbing are the tales Hoch shares of victims of police brutality, which deliberately foster sympathy. Victor, a vibrant young Puerto Rican man, walks with steel crutches and can never dance again because he was shot by overzealous cops in what the newspapers termed "an accident."[110] An emotionally wrenching skit in *Some People* is told from the perspective of a grieving Latino father, Cesar, who lost his nonviolent son in a similar police shooting "accident." Hoch, as the black rapper Emcee Enuff, attributes the criminal behavior of black youth partly to a nihilism bred from routine experiences of institutional racism, such as police brutality: "I see somebody who look just like me, getting a plunger stuck up they rectum by somebody that's supposed to protect us. Then I *wanna* go to jail. I be like, 'Joy? What's that?'"[111] Hoch points to the operation of a self-fulfilling prophecy; if the whole world views you as a criminal, then you are more likely to become one.

This negative image of people of color, Hoch contends, is perpetuated by television and film, and Hoch himself has attempted several anti-racist interventions as an actor and writer in white-dominated Hollywood. In addition to the film *Whiteboyz,* he worked on the development of a series pilot for ABC about multiethnic urban teenagers, which did not reach fruition. Hoch's efforts to develop multiethnic media programming have faced resistance from producers and studio executives who have told him, "'People don't want to watch Puerto Ricans' or 'America is mostly white people, you don't want to disinterest them' . . . or 'You can't have a piece entirely in Spanish, who's gonna get it?'"[112] Hoch also critiques the "one-dimensional image 'opportunities'" available for minorities on entertainment television.[113] He turned down a role in Robert Rodriguez's *From Dusk till Dawn* because he found the script (written by Quentin Tarantino) packed with racial slurs and stereotypes.[114] One of his monologues in *Jails,* told in his own voice,

exposes the racism he viewed on the set of *Seinfeld* when he was offered a guest role as a "Puerto Rican pool guy who cleans up towels and jumps around like an idiot and talks with a 'funny Spanish accent.'"[115] When he complained about the offensiveness of the stereotype, he was summarily dismissed from the set. Hoch surmises that "they wanted somebody that could do the real thing [accents], but still be one of them," and they were shocked to find Hoch to be a race traitor, a wolf in sheep's clothing.[116] In contrast to *Seinfeld*'s form of minstrelsy, Hoch contends, his own work finds the humor, humanity, and pathos in the lives of people of all colors without reducing them to one-dimensional racial or ethnic types.

Hoch appears to subscribe to the "Abolition of Whiteness" manifesto in that he speaks out loudly against white-friendly and racist practices in a variety of institutions. But does he share the desire of David Roediger, Noel Ignatiev, and others to "bring about an end of whiteness" itself?[117] Does Hoch seek to become an ex-white man? Or does he believe that doing away with racial identity is neither possible nor altogether desirable? In opposition to the *Race Traitor* "new abolitionists," Henry Giroux's model for white allies requires that they come to terms with and accept their status as white.[118] The sociologist Ruth Frankenberg similarly contends that whites should acknowledge that they are fully imbricated in racial discourse by reflecting on how "racism . . . shapes our daily experiences and sense of self." Like Giroux, Frankenberg advocates working toward "antiracist forms of whiteness" rather than rejecting white identity altogether.[119] While Hoch is clearly working toward the abolition of whiteness and racial essentialism, he also acknowledges the necessity of owning up to his whiteness given the current racial order. Yet he stops short of embracing a white identity as the locus on his political agency, as does Giroux. Giroux advocates that white youth search for oppositional anti-racist models *within* white culture, while Hoch locates the sources of his political agency in black and Latino hip-hop culture.

In some moments in his shows, Hoch rejects an identification as white almost too sanctimoniously. One could similarly argue that those who claim to be "ex-white men" underestimate the fact that one's subjectivity has been and continues to be shaped by social forces beyond one's control.[120] Hoch's denunciation of Jerry Seinfeld and company is a bit self-righteous in tone, as he vehemently denies that he is "one of them." Yet it is quite likely that he was given the opportunity to be on the show precisely because he *is* one of them, a Jewish white performer. In his introduction to *Jails,* Hoch also writes: "It's just cooler to be the oppressed than the oppressor. Who wants to be the oppressor? Shit, not me."[121] Here Hoch sounds like a teenager seeking popularity and "street cred" rather than political change. He appears to be momentarily engaging in what the theater professor Shannon Jackson humorously dubs "saving whiteface"—the practice of distancing oneself from

racist whites with a holier-than-thou attitude. Instead, Jackson advocates "undoing oneself" by showing whiteness in conflict, contradiction, and transformation.[122]

Despite moments where Hoch appears to be saving whiteface, he does engage in meaningful self-reflection about his own complicity with white privilege. In his prologue to *Jails,* Hoch calls attention to the fact that he inadvertently benefits from racism: "I'll use my skin privileges to flag you down a taxi."[123] Like Eminem, he points out how his color has no doubt fostered his success: "I often wonder if my skin were darker, or if I couldn't flip my linguistics during meetings to sound 'businesslike and un-threatening' . . . if I would have had the success I've had with these two shows. Was I a 'safe in' to the 'disenfranchised voice of America' for the rich and middle class?"[124] Whereas the skit as himself in *Jails* shows him heroically railing against Seinfeld's racism, the skit he performs in his own voice in 2008's *Taking Over* is far more self-reflexive, showing his whiteness in all its complicity and contradiction. The skit depicts Hoch having an existentialist moment in a Whole Foods market where he guiltily enjoys the fancy foods, reckons with the fact that he benefits from gentrification as a property owner, and considers how white allies and anti-racist activists like himself irrevocably changed the neighborhood with their very presence. Calling gentrification a "recolonization," he admits that "we're all participating. As am I."[125] No matter how much he might desire to be an "ex-white man," Hoch acknowledges that he will perhaps always be granted the privileges of whiteness, even against his own political will.

Unlike those who advocate a complete rejection of whiteness, Hoch expresses a more ambivalent stance, neither disavowing nor embracing his identity as white. He aims to attack white privilege from within, by exploiting his skin privileges—such as an ability to broker meetings with Hollywood executives—in order to reach a "wider audience . . . and of course to make more money—money to invest in my community and generation."[126] As he notes in an interview: "[P]art of me wants to say, f—k [Hollywood], but it's difficult. It comes back to the age-old question, do you change the system from outside of it or from the inside? I think you can do both. I'll run on one path and then on the other."[127] The *Race Traitor* editors might consider this impure resistance a form of treason against their abolitionist goal of transcending whiteness, but Hoch might reply that he is simply "keepin' it real."

Hoch's pragmatic strategy of working simultaneously within and against whiteness is brilliantly demonstrated in his film *Whiteboyz.* The character of Flip provides a self-reflexive commentary on Hoch's own cross-racial "brotherhood trip"[128] and on his own complex attitudes towards race and "representing." Although the *Village Voice* critic Richard Goldstein believes that Hoch erases and "empties his whiteness" in his theater performances, I argue that the trajectory that Hoch draws for his character of FlipDogg suggests a much different goal.[129] As

part of his acquisition of a black persona in the film, Flip continually drops the hip-hop phrase "I'm here to represent," which means to stand up in solidarity with one's race or to speak out against racism. For example, Flip claims that he is "representin'" when he protests a cop's prejudiced treatment of a black teen in his town, and both boys get arrested as a result. But as Flip employs the term, "representin'" also suggests a process of standing in the place of reality, and this disjunction between the representation and the real is evident in Flip's misguided claim to *be* black. As he sits in jail, pleased at finally living out his fantasy of the ghetto life, he enrages his black schoolmate by saying "brothers gotta stick together," to which the black college-bound teenager replies, "Who the hell are you representin'?"[130]

Flip's attitudes about race and representing are radically altered by his trip to Cabrini Green, when his own ignorance causes the death of a black man. As a result of this reality check, Flip takes off the black "mask" and begins writing rap as political protest poetry, speaking out *as a white man* against America's long history of racism. The moving lyrics to Flip's final "rap" speak volumes about Hoch's own stance toward whiteness:

> I had this dream that I was on this planet
> But it wasn't another planet, it was like this planet
> And I started crying
> And I was embarrassed
> Embarrassed that I didn't know shit
> Embarrassed at my history
> And I started thinking about 50,000 murders a year and two million people in jail
> And I think about Columbus Day and Columbus Circle and Columbus, Ohio
> And I started thinking about tribes, man, American tribes
> Raped, murdered and moved
> And I started thinking about tens of millions of Africans dying in the sea
> And Malcolm X and Jeep Cherokee and Columbus Day and Columbus, Ohio
> And I felt ashamed, man, ashamed of what I was representin'.

While Flip previously claimed to represent blackness, now he has owned up to his identity as a white man, voicing his shame at "what [he] was representin'"—white privilege and genocidal power. Flip no longer empties his whiteness but rather poignantly acknowledges that he is imbricated in white racism against African Americans and Native Americans, which he calls "*my* history." Although earlier he had shunned white culture for being boring, uncool, and stagnant,

he now disidentifies with "whiteboyz" for political rather than merely cultural reasons. In his essay "Crossover Dreams" in *Race Traitor,* Phil Rubio wonders if White Negro fascination with blackness can grow from a "cultural to [a more powerful] political" identification, and Hoch as Flip offers us a fable of just such a transformation.[131] Crucial to Flip's political awakening is his acceptance of his own complicity with whiteness. Abandoning his earlier attempt to become black, Flip in a sense becomes Danny Hoch, a man who has forged an anti-racist yet white political identity.

The anti-racist identity that Hoch has forged closely resembles what Susan Gubar describes as a space of "transraciality," in which people "seek neither to become the Other . . . nor to flaunt their alienation from the other" but rather to dwell "in racial borderlands."[132] Danny Hoch's theater and film explore the possibility of whiteness in solidarity with racial minorities and the underclass, a kind of counterhegemonic, transracial identity that is rarely explored in popular culture. To equate Hoch's ethic of transraciality with the cultural fad of the wigger or White Negro is to seriously underestimate the transgressive power of his work as a form of race treason. Yet Hoch's occasional missteps—his moments of "saving whiteface" that paint him as a hero, his defensive response to Harry Allen, and his self-righteous responses to Anna Deavere Smith's success—reveal a human being struggling with the contradictory impulses of his hip-hop battle spirit and his sincere anti-racist work as a white ally. Hoch's own struggle reminds us about the challenges faced by white people who are "straining to live black," in Hoch's own words.[133] The choice of "live black" rather than "be black" indicates his critique of the White Negro paradigm and his understanding of blackness not as an essence or embodied position one can occupy, but as a way of life, an activity of expressing solidarity with a community. The word "straining" reminds that cross-racial empathy and racial progressivism can be difficult work for white allies, but well worth the effort. To demonstrate this point further, I turn to an analysis of the work of the hip-hop novelist Adam Mansbach, for whom racial progressivism is not a "state of being" but an "ongoing struggle with one's self and one's country."[134]

Adam Mansbach's "Lit Hop": Satirizing the Perils of Race Treason

Hoch and the white novelist Adam Mansbach both share a stylistic investment in hip-hop aesthetics and a political investment in exposing white power and privilege. Both employ humor to investigate the insanity and absurdity of racism in America. Yet the bitingly satirical mode of Mansbach's novel *Angry Black*

White Boy reveals a more cautious and skeptical form of resistance compared to Hoch's championing of the revolutionary power of hip-hop. The targets of Mansbach's self-reflexive satire are not simply racist whites or complacent liberals but also radical whites—like Hoch and Mansbach themselves—who aim to commit race treason. Whereas Hoch can occasionally be defensive about his motives for aligning himself with people of color, Mansbach invites such questioning: "I've always taken the privilege of being allowed to participate in black culture very seriously. . . . I encourage a certain amount of suspicion. I try to be self-critical and honest."[135] In *Angry Black White Boy,* Mansbach offers an unflinchingly honest portrait of Macon Detornay, a nineteen-year-old white hip-hopper turned anti-racist vigilante. Macon is so strongly affiliated with black culture and people that he sets a police cruiser on fire to protest the Rodney King verdict. After he leaves Boston for New York City, Macon takes a job as a cab driver and robs white privileged passengers to disrupt their safety and complacency. The notoriety from his arrest spurs him to begin a public campaign to force whites to confront white privilege and institutional racism, which he dubs the "Race Traitor" project after Noel Ignatiev's anti-racist journal of the same name. Yet his quest for racial justice backfires, leading to a race riot that reveals the recalcitrance of white power. Mansbach's satirical look at white race-traitors investigates how anti-racism can become a commodity that further serves white interests. He underscores the difficulty of fully divesting oneself from white privilege, yet Mansbach's message is not defeatist. Through his satire of the wrong moves of a would-be race traitor, Mansbach projects a racially sincere message about the characteristics of an ideal white ally who effectively fosters the cause of racial justice.

Mansbach's own life story offers a testament to the potential for suburban white consumers of hip-hop to be politically transformed by their encounter with African American cultural forms. Growing up in the 1980s in an upper-middle-class and largely Jewish suburb of Boston (the city of Newton), Mansbach cut his teeth on politically charged hip-hop, such as Public Enemy, KRS-One, Brand Nubian, Gang Starr, and X-Clan. At eleven, he was "memorizing *Criminal Minded* [a seminal hardcore rap album] and beginning to understand the subjectivity of whiteness, as hip-hop was wont to make a white boy do back then."[136] Consuming underground rap music, which was not yet mainstream in the white community, cemented his budding friendships with the urban black kids in his elementary and junior high school, who were bused to the suburbs to access greater educational opportunity.[137] He credits his hip-hop insider knowledge to years spent taking the bus in the opposite direction, hanging out in the inner city with his African American friends. This physical journey of participation was crucial, he argues, because it involved "venturing outside of comfort zones, rendering myself visible

as different."[138] As he put it in an interview with me, he was the "only white kid in the room, quite literally," and was forced to think about the question of belonging. When I asked him whether his cross-racial friendships or his schooling in hip-hop came first, he noted that he had already befriended a few inner-city kids at his suburban elementary school who then introduced him to hip-hop. Although these cross-racial friendships were the catalyst, he asserted that hip-hop "strengthened my friendships in major ways" and fostered many new ones: "It was like an invisible badge [of cultural knowledge], all that was needed as the basis for a new friendship."[139]

His avid consumption of hip-hop quickly turned into a desire to produce hip-hop culture of his own making. Before hip-hop's mainstream crossover, Mansbach notes, "there was little conception of being a fan or an inactive participant."[140] Because he was a kid with a facility with words, he was drawn to rapping. In his teens and early twenties he busked around Europe as a rapper on the streets, cut a jazz/hip-hop fusion CD as an emcee named Kodiak Brinks, and published a volume of "spoken word" poetry entitled *genius b-boy cynics getting weeded in the garden of delights* (2002). The trajectory of Mansbach's development from white middle-class suburban kid to hip-hop practitioner underscores my emphasis on the power of cultural encounters to change lives. As Mansbach himself poignantly argues, "I believe that the music to which one is exposed at twelve is the most important one will ever hear."[141] Yet the story of Mansbach's cross-racial affiliation also echoes scholar Tricia Rose's point that white fans of early hip-hop were significantly different from today's fans of contemporary commercialized rap. Rose notes that when hip-hop was an underground rather than mainstream musical form, "to become a white fan of hip hop often meant leaving one's predominantly white social spaces and comfort zones . . . and sharing physical space where they themselves were a minority. The terms of their participation often required, if not cultural knowledge, certain familiarity with aspects of black life and a willingness to express a shared appreciation for actual black people."[142]

Mansbach's consumption and production of hip-hop led him to become involved in multiracial friendship and creative groups, and also to become immersed in black literature, black history, and the history of jazz music. From this wide-ranging cultural immersion, he internalized much more than simply hip black style, but also an African American point of view concerning institutional racism. Listening to hip-hop's articulations of the "insidious realities of police brutality, a Eurocentric school system, American collusion in South African apartheid, and ghettos ravaged by crack and guns" allowed him to "dislocate whiteness from its presumed position of centrality" and to "cast off romantic notions of colorblindness and investigate oppression . . . as something monstrously alive" in the present.[143] He was attracted not only by the poetics and word play

of hip-hop[144] but also by its politics. Mansbach muses, "I was the kind of kid who was thinking about fairness not just as to how it applied to me, but how it applied socially. . . . Hip-hop was the thing I found that was speaking most honestly" about systems of inequality.[145] While Mansbach's empathy and keen sense of social justice were most likely borne of multiple influences, hip-hop provided fuel for the fire. Because overtly political hip-hop lyrics in the late-1980s were thick with references to historical and current events, figures, and other black cultural texts, Mansbach notes that the music "literally sent you to the library."[146] As a teen he read Amiri Baraka, Malcolm X's speeches, Toni Morrison's fiction, Claude Brown's *Manchild in the Promised Land,* Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice,* Cornel West, Paul Beatty, and the essays of James Baldwin, his "number-one favorite writer."[147] His love of Public Enemy led him to Spike Lee's film *Do the Right Thing.* When hip-hop began to sample jazz music extensively in the 1990s, the music led him to become a jazz aficionado and protégé of his high-school music teacher, an African American jazz drummer who helped him to get gigs as an errand boy and roadie for the jazz greats Delfeayo Marsalis and Elvin Jones (John Coltrane's drummer). This snowballing effect is a significant possibility of cultural consumption that is often underappreciated by scholars. In Mansbach's case, an encounter with black music led to intensive reading and deeper cultural immersion that enhanced possibilities for cross-racial friendships, mentorship, and creative collaborations that materially altered his worldview. As Mansbach himself notes, "If you were to interview one hundred white kids who found some affinity with black culture, you would always find a specific vector or way in, be it hip-hop or basketball. Whatever happens after that happens," and an anti-racist self-definition is by no means guaranteed.[148]

In Mansbach's case, he was influenced by activist hip-hop groups such as X-Clan[149] to follow suit, speaking and acting out deliberately against racism. Mansbach's youthful activism involved taking a loud stand against the racist attitudes of his Hebrew school teacher, for which he was expelled from the class.[150] Not your average white seventh grader, he protested to have the Black Panthers included in his school's history curriculum.[151] At fifteen, he was outraged that his high school was virtually ignoring the Rodney King verdict, which he called "the most profound and most obvious injustice of my lifetime," so he organized a walkout, which led to a rally at city hall.[152] In his twenties, when he was an undergraduate and then an MFA student at Columbia University, Mansbach's activism began to take shape in a writing career as a journalist, promoting and reviewing the work of other hip-hop artists and intellectuals, and as a novelist, giving direct voice to the concerns of the hip-hop generation.[153] His novels *Shackling Water* (2002), *Angry Black White Boy* (2005), and *The End of the Jews* (2008) employ hip-hop aesthetics, focus on protagonists who are hip-hop and jazz artists, and

explore the ethics of cross-racial cultural affiliations, especially between blacks and Jews. More recently, Mansbach turned to the world of politics by writing a regular column for NewsOne.com concerning the 2008 election, in which he offered a scathing critique of those who complacently believe the United States has reached the "end of racism" by electing Obama.[154] It is significant that black writers and hip-hop intellectuals have enthusiastically embraced Mansbach's work; for example, the influential African American cultural critic Touré (who has notably skewered Eminem) endorsed *Angry Black White Boy* on the jacket cover, likening Mansbach to Ishmael Reed.[155]

In his creative work, Mansbach draws upon the synergy of hip-hop's aesthetic and political values. Mansbach's essay "On Lit Hop" articulates a key foundational element of hip-hop's politicized aesthetics—"intellectual democracy through collage."[156] His own collage style, heavy with references to popular culture and events in African American history, resembles that of hip-hop DJs who sample hooks from earlier rap and popular music. Comparing the hip-hop novel to a DJ's "mix board," Mansbach articulates his goal "to write fiction . . . that builds layers of reference and meaning" through a form of cultural shorthand—the "common language" of hip-hop with which many of his characters communicate.[157] Such "blend-happy" collage techniques are not mere postmodern play for hip-hop practitioners, he contends, but are informed by a democratic effort to revise white notions of cultural literacy and of what counts as history.[158] Mansbach's "lit hop" style is perfectly exemplified in this passage from *Angry Black White Boy,* in which Macon likens hip-hoppers to superheroes:

> Hip hop's a superpower worn incognito by cats like me, who move with the venom of every rhyme ever spit, cleave courses with the cold-fusion speed-of-sound precision of every turn-table cut scratch slice transform and crossfade, and think with the dexterity of every theatric unsolved b-boy battle tactic, from show-stop uprock down to linoleum headspins and impossible whirling-dervish cardboard axis chiropractics. . . . I throw cold steel in motherfuckers' unsuspecting faces and skate away unseen, muttering knockout punchlines in cartoon-bubble frozen breath. Then I dip into a phone booth and emerge jiggified, in tailored clothes with refined flows . . . gesturing Shakespearian and quoting Machiavelli in a tone that makes the Western canon bawl.[159]

This passage beautifully captures the lyrical flow, alliteration, rhythm, internal rhyme, and braggadocio of rap lyrics, and it is enriched by insider cultural knowledge of breakdancing and DJ practices such as "linoleum headspins" and "crossfades." Yet Mansbach also samples and riffs upon mainstream popular and high culture—Superman, Shakespeare, and Machiavelli—to illustrate the "cultural multi-literacy"[160] of hip-hop practitioners. In Macon's mythic vision, the heroic

hip-hopper is a no-longer-lily-white Superman who can flip the script at will to emerge victorious in a battle with the villains arrayed against the nonwhite world.[161] This "blend-happy" passage reveals a serious goal of undermining white power with artistic prowess.

Mansbach also draws upon hip-hop's "ecstatic genre-crossing"[162] in *Angry Black White Boy* when he deliberately mixes registers between satirical farce, tragedy, and earnest political arguments. In response to a few mainstream reviewers who objected to his novel's bricolage of tragedy and comedy, fantasy and reality, and earnest and satirical tones, Mansbach defends his strategy by arguing that hip-hoppers and African American writers alike have a "comfort with both the absurdity and the horror of race in America."[163] He claims as his literary ancestors the racial satires of George Schuyler's *Black No More,* Ishmael Reed's *Flight to Canada,* and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man.* He laments that the publishing industry seems to have decreed that books about race (especially those written by whites) should "give us our lesson and go. . . . Give it to us clean, simple, unambiguous, so we know how to feel: empathetic, indignant, disturbed. Don't start mucking around with satire; don't abandon gravitas or cross genres or switch tones on us. You start blurring right and wrong, buddy, and it's all over."[164] A strategy of ambiguity and ambivalence is key to Mansbach's intellectual project in *Angry Black White Boy,* in which he celebrates and criticizes hip-hop and explores the positive and dangerous consequences of white affiliation with blackness. To fully explore the complexity of blackness and whiteness in America, Mansbach's novel dives right into the gray—the rich and vexing territory of racial mixture and mixed motives that can not be unequivocally denounced or celebrated.

Although he deeply admires hip-hop because it "drags American race-hypocrisy and class-complacency out of the catacombs . . . and throws them on the examination table,"[165] his novel also puts hip-hop itself on the exam table. Immediately following the superhero passage cited above is a more critical evaluation of the contemporary state of hip-hop: "So what if hip-hop turned out not to be the Revolution like we hoped [and] . . . Chuck D's black CNN is more like a satellite dish now with two hundred channels of wack movies, cartoons, and home shopping networks?"[166] Mansbach, like Tricia Rose, Danny Hoch, and others, holds gangsta rap and the music industry responsible for its sins of commodifying violence and misogyny, but he also dares to criticize a foundational element of the politicized hip-hop music that he loves: its "free floating aggression."[167] Although Mansbach enjoys the competitive swagger of graffiti artists and emcees, he also shows how such postures of adolescent defiance can get in the way of coalition-building and political progress. When Macon is invited to be a guest on a call-in radio show, he is confronted by a fifty-seven-year-old Jewish civil rights worker who critiques his rash, incendiary plans. Macon feels compelled by hip-hop's

jousting spirit to attack him, yet "knew he had to overcome this uninformed, hip hop desire to dis every well-meaning voice, clown every hero of the past. He had to learn to recognize his allies, to build coalitions without feeling that it compromised him."[168] Mansbach addresses hip-hop in a thoroughly dialectical fashion, celebrating its artistic and political elements yet taking the movement to task for its own prejudices, misguided tactics, and juvenile limitations.

The novel's approach to the advent of white hip-hop fans and artists, like the author himself, is similarly judicious. Instead of sanctimoniously drawing sharp racial lines between authentic insiders and interlopers, Mansbach's post-soul novel aims to trouble the color line, much like African American Paul Beatty's similarly satirical hip-hop novel *The White Boy Shuffle,* which Macon references as one of his cultural influences. Macon Detornay is the visual inverse of Beatty's protagonist, Gunnar Kaufman, an intellectual black kid socialized in white surfer culture who struggles to "become black" to fit in with the kids of the 'hood. Both Beatty and Mansbach examine race as socially constructed and performative, a process of acculturation for both "black" people and their "white" allies. Yet Mansbach does not overcelebrate racial fluidity or allow it to obscure the reality of unequal distributions of power. Mansbach asserts that whites who choose to participate in hip-hop must practice their art in solidarity with people of color by fostering a critique of racial inequality. His novel shines a harsh spotlight on the "legions of backpack rap kids" whom Macon encounters at the famed Nuyorican Poets Café. Spitting out formulaic slam poetry, these white middle-class kids "sauntered into hip hop like it was their parents' living room and [threw] their legs up on the coffee table."[169] What most goads Macon about the backpack rappers is that they claim to "keep it real" but they never stoop to "figur[e] out what real [is], or for whom they [are] keeping it."[170] Throbbing with indignation and guilt, Macon feels implicated in paving the way for these posers to take over the hip-hop neighborhood without caring a damn about its "cause." He laments the bleaching of both the audience and performers, despite his own complicity in that process. In sharp contrast to the backpack rappers, the powerful poem that Macon reads at the Nuyorican's open mic reveals a "racially sincere" and self-reflexive hip-hop voice, commenting on poverty and welfare, white oppression of dark people worldwide, white control of the U.S. government, and his own "down syndrome"[171]—his self-conscious desire to be "down" or accepted as an ally by black people.

Because Mansbach's portrait of Macon is even more deliberately self-reflexive than Hoch's depiction of FlipDogg, the novel's plot and characterization deserve more extended analysis. Through Macon, Mansbach offers a provocative assessment of the promise and problematics of white race traitors' psychological and cultural identification with blackness. Mansbach's fictional character thus reflects

the author's own attempts to grapple with the difficulty of being a white ally. For the most part, Macon is well-intentioned, emotionally sincere, and politically attuned to racial injustice. Like Mansbach himself, Macon grew up in suburban Newton, Massachusetts, but forms friendships with African American teens with whom he chooses to live in a hip-hop collective for fifteen months. Macon's "adoption" by this African American community—and their family members, including "regal black matriarchs" and "Revolutionary [Uncle] Stan"—attests to his sincere affiliation with not only black culture but also black people and their values and concerns.[172] Like Mansbach, Macon was outraged by the Rodney King verdict and by the complacency of the safe, white suburbanites who cared more about the Red Sox winning than any riot in black Los Angeles. In his frustration, Macon torches and explodes a cop car in an empty parking lot, a cathartic act of solidarity with people of color who are often targets of police brutality and racial profiling. Macon's rebellion against law enforcement is not just a teenage prank but an anarchic form of protest against a racist criminal justice system. On April 29, 1992 (a date that he has tattooed on his arm), Macon "stopped believing in justice even a little bit. Any faith [he] had left in the system, or in white people, pretty much evaporated when [he] noticed that no one around [him] gave a fuck."[173] Macon thoroughly disidentifies with whiteness on political grounds, which earns him the friendship of black people. When he discovers that his ancestor Cap Anson was a racist baseball player who fought against the integration of the sport in the 1890s, he seeks further ways to disavow and undermine his racist family legacy.

When Macon moves to New York City and becomes a cab driver, he chooses to continue his rebellion through a form of vigilante crime, robbing his racist or simply privileged white male customers at gunpoint. By deliberately racializing and insulting his "white devil" victims as a "plague on this planet," Macon forces them to experience racial profiling and to "regret the color of their skin," perhaps for the first time.[174] In some ways, Macon's act of robbery might provide an eye-opening experience of trauma or discomfort for the privileged white victims, but it is unlikely to have the positive effects Macon claims to be invested in. Macon seems to be taking his cue from Noel Ignatiev's essay "How to Be a Race Traitor: Six Ways to Fight Being White," but he misinterprets Ignatiev's suggestions in a problematic way. Ignatiev's "how to" list involves opposing and actively disrupting systems of institutional racism that perpetuate white privilege and targeting mainstream institutions rather than individual hardcore racists. Ignatiev's last point reads: "Finally, do not reject in advance any means of attaining the goals of abolishing the white race; indeed, the willingness to go beyond socially acceptable limits of protest is a dividing line between 'good whites' and traitors to the white race."[175] Macon takes the vague final point most to heart, risking arrest and his

own safety by going beyond "socially acceptable" forms of protest against white privilege. Yet he ignores Ignatiev's advice to target institutions and systems that reproduce racial hierarchy and instead directs his anger at individual white people, the passengers in his cab. Robbing a few white people, or even striking fear in the hearts of the city's whites, is unlikely to undermine white supremacy. Macon hopes to teach his white passengers a lesson, but that lesson backfires when the robbery victims assume they were targeted by a black, not white, gunman in a "reverse-racism" hate crime, which merely reinforces their preconceived notions of aggrieved whiteness and dangerous blackness.

Mansbach's exposé of the "pathologies of a white kid in hip-hop" is unflinchingly honest because he created Macon as "somebody like me at a moment shortly before I split from that person whom I might have become."[176] Mansbach wrestles most deeply with Macon's juvenile desire to escape his own perceived deficiency as a white boy by pursuing black "soul." His vigilante crimes become a means to escape a whiteness that he perceives as lack: "[T]he epidemic flavorlessness of white men, their arthritis of the soul, sickened Macon; that obvious lack of style was at the root, even, of his frustration with himself."[177] In contrast, blackness functions in his mind as a mythic sense of plenitude and hipness, echoing Norman Mailer's essay "The White Negro," and thus he adopts any practices that will blacken him: "[E]very handshake and shoulder-banging embrace had darkened him imperceptibly, and he'd welcomed the transfer of every myth: coolness, danger, sexual superiority."[178] Macon is unquestionably aware that these essentialist concepts are myths, but he lacks the will to refute this logic as long as he gets to share in the bounty of "soul." Mansbach admits that he was that "same kid with the Malcolm X t-shirt and hat going to those parties" and that he "cribbed his coolness" in gesture and speech rhythms from both hip-hop and jazz musicians.[179] This continual quest to be seen as an "honorary brother" has positive and negative consequences, according to Mansbach. On the one hand, Macon is honestly seeking belonging in a community whose values he admires, and he cares deeply about black folks' opinions and standards of judgment. Blackness becomes the norm to which he is trying to assimilate or aspire. On the other hand, his White Negro "down syndrome" smacks of egotism. Living with his black friends, many of whom spout Elijah Muhammad's rhetoric about "white devils," Macon constructs a framework that will enable him to be "special, angry, the exception, the crusader. The down whiteboy."[180] At this point in the novel, Macon's strategy of denying his own whiteness exemplifies Shannon Jackson's point that "the saving of whiteface often substitutes for the undoing of racism."[181]

Macon's desire to shape himself in the mold of heroic black leaders also reveals a problem that has similarly haunted critical whiteness studies: the danger of marginalizing blackness and reinstating "great white heroes," albeit anti-racist

ones. Skeptical of whites' desire to view themselves as heroes, Mansbach is clearly invested instead in giving voice and primacy to heroic *black* activists. Several sections of the novel are told in the imagined first-person voice of the black baseball player Fleet Walker, an actual historical figure who tried to integrate the sport fifty years before Jackie Robinson did. Macon is reading Fleet's "autobiography" while the novel's major events are occurring, and he draws inspiration from Fleet's courageous will to play ball in the face of racist threats from the audience and players, including Cap Anson, Macon's own ancestor.[182] Yet the presence of this heroic black voice, who risks death to stand up for his belief in freedom and equality, functions as a foil to the much less heroic Macon, who nonetheless envisions himself as a latter-day Malcolm X. Speaking at a race symposium, Macon is inspired to "declare this Friday to be the first annual Day of Apology in the City of New York. I want white folks to meditate on what it is they're apologizing for and then to follow Brother Malcolm's advice and walk right up to black folks on the street and say they're sorry. Don't expect forgiveness; the point is to acknowledge how . . . messed up things are and to take a little bit of personal responsibility."[183] When the *Village Voice* starts calling him "The New Black Leader," however, Macon's desire to be like Malcolm risks becoming a displacement of black leadership that inadvertently reasserts the primacy of whiteness.

Skewering white egotism, Mansbach reveals that Macon's desire to be the new black hero is a self-aggrandizing goal. Nothing irks Macon more than when his robbery victims mistake him for a black man, thereby rendering him "invisible."[184] Ironically echoing Ellison's *Invisible Man,* Mansbach points out that Macon wants visibility—to be famous as a "superhero"[185]—perhaps more than he wants to be black. Once the Day of Apology turns into a media circus and then a race riot, Macon's leadership is seriously compromised. When a black hoodlum demands Macon's money as a form of race reparations, Macon refuses in a hypocritical way, declaring that he is special and above the ranks of a "foot soldier."[186] Through the angry retort of his black friend, readers are invited to see Macon's hubris as linked to white privilege: "You don't give a fuck about all the niggers that're gonna die and go to jail and get burned out behind this shit. You think it's a game. 'Not everybody's a foot soldier.' Please! You think Malcolm thought he wasn't?"[187] Macon's ill-considered plan to literalize Malcolm X's rhetorical flourish results in the unnecessary deaths of scores of black people. Through Macon's trajectory from voicing the grievances of the powerless to becoming an agent of power, Mansbach shows how easily power seduces and corrupts, a fact that is at the root of many white people's complacent acceptance of the racial status quo.

When the riot and looting escalates to pandemonium, Macon realizes far too late that his Day of Apology has inadvertently furthered white economic, political, and emotional interests. Mansbach satirically suggests that the Day of Apology

is flawed at the root, because the act of apologizing works to absolve the white person of feelings of guilt and becomes a replacement for political action. In the novel, numerous apologizing whites approach black New Yorkers, perhaps with genuine concerns about their own complicity with racism, but apologizing only makes the whites feel better about themselves, as if "a million pounds just dropped off [their] shoulders."[188] Macon's goal for whites to "take personal responsibility" backfires, since the apology becomes a vehicle for denying any further responsibility on the part of whites for making changes to the racial order. Mansbach implies that whites may speak the rhetoric of change but are rarely willing to pony up the money to make that redistribution happen. After his black friend Andre bails Macon out of jail, Andre questions the idea "that a white middle-class dude stealing from other white middle-class dudes is somehow redistributing the wealth."[189] He sarcastically goads Macon with the challenge to start doing something to benefit the black poor, like starting "a free breakfast program for underprivileged kids in Harlem."[190] Like Eminem, Macon focuses on attacking whites rather than helping to improve the lives of the poor and disempowered. Mansbach's point is that undermining the system of white privilege must also involve exposing and working against the role of capitalism in that system.

Mansbach further implies that anti-racist activism itself can become commodified and easily stripped of its political goals. Books I and II of the novel are entitled "Trader" and "Traitor" to imply that race treason and capitalist trading upon blackness may unfortunately sound very much alike. Mansbach's point of view is shared by David Roediger, who is skeptical about the new phenomenon of "commodity antiracism"—the marketing to teenagers of anti-racist clothing and slogans like Timberland's "Give Racism the Boot."[191] The superficial nature of commodity anti-racism is clearly satirized when *Teen Steam* magazine turns the vigilante Macon into the newest heartthrob, all the major rap labels come to the rally to reach their "dream demographic" of wiggers, and even right-wing Domino's Pizza chips in free pies once they hear the spin that the Day of Apology is an "all-white rally for racial solidarity."[192] Mansbach's biting satire implies that revolutionary impulses, like hip-hop itself, are always in danger of being co-opted by the powerful against the interests of the powerless.

All of Macon's errors of judgment might imply that Mansbach is unsympathetically skewering white hip-hoppers and all would-be race traitors. However, after Macon escapes to the South following the disastrous Day of Apology, Mansbach invites readers to view him more charitably as a deeply regretful teenager, full of youthful rebellion but lacking in foresight, sincere in motive but cowardly in execution. Macon bravely declares, "I have seen the enemy and he is me."[193] Earlier in his life, Macon had understood his white privilege as an ill-deserved bonus of middle-class comfort and convenience. Now that his ill-considered activism

has wreaked havoc on a city, he deeply understands a far more devastating truth: that white privilege can be a life-and-death matter. The fact that Macon emerges unscathed from a riot that he incited is symbolic of the ways that whiteness in America equals safety and freedom from harm or early death.[194]

The third and final section of the novel details Macon's self-reckoning through a horrific experience of southern racial violence, which gives him the chance to redeem himself as a true ally of African Americans. Book III begins with the final installment of Fleet Walker's narrative, recalling how Fleet's life was saved by the heroic action of his white teammate Red Donner. To save Fleet from the lynch mob chasing him off the baseball field, Donner quickly blackens his own face with greasepaint to confuse and divert the white mob, which succeeds in buying time for Fleet to jump to safety on a passing train. Red Donner assumes blackface not as mockery but as a heroic alliance, an alliance that cost him his life as the crowd "sliced him up and left him there to die."[195] In his willingness to put his own life at risk for the cause, Red Donner not only becomes a foil for Macon, who chooses the safety of whiteness against his own principles, but also a model for the ideal white ally. At the novel's close, Macon must decide whether to live up to the legacy of his genetic ancestor—the racist Cap Anson—or his spiritual ancestor, Red Donner, as the plot events take a turn toward the surreal. Macon is tested by the offer of a rich businessman who wants him to be a spokesperson for his "race-changing" venture to reprogram people from one race to another, as they choose. This racial-reprogramming business strips race of any concept of group solidarity and reduces it to a commodity. Macon's refusal to sign on as the spokesperson represents a major turning point in his development, as he takes a strong stand against the forces of commodification that doomed his own Race Traitor project. Through Macon's stand against the quick-fix idea of race-change, Mansbach argues that cross-racial affiliation cannot be achieved overnight but should be an ongoing process, a journey of sincere empathy and action that is never complete.

Although Macon passes this first test of the integrity of his anti-racist ideology, the final test he faces when he is abducted by a group of racist southern rednecks proves to be the far more difficult one. Through this incident, Mansbach challenges white allies to consider how far they are willing to go to undermine racism. The rednecks sadistically force Macon to beat an old black man to prove that he is truly "white." Out of fear for his own life, Macon hits the innocent man while apologizing to him, racked with guilt. Mansbach depicts Macon here in all his cowardice and conflicted ideology, striving to undo his years of identification with blacks in order to save himself. Although he tries desperately to abandon the worldview he learned from hip-hop, Macon ultimately can not "unenlighten himself."[196] Mastering his cowardly self-preservation instinct, he turns the gun

with which he is instructed to shoot the black victim upon his white captors instead. As a result of this decision, his KKK captors decide that Macon "ain't been white for a long time" and proceed to murder him, allowing him to "die for his cause."[197] The final ambiguous line of the novel reads "Burleigh pulled the trigger, and Macon joined his ancestors."[198] Mansbach could simply be suggesting that in death, Macon joins his genetic ancestor, the racist Cap Anson. Such a literal interpretation implies that Macon's affiliation with black culture is ultimately ineffectual, and white people are inevitably trapped by their inheritance of race privilege. Yet the phrase could also suggest that Macon joins his spiritual ancestor Red Donner, the white man who died trying to save his black friend. Macon's spiritual ancestors might also include civil rights protestors, revolutionary hip-hop artists, and the millions of black "foot soldiers" who have been victims of racial violence. In the end, Macon ironically fulfills Dominique's sarcastic command to "stay black and die,"[199] albeit against his will. With the ambiguity of that final line, Mansbach invites us to question how we define our ancestors, by inherited genes or cultural and political affinity. The novel asserts that white people have a choice, and the stakes of that choice involve significant risks. Real change to the racial order, Mansbach implies, is unlikely to occur without such risk.

Although *Angry Black White Boy* satirizes the ways in which white affiliations with blackness and hip-hop can "rebound against the ethical integrity of whites," he does not depict such failings as "inevitable," as does Susan Gubar.[200] Macon Detornay's misguided actions may have disastrous consequences, but he is nonetheless morally and politically changed for the better by his alliance with the black community and its expressive forms. Macon moves from an "appreciation and empathy" for black artistic expression to assuming the responsibility to take action against the "oppressive conditions from which so much black art springs."[201] Although Macon's idea of effective political action is deeply flawed, this potential for change and action—a change galvanized by the consumption and production of cultural texts—is where the novel rests its hope. Just as Mansbach credits hip-hop with shaping his own art and political viewpoints, he hopes that hip-hop literature may be "transformative, socially and spiritually," for the readers of his own generation.[202] Yet Mansbach is ultimately a realist, rather than an idealist, about the possibility for the racial and political transformation of white people. He believes in the "moral imperative" of working toward a future that we could call "postracist" but insists that in our present moment, "post-race is [simply] an idea" rather than a reality.[203] As flawed as Macon Detornay is, the novel invites us to value his passionate efforts to break free from the web of white privilege, even if he never quite succeeds in becoming an "ex-white man." Mansbach suggests that the ideal white ally is not a self-aggrandizing leader who seeks glory in "heroically" attacking whiteness

but rather a foot soldier engaged in daily struggle alongside African American efforts for change, justice, freedom, and opportunity.

Complicating the Black-Jewish Alliance

Although I have detailed how Danny Hoch and Adam Mansbach emerged from quite different class locations to form an alliance with the hip-hop community of blacks and Latinos, the fact that both are of Jewish ethnicity also warrants discussion, given the long history of alliances and conflict between blacks and Jews. The history of black-Jewish relations is intertwined with the trajectory of American Jews over the past one hundred years. In 1910, the majority of American Jews were working-class immigrants perceived as "off-white" and frequently the targets of discrimination, whereas by 2010, many Jews had achieved the status of privileged members of the white elite. Although Hoch and Mansbach are critical of the ways in which Jews have willingly paid what Eric Goldstein calls the "price of whiteness,"[204] I will argue that their Jewish ethnicity and sensibilities were also instrumental in their attraction to black expressive culture and its politics, in their social activism, in their self-deprecating sense of humor, and in their disaffection with whiteness in the first place. Both artists address their Jewishness and the complex relations between blacks and Jews in various interviews as well as in their creative work—in Hoch's portraits of Jewish characters Doris (*Some People*) and Stuart (*Taking Over*), and in Mansbach's 2008 novel *The End of the Jews,* whose main characters are three Jewish artists who are inspired by and allied with black musicians, photographers, and graffiti writers.

The field of black-Jewish relations has yielded stellar scholarship that reveals what drew blacks and Jews into an alliance and what frequently drove them apart, especially in the years after the civil rights movement. Since this book is focused on white experiences of cross-racial empathy, I will address the Jewish rather than the black motivations for forming an alliance. In the early twentieth century, Jews became actively involved in the founding and administration of civil rights organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (1910) and the National Urban League (1911).[205] A variety of factors encouraged Jews in this period to seek out an alliance with African Americans based on their shared experiences of discrimination and marginalization. Many scholars have noted that Jews "had an uncertain relationship to whiteness" from the late nineteenth century to World War II.[206] Not-quite-white Jews and African Americans faced discrimination in college admissions and social clubs, residential segregation due to restrictive housing covenants, and employment discrimination in the professions. Jewish newspapers (unlike those of the white mainstream) regularly reported on lynchings, noting the commonalities between the racist terrorism

of the Ku Klux Klan and the pogroms against Jews in Eastern Europe.[207] Ethan Goffman notes that it was a post–World War I rise in anti-Semitism that led Jews to seek a common legal agenda with African Americans.[208] The Holocaust had a similar effect in the post–World War II period, drawing more Jews to recognize the commonalities between Hitler's Third Reich and the Jim Crow American South and moving them to contribute significant financial backing and volunteer hours to civil rights efforts such as the Freedom Summer.[209] Scholars have advanced a variety of arguments explaining why Jews were drawn to collaborate with African Americans in the long civil rights movement: a recognition of the common roots and effects of racism and anti-Semitism, Jewish philosophies of liberalism and pluralism, black-Jewish integration in urban slums due to the Great Migration, Jewish values such as *tikkun olam* (repairing the world), and Jewish self-interest.[210] Jewish participation, funding, and leadership in the movement, however, raised cries of paternalism from the black community, especially with the rise of black nationalism.[211]

While the black-Jewish political alliance yielded largely positive results despite charges of paternalism, most critics who look at *cultural* alliances between blacks and Jews tend to view them as instances of appropriative identification that shored up the power of whiteness. Michael Rogin sees the "racial cross-dressing" of blackface minstrelsy in vaudeville and film as a form of white supremacy that "did not oppose . . . racial hierarchy."[212] According to Rogin, Jews like Al Jolson and Eddie Cantor put on the mask of caricatured blackness to establish themselves as white and American by comparison, thus reasserting the black/white color line rather than erasing it. In *A Right to Sing the Blues,* Jeffrey Melnick examines the Jewish Tin Pan Alley artists George Gershwin, Irving Berlin, and Al Jolson, who appropriated black musical culture as a way of expressing Jewish suffering and ethnic nationalism. Since Jews often owned the means of production—theaters, music halls, and record-production and film companies—they reaped economic rewards by being translators and interpreters of black culture, while working actively to exclude black composers.[213] Melnick further explores the ways in which "Jewish men used black looks and sounds to shore up their own masculinity."[214] Melnick admits, however, that some Jews were more invested in commodifying black music and style from a distance, while others were more intimately connected to the black community. Not all cultural critics reduce black-Jewish cultural alliances to a unidirectional appropriation worthy only of condemnation, as do Rogin and Melnick. Gayle Wald offers a more nuanced portrait of the White Negro Mezz Mezzrow in *Crossing the Line,* Michael Billig's *Rock 'n' Roll Jews* celebrates the Jewish songwriters Lieber and Stoller and Jerry Wexler for their mutually beneficial collaborations with black performers, and Michael Alexander's *Jazz Age Jews* challenges Rogin's account by suggesting that

Jews in the 1920s often chose to resist assimilation and embrace an "outsider identification."[215] Lori Harrison-Kahan's *The White Negress* offers an insightful analysis of alliances between early twentieth-century black and Jewish women writers such as Fannie Hurst and Zora Neale Hurston, who forged relationships that were reciprocal rather than simply hierarchical.

The main sources of conflict between blacks and Jews have been their differential access to economic opportunity and class mobility and the increasing identification of Jews with whiteness.[216] As Karen Brodkin has argued, Jews "became white folks" after World War II because the Holocaust made American anti-Semitism socially unacceptable, and because Jews (but not blacks) received educational benefits from the G.I. Bill and access to suburban housing with the relaxation of restrictive housing covenants.[217] From the Depression through the 1950s, Jews began moving out of neighborhoods they had shared with African Americans, taking on the roles of landlords, store owners, and employers of African Americans (especially domestics). In his 1967 essay "Negroes Are Anti-Semitic Because They're Anti-White," James Baldwin wrote, "The Negro is really condemning the Jew for becoming an American white man."[218] As Jews became a comfortably middle-class "model minority," they often became "blind to structural racism. . . . Many blamed blacks' failure to rise on black people themselves."[219] In the second half of the twentieth century, far fewer Jews were living the life of urban poverty, although Danny Hoch's own childhood in the 1970s and 1980s as a working-class Jew in Queens belies the generalization that all Jews had achieved the "promised land" of middle-class suburbia.

From the civil rights movement through the 1980s, black critiques of Jews grew louder, and the fissures in the alliance grew wider. Comparisons of the Holocaust and the Middle Passage incited arguments as to which was the greater atrocity.[220] As Baldwin put it, "[O]ne does not wish . . . to be told by an American Jew that his suffering is as great as the American Negro's suffering. It isn't."[221] In the 1980s, animosity was stoked by arguments between Jewish neoconservatives such as Norman Podhoretz and black anti-Semitic leaders such as Louis Farrakhan of the Nation of Islam, Al Sharpton, and Jesse Jackson, who called New York "Hymietown." The differing ideologies of the black and Jewish communities were clarified in their disagreements about affirmative action after the 1978 case of *Bakke v. the Regents of the University of California.* Fearing the policy as dangerously close to the quota systems they had worked diligently to eradicate, Jews spoke out against affirmative action as a betrayal of liberalism, revealing their deep faith in meritocracy and individual freedom[222] and their blindness to the tenacity of institutional racism against nonwhites.

Despite the highly strained nature of black-Jewish relations in recent decades, statistics show that Jews in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century still

vote disproportionately Democratic and remain less racist and more socially liberal than other whites.[223] Eric Goldstein argues that the contemporary Jewish community is experiencing a resurgence in tribalism and the rhetoric of difference, as high rates of intermarriage with non-Jews stoke fears of cultural extinction.[224] Although tribalism may further frustrate efforts at coalition, many Jews are now coming to view themselves as outsiders as well as insiders in America, which may increase the potential for alliance with other outsiders. As Goldstein sees it, in the twenty-first century "an increasing number of Jews are becoming frustrated with the constraints of acceptance in white America and are expressing a sense of alienation from and disengagement from whiteness. . . . [Some] Jews have become disenchanted with their role as privileged whites."[225] A case in point is Tim Wise, a well-known Jewish American anti-racist activist and author of *Speaking Treason Fluently: Anti-Racist Reflections from an Angry White Male* (2008). In fact, as Jonathan Freedman has remarked, the field of critical whiteness studies is greatly indebted to the work of Jewish scholars such as Howard Winant, Michael Rogin, Jeffrey Melnick, Robyn Wiegman, George Lipsitz, Susan Gubar, and Matthew Frye Jacobson, who have "been in the forefront in the rethinking of racialization, whiteness, and even Jewishness-as-whiteness."[226] Hoch and Mansbach are two further examples of Jews who are rejecting the privileges of whiteness and challenging the color line.

In Hoch's portrait of a Jewish liberal mother (Doris) in his play *Some People,* he underscores the contradictory nature of contemporary Jewish identity in its relationship to whiteness and blackness. The skit depicts Doris arguing with her anti-racist son Dave, who works for an organization "like the Peace Corps, but in New York."[227] Hoch modeled this sketch after an argument he had with his own Jewish mother.[228] Worried that her son might be shot on the subway in a black neighborhood, Doris says, "I wish these kids didn't have to grow up with all this violence and uch, a mess, and my heart goes out to them. . . . [B]ut let them shoot each other and not you." About "those people" of color who live in the South Bronx, she offers this conflicted analysis: "[T]hey're different . . . I mean not that they're different, they're the same as us, everyone is the same, but all right, never mind, it's just different."[229] Like many white liberals, Doris has been taught that a color-blind ideology is polite and correct ("everyone is the same"), but when threatened, her deep-rooted belief in racial differences (an "us" and a "them") emerges. Despite her fear of difference, Doris still views herself as a victimized minority: "How is it possible for Jews to be prejudice when everyone is prejudice all the time against the Jews? . . . David, six million . . . did you see *Schindler's List*? . . . How am I a victim in the suburbs in 1994? . . . The Jews are still victims."[230] Yet rather than being proud of the history of Jewish involvement in the civil rights movement, Doris interprets that history as a wrong turn that

distracted Jews on the path of assimilation into the safety of white America: "You wanna be one of the Jewish kids in Mississippi with the voter registration and they killed them?"[231] Hoch's portrait of Doris implies that although remnants of an "off-white" consciousness of marginality remain among Jews in the late twentieth century, the black/Jewish alliance is severely strained. However, by creating the character of Doris's son David, a stand-in for Hoch's own activist efforts in conflict-resolution among urban youth, Hoch also suggests that the legacy of the black/Jewish alliance can still bear fruit in the present.

In his most recent one-man show, *Taking Over* (2008), Hoch offers a similarly critical portrait of a Jewish real-estate developer with designs on sweeping the minorities out of Williamsburg, Brooklyn. Yet this monologue also self-reflexively implicates Hoch himself in the gentrification of this neighborhood in which he has lived since the early 1990s. The character Stuart recalls black critiques of Jewish landlords exploiting black neighborhoods in midcentury Harlem, and Hoch expressed some qualms in interviews about making the real-estate developer overtly Jewish because of stereotypes of Jewish greed.[232] Different from those absentee landlords, however, Stuart lives in the apartment building he developed because he loves the hip vitality of the neighborhood. The fact that Stuart is doing yoga while speaking also humorously calls attention to the white-middle-class practice of cultural appropriation-as-recreation. In an interview, Hoch remarked that Stuart is a "funny character and very, very likeable. And as villainous as some of the stuff he says is, he actually says some of the deepest truths of the show"[233] by exposing the hypocrisy of the white bohemian artists who oppose real-estate development but act as first-wave gentrifiers themselves. Elsewhere in the show, Hoch admits his own guilt about being one of those white artist/creative types who first moved to Williamsburg well before it was fashionable; he points out that he is inadvertently benefiting from gentrification's increase in property values because he rents out his own house for $1,700 while he is on tour. His choice to make Stuart Jewish reveals his commitment to exposing Jews as privileged whites who benefit from gentrification, yet he does not paint him as an uncomplicated villain. Rather, Hoch uses Stuart's monologue as a mouthpiece to explore the ways in which exploitative *and* progressive Jewish whites are caught in the process of colonization, attracted by the multicultural vitality of a polyglot neighborhood but altering its character with their very presence. Such a self-reflexive gaze is crucial to the work of white allies who must remain aware of how white privilege can impact their participation in multiracial coalitions.

Hoch's monologues offer strong criticism of liberal Jews and those who exploit people of color for economic gain, but one statement that he made in an interview echoes the psychology of Jewish White Negro hipsters and their attraction to the mythology of black masculinity. In a 1999 interview, he told of an incident

that occurred right after his bar mitzvah, the rite of passage for thirteen-year-old Jewish boys to become "men" within the synagogue. Two weeks after this Jewish initiation rite, he was arrested for weapons possession with his multiracial group of graffiti writers. Hoch remarked jokingly but proudly of the incident, "*That* was when I became a man."[234] The implication here is that Jewish ritual does not confer as potent a sense of manhood as the "thug life" of criminality mythologized by gangsta rap. On the one hand, the comment can be seen as problematic because it resonates with Melnick's analysis of the ways that Jewish jazz men used black music to "shore up their own masculinity."[235] Hoch also appears to be capitulating to what John Jackson Jr. calls the discourse of authenticity rather than sincerity, wearing his arrest as a kind of racial badge or "hood pass." On the other hand, this formative run-in with the law also reflects Hoch's alienation from the so-called justice system and his empathy for people of color who are often unfairly targeted by law enforcement officers, as he addresses in many of his skits. Later in the same interview, Hoch passionately claims as "my people" two victims of NYPD brutality, Abner Louima and Anthony Baez. Perhaps the phrase "*that* was when I became a man" could also mean that this experience of incarceration offered a sobering education in the reality of a police force that harms rather than protects inner-city youth. Elsewhere he has written about this arrest as opening his eyes to the power of white privilege and the racism of law enforcement: "The arresting officer, who was Latino, asked me and my Italian-American friend why we didn't leave this stuff to the blacks and Latinos—using more colorful language, of course."[236] The fact that a single phrase, "when I became a man," could paint Hoch as either a Jewish White-Negro in envy of black masculinity or an anti-racist activist against institutional racism attests to the difficult historical baggage that Hoch must negotiate as he struggles to express a sincere racial politics as a white Jew allied with black people.

While it is clear that Hoch has chosen to claim people of color and the hip-hop community as "his people," he also acknowledges that his sensibility and politics are shaped by his ancestral heritage as a fourth-generation New Yorker descended from Eastern European Jewish immigrants. In an interview, Hoch acknowledges his indebtedness to a Jewish comic sensibility: "Jews in Eastern Europe have always played with the fine line between extreme pain/seriousness and hysterical laughter. It's not something I think about doing; it just happens naturally throughout my work and I think I can attribute that to Jewish roots."[237] At a panel on "Blacks, Jews, and the Comedy of Subversion," Mel Watkins, an African American editor, argued that Jewish and African American humorists share many qualities: sarcasm, an anti-authoritarian goal of ridiculing hypocrisy, the self-reflexive ability to laugh at the difficult circumstances of their people, and a tendency to mock their own religion while nonetheless reaffirming its values.[238]

Although Jews and blacks may share a darkly comic sensibility, it must still be remembered that Jewish blackface performers employed humor at the expense of African Americans. The history of blackface Jews is one that weighs heavily upon Hoch, since some have mistaken his own performances as a form of minstrelsy. In his early career, he became frustrated when a group of Jewish spectators booed his show, claiming that "they can't stand that I'm playing complex black characters, because . . . they can only reference minstrelsy" and fear anything associated with its taint.[239] Although I have already argued that his "racially sincere" theater is distinct from minstrelsy because it is rooted in ethical concern for African Americans and Latinos as complex individuals, Hoch learned that he needed to do more to address the charge rather than simply dismissing it in bombastic hip-hop fashion. In an interview in 2002, he said: "The question [of ethnic heritage and creative production] is a tricky one because of . . . the unfortunate history of Al Jolson and other Jews who took 'black' culture and exploited it, and misinterpreted it for America, back in the day. However, precisely because of my heritage, which is also one of resistance, it is one of my responsibilities to work towards undoing the Al Jolson effect, and to work towards, rather than against, the liberation of this big shtetl we call New York City."[240] In aiming to "undo the Al Jolson effect," Hoch notably draws on the heritage of Jewish progressive "resistance" and also expands the concept of a "shtetl" (European Jewish enclave) to include all of New York City as a larger multiethnic community in need of liberation. By using the word *shtetl,* Hoch also recalls the pogroms and thus the shared experience of racist violence that enabled the black-Jewish alliance in the first place.

Hoch's goal to use humor to empathize with rather than to lampoon people of color came into direct conflict with the "minstrel" humor of a far more famous Jew, Jerry Seinfeld. Hoch comments on the Seinfeld incident in the skit called "Danny's Trip to L.A." in *Jails, Hospitals, & Hip-Hop,* and in an article he wrote for *The Nation*.[241] As discussed earlier, Hoch was hired to be on *Seinfeld* but refused to play the part of Ramon the crazy pool boy with a "funny Spanish accent." The most striking aspect of this incident is Hoch's empathetic identification with the Latino community, which fuels his disidentification with a fellow Jew, whom Hoch exposes as trafficking in ethnic stereotypes. It seems clear that Seinfeld at first mistook Hoch for a minstrel, saying, "Isn't that what you do, little accents?"[242] In the filmed version of his performance, Hoch delivers Jerry's line by using his hand as a jabbering puppet and then "silences" the hand to underscore his disagreement with Jerry.[243] In response to Seinfeld's assertion that a Spanish accent would make the scene "funnier," Hoch argues that "accents aren't funny, *people* are funny." Here Hoch is working to "undo the Al Jolson effect" by implying that ethical humor finds its roots in individual subjectivity rather than stereotypes.

He smartly notes that Seinfeld and company "didn't want the real thing, they wanted somebody that could do the real thing but still be one of them," a funny Jew.[244] By calling attention to this substitutive logic, Hoch echoes Michael Rogin's argument that blackface Jewish minstrels aimed to distance themselves from the very blackness they mimicked. Interestingly, Hoch tried to play the scene in his own "accent," that of an uptight Brooklynite, and later suggested, "Let's make him Israeli. He could be Shimon." His willingness to play an Israeli reveals that Hoch is perhaps willing to make fun of "his own" Jewish people in self-mockery, but he draws the line at participating in the stereotyping of Latinos, which he sees as the far larger problem. In response to being attacked as anti-Semitic for daring to go public with his story, Hoch quips, "I wonder if they would have seen Jerry Seinfeld as anti-Semitic if he burned an Israeli flag, instead of the Puerto Rican flag they burned and stomped on during the last season of his show."[245] Here Hoch strongly criticizes Jews who hurl the "anti-Semite" charge to squelch valid criticism of their racially insensitive actions, much like neoconservative whites who hypocritically point out what they see as "reverse racism" to deflect attention away from their own.[246]

Hoch's attitude toward Jews remains ambivalent, marked by a rejection of Jewish class privilege and the history of minstrelsy, combined with a respect for the Jewish legacy of resistance to discrimination and racist violence that enabled an alliance with blacks. Adam Mansbach shares a similar ambivalence about his own Jewishness, and like Hoch, he defines himself as a secular rather than a religious Jew. Mansbach withdrew from Hebrew School before his bar mitzvah, but he claims a deep connection to "the spirit of inquiry at the heart of the Jewish tradition" and an argumentative penchant for critique, inherited from the Talmud, that speaks loudly "from the margins."[247] His childhood concern for fairness and justice may have been influenced by Jewish liberalism and values such as *tikkun olam* ("repairing the world," or social justice) that he absorbed from family members. Notably, his grandfather Benjamin Kaplan was a judge, professor, and lawyer involved in prosecuting the Nuremberg war-crime trials, and his father Charles Mansbach is front-page editor of the liberal-leaning newspaper the *Boston Globe.* When Adam recalled his reading of African American protest literature as a teenager, he noted that he "only had to go as far as his parents' bookshelf to find *Soul on Ice*" and other 1960s touchstones that reflected the investment of Jews in the civil rights movement.[248] Black-nationalist books were certainly not on the shelf in my own conservative Catholic parents' home.

In his novel *The End of the Jews,* Mansbach offers an extended meditation on the sustaining power and the fraught nature of black-Jewish cultural alliances. The novel follows three Jewish artists with ties to African American artists: Tristan Brodsky, a novelist reared in the 1930s in a poor Jewish enclave in the Bronx who

develops a lifelong friendship with a black jazz performer (Albert Van Horn); Tristan's grandson Tris/RISK, a novelist and graffiti writer who considers himself a member of the hip-hop community; and Nina, a Czech-immigrant photographer who becomes the protégé and lover of an African American photographer and goes on tour with a group of black jazz musicians. In his interview with me, Mansbach noted that there are autobiographical elements in all three of his main characters, whom he employs to comment on his own cultural alliances with jazz and hip-hop and on the role of his Jewishness in that identification. Since the novel follows three generations of Jews from the 1930s to the present, it also tracks the process of Jewish assimilation into whiteness and class privilege, as the title *The End of the Jews* suggests. The novel offers a more nuanced analysis of the relationship between Jewishness and whiteness than did *Angry Black White Boy,* which confusingly gave the Jewish character Macon Detornay a French/Belgian last name and a nineteenth-century racist ancestor with the English surname Anson, thus conflating Jews with other whites and ignoring the history of anti-Semitism in America.[249]

In *The End of the Jews,* however, Mansbach provides ample evidence of how anti-Semitic discrimination hampers the characters' freedom, especially in Tristan's midcentury New York and in the Czechoslovakia where Nina grew up. Yet his depiction of Jews in the present echoes African American claims that Jews no longer have much in common with the "have-nots."[250] In the 1940s, Tristan struggles to publish his first book because publishers believe that the market can sustain only one Jewish author at a time, and he needs a WASP mentor to grant him entrée into literary circles. At an African American rent party, he faces slurs like "hymie" and "sheeney." In Czechoslovakia, Nina's mother is forced to hide her Jewishness from the state and from her daughter. Mansbach paints a complex portrait of how the forces of anti-Semitism influenced Jews to desire assimilation and secularization. Tristan's father refuses to teach him Yiddish, none of the characters go to temple or celebrate Shabbat, and the Torah has become nothing more than a set of mythic "fairy tales" to Nina.[251] Although Tristan is secularized himself, he views the ascension of Jews into upper-middle-class white society as a loss of the outsider status that shaped his artistic sensibility. Commenting on the materialist excesses of bar mitzvah parties, Tristan pronounces "the end of the goddamn Jews," as they appear to have achieved full inclusion in the secular, commercial world of whiteness.[252] Significantly, the book closes when Tristan, in his eighties and facing divorce and betrayal from his grandson, begs his wife Amalia to recite the Shema and V'ahavta prayers with him, prayers that assert one's allegiance to God and promise to teach God's commandments to one's children. Although it gives the couple a poignant moment of religious fellowship as they are about to split, it also sadly testifies to the fact that many contemporary

American Jews, like the Brodsky family, have lost an investment in the Shema's injunctions of faith.

While Mansbach tells the story of Jewish assimilation into whiteness with a certain amount of pathos, he is more invested in the alternative: Jewish alliances with black culture and people. Most of Tristan's life is spent rejecting the Jewish community of God's "chosen people" and instead choosing an alliance with African Americans, especially black musicians. When the fifteen-year-old Tristan goes to his first jazz club, he feels an "an unprovable suspicion that these people are like him, or like he wants to be. He feels a wrenching lust for a life like theirs, a life lived in the present moment, an American life." Whereas the Jews are haunted by the past, blacks seem to him to "stand with both feet in the here and now—for horrible reasons, to be sure," and he admires and covets the "freedom" he sees in their lives.[253] Tristan's attraction to blackness combines complex feelings of solidarity ("these people are like him"), an "awestruck voyeurism,"[254] an immigrant desire to be more fully American, and a romanticization of black vitality. Following the black musicians to a rent party in Harlem that is bursting with "people, music, laughter," Tristan "thinks of Moses standing on the mountain overlooking the Promised Land."[255] Importantly, however, Tristan remains skeptical of his own "fantasy" of black "freedom," admitting that it may just be "a load of bullshit."[256] Mansbach exposes the fantasies fueling Jewish attraction to blackness, yet he also admits some vital similarities between blacks and Jews that enable a lasting friendship between Tristan and the African American jazz drummer Albert Van Dorn.[257] Tristan's working-class urban struggles and his experiences of anti-Semitism are not insignificant in enabling a bond with Van Dorn. According to his hip-hopper grandson Tris/RISK, the scrappy, working-class, Bronx-born Tristan resembles many black artists whose creativity is a form of survival and agency: "[Y]ou did whatever you had to do to survive, claimed what you needed, made it all yours—that's the fucking story of the Jews, of hip-hop, of everything."[258]

Tristan and his grandson RISK's attraction to black expressive culture is sincere in many respects, yet Mansbach also details an undercurrent of appropriation and a problematic use of black affiliations to resist the constriction of identity politics. When Tristan writes an acclaimed novel inspired by hip-hop graffiti writing to which his grandson had introduced him, Tris accuses Tristan of "sucking the marrow from [black] lives" and seeking appropriative vitalization in a "ghetto darker" than his own.[259] Because Tristan "cannot allow the mantle of Jewish Writer to . . . obscure him like a Halloween mask," he finds his own affiliation with blacks to be a useful strategy in his fight against identity labels.[260] Inviting Albert Van Horn's jazz quintet to accompany his reading at a Jewish awards banquet in the

1960s, Tristan resorts to "wielding blackness as a scare tactic, a shock technique, a weapon":

> conveying the message [to other Jews that] *I am not like you.* . . . [A]nd here are the soundtrack and visuals to prove it. Here I stand with those whom, let's be honest, many of you are only marginally ahead of the national curve in learning not to fear and despise despite all that has been done to you, a couple of dead freedom-riding kikes notwithstanding. Those whose holocaust, if one wishes to compare such things, and I do not, outhorribles even our own. Those who are more Other than we will ever be again, O universally shunned and crushed and banned Chosen People . . . who have survived . . . and by sweat and wit risen to become America's brain trust, Hollywood's finest.[261]

Tristan's black friends offer a convenient tactic for him to self-righteously distinguish himself from barely liberal Jews who hypocritically claim otherness despite their ascension to power. He dares to take a black stand in the comparative debate about the atrocities of slavery versus the Holocaust, but he seems to do so largely out of an angry desire to reject constraints on his own creativity that follow from the strangling label of "Jewish writer." While there is certainly much truth in Tristan's venomous critique of the Jewish liberal establishment, Mansbach also reveals the appropriative, self-serving tactics lurking within Tristan's alliance with blackness.

Tristan shares with his grandson an overly strident condemnation of middle-class Jews that resembles "saving whiteface" or Macon's "down syndrome" in *Angry Black White Boy.* Mansbach humorously lampoons Tris's angry teenaged political poetry, "scary verses full of heroic dead musicians and fiery revolutions that incinerate white middle-class people . . ., judge them guilty of shallow liberalism and post their heads on sticks to decorate the perimeter of some new sanctified land where Amiri Baraka seems to be emperor."[262] Notably, Baraka has written famously anti-Semitic poems ("The Black Man Is Making New Gods," "Black Art," and "Somebody Blew Up America") and was married to a middle-class Jewish woman (Hettie Jones) before his black-nationalist politics led him to divorce her. Since Mansbach noted in his interview with me that the *Leroi Jones/Amiri Baraka Reader* was a formative influence on his teenaged ideas about race, Mansbach is likely offering a self-critique of his early identification with black nationalists as a means of rebellion against his own middle-class Jewish world.

Through a plotline involving Tris's girlfriend, Nina, Mansbach also argues that there are definite limits on any white Jew's claims to blackness. Although Nina is a Czech Jew, she is embraced by a group of black jazz musicians and their photographer as an honorary African American/Creole, "more black than Jewish" with a "soulful type of vibe."[263] Accepting that identity with pride, she applies for

and wins a scholarship for Black Achievement in Photography at Hunter College. Years later, she is haunted by her deception and decides to give back the money because "she hadn't had the means, back then, to correlate blackness with disadvantage, or understand how fraught it was to claim it."[264] Tris is more wary than Nina (and Mansbach more wary than Hoch) about the fraught practice of Jews taking the place of or speaking for blacks. Yet Tris feels a similarly strong kinship with black hip-hop that he wishes he could claim without question as his own. Echoing Mansbach and Hoch in his assertion that "hip-hop raised him as much as anything or anybody, so of course he wrote about it," Tris is nonetheless acutely aware of his outsider status within hip-hop and wonders whether he should abandon it to seek "*something that no one can deny is mine.*"[265] Few of the Jews in this novel seek out this easier form of authenticity, the route of claiming the Jewish community as their own and speaking on its behalf. Instead, Tris, like Mansbach, redoubles his efforts to enact his sincere commitment to a progressive alliance with African Americans by producing work that is "unassailably dealing with" all the pathologies of racism and that aims to blow up "notions of race" with dynamite.[266] Mansbach continues to pursue his commitment to the hip-hop nation with his newest novel, *Rage Is Back* (2013), which follows a group of graffiti writers in their fight against an oppressive policeman turned mayoral candidate. As Mansbach noted in an interview, he refuses to "trade action for identification," implying that cross-racial identification is anemic unless accompanied by actions to expose and rectify inequality.[267] The implication is that Jewish allies should focus less on being accepted as "honorary blacks" (Nina's initial tactic) than on the difficult task of undermining oppression.

Mansbach seems to share a writing philosophy with his novelist characters Tristan and Tris: "[W]hatever you love, you've got to stare it in the face until you find the dark part, the part you hate. And vice versa."[268] This bravely self-reflexive truth-telling is characteristic of Mansbach's approach to depicting hip-hop, the black-Jewish alliance, and whiteness. Right after the Holocaust, Tristan Brodsky defied the victimology of American Jews by writing *Manacles,* a novel imagining the Middle Passage with Jewish profiteers as the owners of a slave ship. Responding to the bad press he received, Tristan acknowledged that although many of his family members were slaughtered in the Holocaust, Jews can not afford the self-satisfied illusion of an uncomplicated victimhood: "[B]ut I'm a traitor when I suggest that Jews are not always the prey? . . . How can we understand evil if we can't recognize it in ourselves?"[269] Like his character's, Mansbach's provocative commitment to exposing Jewish self-interest masquerading as liberal investment in black causes angered some Jewish readers of *The End of the Jews.* In depicting the Jewish community's negative response to Tristan's *Manacles,* Mansbach seems to have anticipated the resistance his own book would receive from some American Jewish audiences.[270] As he said in an interview with me, after writing

a book with the word "Jew" in the title, "I was frustrated that suddenly I'm a Jewish writer to a whole population who didn't give a fuck about me before. [Yet] a lot of these Jewish organizations . . . only really want to valorize a certain type of Jewish author, and I am patently not that guy. They don't want you asking hard questions or exploring paradox or race or the Jews pullback from the civil-rights alliance as they got whiter." Mansbach often faced older Jewish audience members who responded defensively by railing against the "three-headed demon of black anti-Semitism" (Farrakhan/Sharpton/Jackson) rather than considering their own failures to maintain progressive alliances to combat all forms of racism.[271]

Mansbach has no problem with being considered a Jewish writer, but only if that tent includes "people whose work is challenging and provoking and which doesn't, on the face of it, have much to do with Jewish issues."[272] He cites Danny Hoch and Kevin Coval as important Jewish artists whose "works don't fit the box" because they identify with the hip-hop community.[273] As Mansbach sees it, an awareness of himself as a Jew—and even a Jewish sensibility—subtly imbues all he does, even his humorous faux children's book *Go the F**k to Sleep*[274]: "The artist's job is to explore, to push boundaries, to blaspheme in the pursuit of deeper faith. Any discussion of Jewish art must thus begin with the understanding that an artist has to lead with his art, not his Jewishness—and that the ways in which the two come together may be hidden, may be complicated, may even be the point."[275] The work of Danny Hoch and Adam Mansbach not only puts into question what counts as Jewish culture but also destabilizes the black/Jewish binary in important ways. While their investment in black culture was enabled by the legacy of the black-Jewish alliance, they explicitly criticize the failures of that alliance from the point of view of blacks and Latinos rather than Jewish liberals.

Henry Louis Gates Jr., in his essay "Authenticity, or the Lesson of Little Tree," questions the problematic investment in "the ideology of authenticity" in ethnic literary studies, and his comments are directly relevant to the work of the white and Jewish hip-hop authors and performers that I have analyzed in this chapter.[276] Questioning the "belief that we can 'read' a person's racial or ethnic identity from his or her writing," Gates contends: "Segregation is as difficult to maintain in the literary realm as it is in the civic one. The lesson of the literary blindfold test is not that our social identities don't matter. They do matter. And our histories, individual and collective, do affect what we wish to write and what we are able to write. But that relation is never one of fixed determinism. No human culture is inaccessible to someone who makes the effort to understand, to learn, to inhabit another world."[277] Gates goes even further to suggest that engaged participation in an ethnic literary tradition can not be determined by the social or genetic positioning of the author. All writers—black as well as white—are shaped by the culture they consume, by the discourse communities that have influenced their own artistic and political sensibilities, and by the work of the writers they choose

to claim as their ancestors. As he puts it, "The distasteful truth will out: like it or not, all writers are 'cultural impersonators.'"[278]

The cultural work of Adam Mansbach, Danny Hoch, and, to a lesser degree, Eminem should make critics pause before dismissing all white hip-hop artists as inauthentic appropriators "aiding and abetting white rule."[279] As Gates has argued, to reject all acts of racial crossover on the part of whites would be to risk reinstating the racial binary by overemphasizing racial purity as a requirement for anti-racist struggle. By showcasing white artists who have moved beyond the paradigm of the White Negro with varying political effects, my goal is not to draw a prettier picture of whiteness but rather to show how whiteness is currently being undermined from within its gates. That difficult work occasionally leads these artists to fall into the trap of trying to prove authenticity rather than sincerity, declaring that they are "down" white boys, or attempting to "save whiteface" by self-righteously lampooning racist whites or Jews. Yet the lion's share of Hoch's and Mansbach's work reveals a racially sincere commitment to undermine white supremacy, to learn from the creative work of people of color, to work empathetically in solidarity with marginalized people, and to remain self-aware of how their own whiteness or Jewishness complicates their role in the struggle against racism. For all three artists, an immersion in jazz or hip-hop culture and the cross-racial friendships that such cultural knowledge enabled were instrumental in shaping their disidentification with the privileges of whiteness.

It strikes me as ironic that many of the cultural critics writing about whiteness and cross-racial identification—Noel Ignatiev, Jeffrey Melnick, Michael Rogin, Susan Gubar, and Robyn Wiegman, to name a few—represent white identity as an unchanging position of domination, despite the fact that these critics are themselves both anti-racist and Jewish. While their own critical work attests to the radical possibilities of some acts of cross-racial affiliation, they universally lament that the liberatory potential of racial crossover is almost never realized in cultural representation—least of all in popular culture. Why is the only acceptable critical stance one of overwhelming despair and cynicism? While I do not mean to minimize the importance of these cautionary analyses of the imperialist power of whiteness, I am concerned that white critics may feel compelled to repeat the same tale as a means of "saving whiteface." This position also smacks of critical hubris, by implying that only critics and theorists, and not producers of popular culture, are capable of treason against white privilege. If scholars continue to treat whiteness as an unchanging essence by ignoring the challenges to white hegemony and racist ideologies currently taking place in American popular and literary culture, we risk reifying the very racial category that we set out to deconstruct and undermine in the first place.

2

Oprah, Book Clubs, and the Promise and Limitations of Empathy

Critical conversations about white appropriations of blackness have focused largely on the spheres of popular music and the performing arts—from jazz, blues, and hip-hop music to vaudeville, dance, fashion, and Hollywood film.[1] Yet signs are everywhere that African American *literature* is enjoying unprecedented circulation among white readers. Beginning with bestsellers like Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982), this publishing renaissance was fueled in the late 1990s by Oprah Winfrey's Book Club of contemporary fiction (hereafter referred to as OBC). While white women constitute the majority of Oprah's talk-show audience, ten of her forty-six book-club selections between 1996 and 2002 were written by African Americans who quickly became bestselling authors—Toni Morrison, Pearl Cleage, Edwidge Dandicat, Breena Clarke, Lalita Tademy, Ernest J. Gaines, and Maya Angelou. In addition, contemporary books by James McBride, Danzy Senna, Walter Moseley, Ntozake Shange, and Octavia Butler were chosen by numerous U.S. cities for the "One Book, One City" initiative to encourage community-wide dialogue about books.[2] On the Internet, one can readily find reading guides for book clubs eager to discuss Stephen L. Carter's *The Emperor of Ocean Park,* Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day,* or Edward P. Jones's *The Known World.* To investigate this crossover phenomenon, the following two chapters present a reception study of the effects of reading African American literature upon the racial attitudes and political sensibilities of white people.

This reception study raises questions about the predominant assessment of white audiences of black culture, typified by Greg Tate's essay collection *Everything but the Burden: What White People Are Taking from Black Culture* (2003). As Tate's tendentious title clearly implies, these essays treat whites' fascination with hip-hop music, dress, dance, and slang as a form of piracy, commodification,

and fetishization. Curiously absent from Tate's book, however, is an examination of what white people are taking from contemporary black *literary* culture. Why this omission? The literary art form is certainly not exempt from the processes of racial commodification that *Everything but the Burden* aims to uncover. Percival Everett's acerbic novel *Erasure* offers a parody of the popularity of African American "ghetto fiction," which feeds white consumers stereotypes of dysfunctional and violent black families.[3] Yet many novels by African American writers often strive for a complexity of character and emotion that works against the stereotypes of urban black life that dominate commercial hip-hop music and videos, ghetto films, and popular novels. It's quite possible that an examination of what white readers make of Toni Morrison's fiction, which exposes the effects of racism upon the black psyche, might have upset Tate's totalizing conclusions about white people who consume black culture.

Greg Tate and others might interpret the burgeoning popularity of black and ethnic writers in the literary marketplace as yet another instance of the ubiquitous commodification of ethnic difference in the United States. Are white readers of black fiction merely satisfying a taste for the exotic that replicates Mailer's longing for black hipness? While there's no doubt that the recent popularity of black writers has been driven by the capitalist imperative to expand the menu of ethnic products for white consumption, this expansion of crossover readership can not simply be dismissed as a form of imperialism that reasserts the status quo. Such a position, I contend, cynically underestimates the ability of African American literature to move white readers emotionally and politically, through the power of empathetic identification. Although some rap lyrics have the potential to elicit a similarly empathetic and politicized response from white listeners, many hip-hop fans are ignorant of rap's history of racial protest and are attracted primarily by the "hip" in hip-hop music—its funky beat, its dance-ability, its macho pose and defiance of authority, and its accompanying visual signifiers of coolness. Reading a novel by Gaines or Marshall is an emotional and intellectual experience of a largely different order, an experience that cannot be so easily consumed as a sign of hip blackness.[4]

With a goal of complicating overgeneralizations about "what white people are taking from black culture," I offer a reception analysis of a relatively unexamined audience group: white consumers of contemporary African American fiction. My first case study examines white female readers discussing novels written by African Americans on the *Oprah Winfrey Show,* during Oprah's monthly "book club" television programs from 1996–2002.[5] The reception documents include (1) eight book-club episodes airing discussions between Oprah, the African American author of each novel, and both white and black readers; (2) another program in which eight audience members were invited to discuss the film adaptation of

Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*; and (3) over a thousand postings on the discussion boards of Oprah's Web site, Oprah.com.[6] The OBC books under discussion (ranging from the middlebrow to the highbrow) are Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon, The Bluest Eye, Paradise,* and *Sula*; Pearl Cleage's *What Looks Like Crazy on an Ordinary Day*; Edwidge Dandicat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*; Breena Clarke's *River, Cross My Heart*; Lalita Tademy's *Cane River*; and Ernest J. Gaines's *A Lesson before Dying.* To offer a contrast to these televised public conversations about books, I also analyze evidence from my ethnographic research with twenty-one privately organized book clubs in the Boston area. In the fall and winter of 2004–5, I audiotaped these primarily white[7] book clubs discussing African American novels of their own choosing, including contemporary titles by Edward P. Jones, Danzy Senna, Gloria Naylor, Ernest J. Gaines, Percival Everett, and Alice Randall, as well as "classics" by Nella Larsen, Paule Marshall, and Richard Wright.[8]

Just as my first chapter differentiates between the politics of three white hip-hop artists, this chapter draws distinctions among the reading strategies of white readers in order to shed light on the failures and the political promise of cross-racial empathy. Moving the White Negro debate beyond the often hypermasculine domain of hip-hop youth culture, this chapter focuses largely on middle-class white women as they encounter black-authored fiction within book-club settings. In contrast to much of the scholarship on cross-racial sympathy that replicates a monolithic view of whiteness, I emphasize how multiple identities of gender, class, age, ethnicity, education, and political affiliation work to complicate "white" modes of reading. Given my larger argument that empathy is a key ingredient in the development of anti-racist white identities, this chapter is structured to distinguish among different deployments of empathy and their political consequences. I begin by discussing the complete failure of empathy among some white book-club readers, then move on to sympathetic yet "color-blind" reading strategies that mask structures of inequality in a vexed pursuit of universality, and end with a detailed analysis of white readers whose identification with black characters has moved them to a self-critical unmasking of white-skin privilege.

Talks Shows and Book Clubs: Mediating between the Private and the Public

In addition to my attention to the progressive potential of empathy *and* its drawbacks, this chapter also intervenes in academic debates about the dichotomy between the private and public spheres, as I examine the relationship of fiction reading to political change. Although reading is often considered to be an essentially private domestic-sphere activity, I contend that African American literary texts can encourage readers to develop a politicized point of view about race,

class, and inequality that has the potential to influence their actions in the public sphere. Because reading fiction can be central to a person's developing political attitudes, my analysis suggests that the private and public spheres are more intertwined than dichotomous. Commenting on the effects of empathetic reading fostered by OBC, Suzanne Keen argues that "it may provoke self-evaluation that leads to action in a purely personal realm."[9] Yet Keen's circumscription of reading effects to the "purely personal" realm fails to take into account the ways that personal desires and actions often bleed into the public sphere. When the personal and often emotional act of reading fiction is followed by group discussion prompting connections between the book's content and larger social and political concerns—as often happens in book clubs, college classrooms, Internet discussion boards, or even televised forums such as the *Oprah Winfrey Show*—the lines between the public and the private become increasingly blurred.

Although all of these reception sites blur the boundaries between public and private spheres, there are salient differences between the highly mediated site of the *Oprah Winfrey Show* and the relatively free spaces of the Oprah.com discussion boards and the Boston book clubs meeting in private homes. The televised book-club discussions were clearly circumscribed by the television context and by the ideology of the *Oprah Winfrey Show.* Oprah's integrationist politics, her emphasis on female solidarity, her neoliberal faith in personal responsibility and individualism, and her belief that revelations of pain are instruments of spiritual healing strongly influenced her choice of guests and clips to air from their discussion.[10] On *Oprah,* reading is a means of therapy and self-improvement, and books are the agents of conversion or "spiritual transformation."[11] In one program she visited prison inmates moved by Gaines's *A Lesson before Dying,* and one man summed up her philosophy: "Reading and books can do something that the entire criminal justice system can't—that is, really change a human being."[12] In all of her book-club programs, the white readers appear to have been chosen to exemplify her "conversion" thesis. All of the white women had strong emotional reactions to the fiction by black women, and they often cried during the discussions. Most identified with the characters on the basis of shared experiences as women, while about a third of them described moments of epiphany, in which they gained new insight about race and inequality.

For each televised discussion, Oprah selected readers to represent multiple regions of the nation and diverse class locations and took care to enact her integrationist politics by choosing two or three white and two black participants. She believes that her show has done "amazing things in terms of helping race relations in ways that people don't even recognize. Because most people never . . . break bread together and celebrate their differences and their likenesses."[13] As Jennifer Harris and Elwood Watson argue in *The Oprah Phenomenon,* the OBC

programs strive to demonstrate "sympathetic identification across a variety of differences."[14] Oprah deliberately brought together diverse groups of readers, a construct that had the potential to elicit productive dialogue about race and class. However, the heavily edited clips from the OBC conversations often minimize any tension or debate that might have emerged and instead celebrate an idealized picture of interracial harmony in a cozy dining-room setting.[15]

In contrast to this Oprah-controlled form of reader response, the Oprah.com discussion boards for her selected books are minimally censored, providing access to postings by hundreds of readers generating their own discussion topics and engaging in sometimes heated debates.[16] The relatively unmediated site of the online discussion boards might seem similar to the private book clubs, yet the anonymity and heterogeneity of the posters create significant structural differences. Since the posters use "handles" rather than their own names, the anonymity and absence of face-to-face contact encourage a freedom of expression not usually encountered in other public or private spaces. The race of the online participants was also obscured unless they chose to announce their racial identities, which many did, either overtly or subtly. Sherra Schick calls the online Oprah discussion boards a "communal diary," yet she also sees them as a "branded community" in which the participants are forced to negotiate within the parameters of Oprah's ideology.[17] Mark Hall sees the online spaces as much freer from Oprah's ideological interference, noting a "high level of critical thinking" on the discussion boards for OBC's selection *The Reader*.[18] Like Hall, I observed critical thinking and engaged debate on the Oprah.com discussion boards, particularly in the discussion of *The Bluest Eye*. Because of the existence of contentious debate reflecting a diversity of viewpoints, the online discussion boards could be seen as the most truly "public" of all the reception sites analyzed here.

While the Oprah readers, both on television and online, occupied diverse social positions, the book groups that I studied were homogeneous in racial terms—eighteen of the twenty-one groups were monoracial[19]—and in class makeup, with some tilting toward either the lower-middle or upper-middle class. The vast majority of the 159 Boston-area participants were college graduates, and many had earned advanced degrees. About half of these readers employed academic strategies of textual analysis largely absent in Oprah's book discussions.[20] The private book-club members were also conditioned by the liberal climate of Massachusetts, and their conversations were often laced with criticism of George W. Bush during the 2004 presidential campaign. Yet this liberal political tilt was in tension with the reality that Boston remains a racially segregated social landscape, evidenced by the monoracial nature of these book clubs. Although the book clubs I visited were seemingly homogeneous in demographic terms, their conversations admitted and often encouraged differences of opinion, unlike the *Oprah Winfrey*

Show. Since many of these private reading clubs had been in operation for ten or more years, their strong bonds of trust and friendship allowed them to probe differences and to offer riskier, more controversial statements and interpretations, without fear of upsetting corporate sponsors paying for commercials.

While the Boston book clubs allowed freer dialogue than did Oprah Winfrey's televised chats, I would like to complicate my earlier reference to the Boston book clubs as "private" spaces. For one thing, four of the groups met in public spaces such as libraries and a senior citizens center and were open to members of the community. More importantly, my own presence as an academic observer—and particularly the presence of my tape recorder—among the groups meeting in domestic spaces may have had the effect of transforming the private into a space of "public record" in which some of the participants felt the need to self-censor. However, I heard the most racist comments among the library groups meeting in public spaces, where one might have expected the greatest likelihood of self-censorship. No audience researcher can ever achieve completely unfettered access to a reader or viewer's reception of a text, and thus I have tried to be mindful of the various levels of mediation involved in each reception site.

The mediation factor also begs several questions concerning the nature of the evidence. For example, did the book-club participants fake or embellish their experiences of cross-racial empathy to look good on television or in front of an academic researcher from Harvard? Even if one removes the problem of the mediation of television, any academic study of the subjective nature of reading has to admit the possibility of self-censoring and self-promotion, given that such research must rely on the reader's own reporting. As the anthropologist James Clifford reminds, "[E]thnographic truths are inherently partial . . . and incomplete."[21] Yet among the book clubs I visited, the conversations seemed to me remarkably unguarded, perhaps because they saw me as a kindred spirit, another well-educated, liberal white woman. Some of the readers had such a secure sense of themselves as good-hearted liberals that they did not seem to consider that anyone could find their attitudes about race problematic—which I sometimes did. My close readings of their discourse patterns revealed underlying biases and attitudes that often escape conscious efforts at self-censorship. Nonetheless, some empathizing members of the private book clubs and OBC could have simply been parroting a liberal party line that made them look anti-racist without actually being so. However, I find it hard to attribute the existence of more radical recognition of structural racism during the online and televised discussions to the participants' desire to replicate Oprah's color-blind, universalizing neoliberal viewpoint, or to seek the approval of the more centrist viewing public.[22] In fact, the self-critical and system-critical testimony of some of the empathetic white readers, both in Boston and on *Oprah,* involved a remarkable

degree of risk, and thus are worthy of study because of, rather than despite, their exceptional nature.

Another methodological concern might be that my reception sample is not sufficiently random to satisfy a social scientist interested in general truths about white readers of African American fiction. Since the Boston book clubs contacted me upon reading my flyer soliciting participants, they were obviously self-selected and enthusiastic about reading African American fiction.[23] Most of those who volunteered already perceived of themselves and their fellow book-club members as anti-racist liberals or progressives. Similarly, since OBC participants were carefully selected for their transformational reading experiences, one could argue that any analysis of their commentary reveals more about Oprah's "mind cure" therapeutic ideology than about the average white reader of African American fiction.[24] Yet even within these constructed subsets of liberal white readers, I found significant heterogeneity in the kinds of sympathy and empathy they expressed, and in their political attitudes about race, ranging from color-blind or more blatant forms of racism to radical critiques of white privilege and systemic racism. Although Oprah's readers or these liberal Boston readers may not be representative of the larger reading public, their emotional responses are indeed representative of the political dangers as well as the radical possibilities of sympathy and empathy.

"Read Them and Weep": Affect and the Political Sphere

Any investigation of the political effects of book-club reading must take into account the types of books read and the preferred reading modes encouraged in these spaces. Rona Kaufman contends that "reading groups seem to exist in . . . middlebrow cultural space" in that they often choose books that provide occasion for emotional introspection, while steering clear of formally challenging or disturbing high-literary culture.[25] This generalization was true of some of the book clubs that I studied; for example, one club abandoned John Edgar Wideman's postmodern novel *Philadelphia Fire* in favor of *Caucasia,* Danzy Senna's bestselling novel about a troubled adolescent girl. Almost all of the book discussions plumbed personal territory, as when parents who identified with the mother in Alice Randall's *Pushkin and the Queen of Spades* admitted to similar desires to control their own grown children. Yet among the twenty-one book clubs that I studied, their cumulative reading lists included not only middlebrow favorites like *The Kite Runner* but also prize-winning or classic highbrow books such as *Invisible Man* or *Beloved.* About half of the clubs engaged in academic analysis of the meanings of passages or evaluative debates about the literary value of the texts.

While it's no surprise that the groups with a more critical edge often had members with advanced degrees, those groups also tended to include men, who were less likely to voice their emotional responses. However, even the academically oriented groups also responded to the fiction on a personal level, usually ending their session with wide-ranging conversations about how the text resonated with their own lives. While I agree to some extent with Kaufman's characterization of book clubs as predominantly middlebrow in their selection process, the modes of reading that I witnessed—from the emotional or experiential to the critical—varied from group to group and within individual groups.

As many critics of OBC have noted, academic modes of critical analysis were almost entirely absent from her televised book-club discussions. Yet was it the fault of the books selected? In her essay on OBC, Kaufman admits that Oprah's inclusion of Toni Morrison's challenging work requires qualification. She concludes that "it hadn't been the books that were middlebrow, it had been the reading," which strongly focused on the "affective, transformative, personal."[26] The sociologist Elizabeth Long similarly notes that the reading on *Oprah* was "experiential rather than analytic."[27] Although Kathleen Rooney argues that the high-quality books Oprah selected invite readers to engage with an unsettling and "complex other-consciousness," the televised program flattened their complexity, using books only "as comfortingly familiar and therapeutic tools for self-improvement."[28] Since Oprah asks the prospective guests to "tell us what you learned about yourself" by reading the novel, the letters of those chosen and their on-air conversations resemble personal testimonials, detailing how their identification with the characters led them to confront their own repressed feelings.[29] Even when Oprah chose literary fiction by Morrison or Gaines, her book selections almost always invited sympathetic identification with the pain and joyful triumphs of women and African Americans.

The emotionalism common to Oprah's selections has often led critics to disparage the Book Club and its readers, echoing a long history of attacks against sentimental fiction and sympathetic female readers.[30] Although Oprah was widely lauded for reviving fiction reading on a mass scale, her book choices were often derided for blatantly tugging at the heartstrings with melodramatic stories of victimization. This disdain for the emotive and feminized quality of Oprah's choices was clearly a motivating factor in Jonathan Franzen's response to being chosen for OBC. In interviews, Franzen said that he cringed at the thought of his novel *The Corrections* being associated with "schmaltzy, one-dimensional" books and feared losing male readers of serious literary fiction.[31] Not all the detractors have been male, however. The journalist Susan Wise Bauer also churlishly dubbed the list "Oprah's Misery Index," and Cynthia Crossen called them manipulative tragedies in her editorial "Read Them and Weep."[32] In contrast, many have defended Oprah's

talk show and book club as an important venue for exploring the "real life of the emotions."[33] Elizabeth McHenry similarly defends OBC as well as earlier African American literary societies, arguing that personal and emotionally oriented modes of reading are not necessarily inferior to academic reading protocols.[34] I argue that OBC presents a rich case study for investigating the politics of affect, because she has consistently chosen politically charged texts written by black women that poignantly detail the consequences of racism, sexism, and poverty. To dismiss her selections as sentimental pabulum is to deny the crucial role that emotional provocation has played in the political designs of African American writers, from nineteenth-century slave narratives to the present.

By pinning the blame on Oprah for reducing reading to simply feeling, her critics ignore the fact that emotional and experiential reading modes have been crucial to the success of book clubs and literary societies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As Elizabeth Long documents in her book on women's uses of reading, book clubs provide a crucial space for self-fashioning, as women negotiate the relation between fictional representations of social relationships and their own lived realities.[35] While most would admit that reading can play a key role in the formation of individual subjectivities, fewer have been willing to consider the effects of such reading on the public sphere.[36] When critics do consider the political effects of affect-inducing literature, they often make sweeping categorical or ahistorical generalizations. Optimists like Martha Nussbaum contend that literary reading that induces compassion is instrumental in the development of a just society. The more numerous pessimists argue that sentimental fiction provides a catharsis that reinforces the status quo by focusing on individual stories rather than the need for systemic change. My more tempered conclusions are rooted in a site-specific analysis like the one practiced by Elizabeth McHenry, whose study of African American literary societies exposes "the contexts of the actual reading practices of particular groups at particular times."[37] In studying particular groups of white female readers in our own historical moment, I draw attention to the possibility that empathetic identification through fiction reading can sometimes galvanize anti-racist desires for social justice, even if it does not always or even routinely engender such an effect.

As I have suggested earlier, television talk shows and book clubs are particularly fertile sites for investigating the intersection of the private and public spheres. The sociologist Elizabeth Long shares my interest in the purchase of book-club reading on the public sphere. She admits that while "reading groups generally do not have a political or even a public mission," they invite the development of a social consciousness that may elicit "changes even in realms of life we now classify as far afield from literature."[38] In her study of African American literary societies between 1830 and 1940, McHenry makes a well-supported claim that "literary

societies furthered the evolution of a black public sphere and a politically conscious society" by working to "promote activism" and "foster resistance" among black readers.[39] Given the scarcity of public forums addressing race issues in the Boston area, book clubs may in fact provide an alternative space for dialogue that mediates between the public and private. The political value of talk shows has also engendered a similar debate among media scholars, with most critics denouncing the talk show's emphasis on reducing social problems to the realm of the individual. Wendy Kaminer argues that talk shows trivialize the feminist idea that the personal is political and that such televised revelations of personal pain should not be considered political speech because they ignore the need for epistemic change.[40] Others contend that talk shows offer an alternative counterpublic sphere and a radical "transformation in the nature of the political."[41]

The majority of the scholars writing about OBC argue that Oprah depoliticizes the books' subject matter, but some critics see moments of political potential in the readers' discussions. Offering an optimistic view, Simon Stow contends that the moral discussions fostered by OBC help to develop the values of liberal democracy analyzed by the philosophers Richard Rorty and Martha Nussbaum.[42] A more critical view is presented by Roberta Hammett and Audrey Dentith, who argue that Oprah's investment in a "culture of individualism" led to inept discussions of the work of black writers on the show, ignoring their deconstruction of power inequities in American society.[43] The media-studies scholar Janice Peck offers the most damning critique, arguing that Oprah is a purveyor of neoliberal ideologies that depoliticize struggles related to class, race, and gender. Peck takes Oprah to task for ignoring questions of "politics and power" by privileging individual changes of heart and psychological solutions over public-sphere activism to change systemic inequality.[44] She is particularly troubled by Oprah's efforts to "transcend race" and to treat racial inequality as a "consequence of inadequate personal responsibility," thus echoing the blame-the-victim rhetoric of conservative politicians.[45] In contrast, Edith Frampton convincingly argues that Peck's reading of OBC rests on "limited conceptions of the political" that fail to take into account the blurry line between the personal and the political, especially in regard to gender issues.[46]

Many of Peck's criticisms of Oprah are well founded, but she underestimates the power of emotion. For instance, during the televised discussion of *The Bluest Eye,* Oprah made the utopian claim that "the world would be different" if everyone read the story of this unloved black girl.[47] While Oprah may be too optimistic about the power of reading to transcend racism, Peck and Kaminer underestimate the ways in which the personal realm of affect and the public sphere of political praxis are intertwined. A private change of heart may motivate an individual to vote differently, volunteer with or donate money to minority-interest groups,

advocate for minority hiring at work, or influence powerful friends to pursue anti-racist policies. As the media scholar Jane Shattuc suggests, even if the talk shows themselves do not "advocate changing specific social and political institutions," the audience may independently "connect the discussion of . . . interracial conflict to legislation, elections, and news stories."[48] Critics of talk shows often employ a masculine notion of what counts as political, evident in their disdain for a politics of feeling and their underestimation of the power of micropolitical and intersubjective change. Questioning those who dismiss emotions and the private sphere as apolitical, I concur with sociologists of social movements who argue that "personal change and public activism [are] potentially constitutive of each other."[49]

Critics of Oprah's Book Club also tend to grant Oprah and the television apparatus too much power to control how her readers read. For instance, Kathryn Lofton argues that "there is only one way to read books with Oprah: the way she does."[50] Although Oprah certainly advocates neoliberal, individualized solutions, her containment strategies do not always succeed, and moments of politicized engagement with the literary texts can be witnessed among OBC readers on television and online. Malin Pereira agrees with me, arguing that "a nascent awareness that the [American] dream is illusory erupts in book club discussions," and the program cannot fully contain the "subversive role" of African American literature or its efforts to question the status quo.[51] Politicized forms of anti-racist empathy engendered by African American texts are even more visible among the private Boston book clubs, whose members do not face direct pressure to embrace Oprah's depoliticizing "mind cure" agenda.

The Failure of Sympathy

My analysis of book-club discussions addresses the promise as well as the limitations of empathy and sympathy, asserting that the politics of these emotions are not fixed but contingent upon the individuals experiencing them and dependent on whether the emotion is used to defend or critique racist ideologies. The possibility of a depoliticized empathy that collapses difference is an important concern, but critics also have a responsibility to bring to light moments of empathy or compassion with progressive political significance, lest we lose hope in the potential for change in the racial order. While I do not claim that these subversive effects of cross-racial empathy are predominant, either among these book clubs or in the reading public at large, I found enough recurrence to warrant critical attention and evaluation.

While my reception analysis aims to complicate the overwhelmingly negative critical treatment of cross-racial sympathy and empathy, I did find evidence

of their more problematic tendencies and effects. Among the book clubs that I visited, I also witnessed an even more troubling problem—a complete lack of empathetic perspective-taking among a small number of white readers (approximately eight out of 159 people).[52] Such a resistance to empathy was not visible on the *Oprah Winfrey Show,* because Oprah handpicked only sympathetic readers for the program. In contrast, one senior citizens' group that I visited included several resistant readers of Edward P. Jones's *The Known World,* a historical novel exploring the relationship between slaves and free black slave owners in the antebellum South. A few elderly white women in the group identified only with the character of the white sheriff and were dismayed to find that he did not emerge as the morally righteous hero of the tale. Rather than learning from the stories of any of the diverse black characters, they were primarily invested in seeking affirmations of white liberal nobility. Danzy Senna's *Caucasia,* a coming-of-age tale about a troubled mixed-race adolescent girl (Birdie) living in Boston in the 1970s, provoked an elderly male to deny the realities of white racism evident in its pages. He asserted that the book "does not make you feel empathy for blacks as victims." This curious emphasis on prostrate "victimhood" as a necessary precondition for empathy indicates a blindness to Birdie's complex subjectivity as an individual torn between segregated black and white communities.

While this failure of empathetic understanding was more evident among older readers, the young and idealistic were no less immune. A book group of twentysomething activists devoted to public service were unable to relate to the protagonists of Ernest J. Gaines' *A Lesson before Dying,* a novel that depicts the black male struggle for dignity and limited agency in Louisiana in the 1940s. The novel focuses on the relationship between Jefferson, a young black man awaiting execution for a murder he did not commit, and Grant, a disillusioned and defeated black teacher who helps him to face death as a man rather than an animal going to slaughter. When we meet him, Jefferson has been stripped of his dignity by a defense lawyer who compared him to an unthinking hog. Rather than sympathizing with him or with Grant, two white female readers in the activist book club were "frustrated by the acceptance of the whole situation on everyone's behalf" and judged the two male characters to be childish cowards. In contrast to these readers who judge rather than understand Jefferson, Gaines offers a model of the ideal ally in his portrait of the empathetic prison guard Paul. The only white man to befriend the prisoner and to recognize his humanity, Paul lauds Grant's heroism in helping to transform Jefferson into a man, "the bravest man in that [execution] room today."[53] One of the white women readers, in contrast, declared that she could not see the characters as heroes because "none of them showed huge acts of courage." Because they imagine themselves to be free and powerful agents of resistance, these activist women were unable to empathize with those

for whom small symbolic acts of defiance and self-affirmation can actually require great courage.

These cold and distanced responses were in stark contrast to the emotional conversation about *A Lesson before Dying* that occurred on Oprah's Book Club program. One Latino man who identified most with the teacher Grant was nonetheless intensely moved by the humanity he saw in Jefferson's diaries: "That was the part that made me weep, not just a tear to my eye . . . [because] this person has never been kissed or told that he was liked. I know what it's like to be twenty years old and feel that way. I could relate one-on-one to those feelings of not being loved, not being understood and nobody knowing who I was."[54] A black mother in the Oprah group was pained by the book's description of black men's humiliation, because she "knows that's what [her] son has to go through."[55] While the people of color had no trouble empathizing with the black protagonists, a "blue-eyed, freckle-faced" white woman was also viscerally disgusted by the racist lawyer who called Jefferson a hog: "Those words leapt from the page . . . raising the hair on my arms and the bile in my throat."[56] This woman's somatic response suggests that she is imaginatively putting herself in Jefferson's place; some scholars have argued that this vicarious experience of another person's emotions is crucial to the functioning of empathy.[57]

As in the case of *A Lesson before Dying,* even a book that aims to produce an emotional response can only succeed in doing so if it reaches a reader open to its message. A novel can also deliberately or inadvertently frustrate empathy through its own narrative strategies. Percival Everett's brilliantly acerbic book *Erasure* is a dark satire about the publishing industry's commodification of stereotypes of black life. Much of *Erasure* is told in the first-person voice of the cynical highbrow novelist Thelonious "Monk" Ellison, who writes a parody of a ghetto novel that wins a national book award, much to his horror. Swept up in the whirlwind of publicity, Monk begins to feel erased by the marketplace. While Monk's sad, fractured family life provoked an empathetic response from one white woman reader, another was put off by the snobbish, nihilistic tone of the first-person narrator, which she also attributed to the author. She was frustrated by what she saw as Percival Everett's distanced narrative voice: "[He was] downgrading the people he was writing about, his own race. I don't care about intellect, I care about people, and this book made it hard for me to care." Everett's highbrow satirical exposé and his portrait of a nihilistic intellectual were thus unsatisfying for a reader who hoped to feel. She seems to echo the philosopher Martha Nussbaum's concern that high-cultural artists may "discourage compassion for their characters . . . and promote smugness."[58] While the white reader's criticism of Everett has some merits, her comments also imply that she desired a safer middlebrow reading experience: "Problems, problems, problems, I didn't want to do it. There

was too much responsibility on my shoulders as a reader." She expresses a common white denial of responsibility for racial commodification and oppression, the situation that causes Monk's nihilism and despair. Some of the white readers I encountered thus strongly resisted taking up the "black man's burden" on their own white shoulders, just as Greg Tate contends.

Color-blindness and Analogizing Race

While some readers were unable or unwilling to take up the perspectives of African American characters, others expressed a "color-blind" empathy rooted in a whitewashed concept of universality. In her ethnographic work on the racial discourses of white women, Ruth Frankenberg describes color-blind rhetoric as a "polite language" of universality that masks a "power evasiveness," which she defines as an unwillingness to acknowledge one's "complicity with structural and institutional dimensions of inequality." Frankenberg convincingly argues that color-blindness usually has "reactionary results."[59] Critics of OBC often express concern that Oprah adopts a color-blind viewpoint, overemphasizing "universal humanity" and minimizing differences in social positioning so as not to alienate her largely white fan base.[60] In my Boston book-club study, a color-blind worldview was evident among some older readers who came of age during the civil rights era, when color-blindness and "tolerance" were advocated as signs of good morals among whites. In a discussion of *Native Son,* one white woman proudly recalled teaching her son color-blind rhetoric. To assuage his fear of black people, she told him a universalizing fiction that belies the history of racial inequality: "They're the same as you are. They were just born at night. You could have been black." Although the drawbacks of such "polite" lies are numerous, the impulse behind them is not necessarily reactionary. Philosophers contend that a recognition of universal human emotions is key to feeling compassion, which depends on "our common vulnerability to pain, hunger, and other types of suffering."[61] While empathy ideally involves a generous search for shared humanity, the danger is that the universalizing move will deny or minimize difference. Many of the middle-aged and younger readers in my study, reared during or after the era of black nationalism, were well aware of the limitations of color-blind rhetoric. As one twenty-five-year-old woman said in a discussion of *Caucasia,* "I think it's silly to pretend that you're color-blind, because when someone walks in a door, we immediately put a label on them, and I think it's better to be able to talk about that."

While this form of color-blindness no longer seems to be a sanctioned strategy among these liberal Bostonians, the move to analogize blackness to other experiences of alterity remains quite common. Among the Oprah readers and the

Boston book clubs, many white readers identified with African American characters by claiming shared identities of gender, class, or ethnic "otherness." This analogizing strategy requires careful analysis. The philosopher Elizabeth Spelman argues that "claims of shared human suffering can do as much to reinforce claims of superiority and inferiority as they can to undermine them. It depends on how the claims are made, who makes them, and to what end. This becomes particularly clear when one person or group attempts to borrow the experience of another person to make sense of their own suffering."[62] For example, when white women liken themselves to slaves as a means of protesting gender oppression, they risk obscuring the ways that white women have historically perpetuated racial oppression.[63]

Some theorists argue that empathy is much more likely to occur if the witness or reader feels similar to the sufferer, particularly in terms of social identities.[64] This helps to explain why so many of the white book-club readers equated the black characters' situations with their own experiences as women, Jews, or children of immigrants. Whites who identify with black characters on the basis of a shared identity other than race are not necessarily being appropriative; such an argument would imply that race trumps all other identities. Yet the philosopher Ron Scapp reminds us of the problems of analogizing: "[I]t is only after the other has been redescribed as oneself that the liberal is able to be sensitive to the question of cruelty and humiliation."[65] Such comparisons may be useful in facilitating a recognition of shared experience and common humanity, but not if they obscure power dynamics and the particularity of African American experiences.

A troubling tendency among the white readers on *Oprah* is that they minimize racial difference in their zeal to connect with the characters "as women." Oprah's emphasis on female solidarity, and the need to cater to her largely white viewing audience, leads her to emphasize her selections' universal or gender-specific themes. Setting the tone of the discussion on *The Bluest Eye,* a novel that addresses a young black girl's desire to be white, Oprah opened the program by saying, "Regardless of what color you are, there are a lot of women who have defined themselves by what other people think of them."[66] On the online discussion forum, many white readers thus compared Pecola's self-hatred with their own experiences of being ridiculed because they were fat, ugly, or tall; one even said that "women are all Pecola to some degree." Such universalizing comparisons may inadvertently ignore the specificity of race oppression and merely collapse the other into the self-same, reinforcing the hegemony of whiteness. It is important, however, to acknowledge that Morrison's novel, written in the 1960s, was also a product of the feminist movement. In her afterword to the text, Morrison invites a wider reading of the novel as a feminist book about gender oppression:

"[S]ingular as Pecola's life was, I believed some aspects of her woundability were lodged in all young girls." However, Morrison also refers to Pecola's life as "singular," a "unique situation, not a representative one."[67] A universalizing reading of the text as a portrait of all women thus flies in the face of Morrison's attention to how race informs and complicates gender oppression.

Rather than emphasizing *The Bluest Eye*'s race-specific meanings, Oprah's program used the book as an occasion to promote female solidarity. This overarching agenda is evident in the fact that Oprah always chose at least one white woman participant who described relating to African American characters as mothers, daughters, or sisters. For example, the scene of Hagar's funeral in *Song of Solomon* caused one "rich white woman from Dallas" to break down in tears at the memory she had repressed of her own stillborn son.[68] This woman's prolonged sobbing threatened to derail the discussion of the book altogether, recalling Elizabeth Spelman's complaint about forms of sympathy wherein "I acknowledge your suffering only to the extent to which it promises to bring attention to my own."[69] While sharing experiences of female pain and loss can certainly have positive feminist implications, these evocations of sisterhood may indicate a problematic race-blindness that also plagued the early feminist movement. A quest for a bridge across social difference is essential to collective political struggle, but these universalizing moments of female solidarity can also be an excuse to ignore what divides us.

Of course, gender identification does not necessarily result in race-blindness, but it can legitimize a reading process that seeks only reflections of the self rather than deeper understandings of others. The "rich white woman from Dallas" identified strongly with the mothers in *Song of Solomon,* connecting with their love of breastfeeding, but this woman's identifications belie racist, egocentric attitudes. She states, "I found [the novel] kept sucking me down to a level I've never been before, and that was uncomfortable for me. . . . I had way too much in common with this odd group of characters, and [the book] was making me see pieces of me I didn't like."[70] Because she imagines the African American community of the novel as a space beneath her, her experience of sympathy affirms rather than challenges racial hierarchy. For this woman, reading is a means to greater self-knowledge, to "see pieces of me," rather than an imaginary encounter with other viewpoints. In her sociological study of white women's book clubs in Houston, Elizabeth Long observed a similarly "self-serving" move among white readers who "only made use of insights . . . that spoke to their own social situation as white women."[71] In his book on empathy, Martin Hoffman calls this phenomenon "egotistical drift."[72] Kathleen Rooney attributes the source of this problem to Oprah, who urges her audience not to "engage intimately with a strange and complex other-consciousness but rather to perceive it [fiction] as merely being about the reader."[73] Offering a classic example of sympathy as self-indulgent catharsis that reaffirms hierarchy, this OBC reader of *Song of Solomon* lacks an important in-

gredient of empathy—a respect for the "qualitative difference" of the sufferer as a unique individual of equal value to oneself.[74] Echoing the viewpoint of other scholars, the psychologist Jessica Benjamin understands empathy as ideally involving "mutual recognition" of the subjecthood of the other and the "ability to share feelings . . . without demanding control, to experience sameness without obliterating difference."[75]

The question of whether empathy collapses differences was the subject of a heated debate on the online discussion board for *The Bluest Eye,* a debate that encompassed 30 percent of the 345 total postings on the novel. This debate subverted Oprah's containment strategies and her emphasis on race-blind female bonding. The disagreement was sparked by two provocative posts, the first from a white woman whose own color-blind ideology was challenged by Morrison's book. She wrote: "I am having a hard time with the [previous] white posters who say they can 'relate' to Pecola. After I read this book I realized that I will never ever know prejudice or pain like the characters have known." Furthering the critique, a black woman argued that the color-blind empathizers were ignoring the issue of racism at the core of the text: "[T]he luxury of bypassing race can only be for those who are not affected by racism." Several middle-class whites echoed these concerns about the colonizing effects of empathy and stressed the importance of respecting difference. Acutely sensitive to the power dynamics of claiming to know how the other feels, one wrote: "[A]s deeply as I have tried to over many years of living side by side with black culture, I can never truly know Pecola . . . or all the truth she speaks." This white woman's comments resonate with Rita Felski's point that "texts can underscore the limits of knowability."[76] These readers felt empathy for African Americans while simultaneously rejecting the "blanket of shared victimization" that can obscure the particular "ways that racist domination impacts on the lives of marginalized groups."[77]

While these readers were rightly critical of the universalizing logic of color-blindness, the readers on the other side of the debate celebrated the power of empathy to unite people in common humanity. Defending their identification with Pecola were many working-class, underprivileged whites who shared experiences analogous to those of the African American characters. One woman wrote: "I'm not minimizing racism at all. I see it every day. I'm just saying pain is pain. Is poverty, ignorance, abuse, and cruelty unique to one race? I think we all have to start understanding other people's burdens." This white person recognizes that individuals might carry different burdens, and thus analogies are sometimes limited. But she nonetheless seeks a bridge across difference by invoking shared humanity—a concept that critics have located at the heart of the operation of sympathy and empathy. As Elizabeth Spelman argues, sympathy succeeds when it results not only in acknowledging "deep and pervasive similarities among suffering humanity" but also in "making a case for mutual care."[78] Reflecting on the

segregated schooling of her childhood, one woman from an abusive "poor white trash" family declared: "I would have had more in common with Pecola than with the little white girls in my school. I think we've all been cheated. Maybe Pecola would have liked to know me too. We're all going to have to take a chance to bridge the color gap. Start by knowing that we all have pain, and we all have something to offer." Unlike the rich white woman from Dallas who used Morrison's characters as a cathartic excuse to wallow in her own pain, this working-class woman expresses a desire for mutual care and recognizes Pecola as a subject with "something [valuable] to offer" to society, much like herself. These working-class empathetic whites remind that experiences of shared humanity need not result in blindness to difference. They also attest to the fact that there are "vast disparities in power and privilege among whites" due to class position.[79] These responses also accord with the conclusions of Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's empirical study, arguing that white "racial progressives" are most likely to be working-class white women who draw upon experiences of gender and class discrimination to empathize with minorities.[80]

In contrast to the working-class readers on Oprah's discussion boards who legitimately related to the African American characters on the basis of shared economic hardships, the vast majority of the Boston book-club readers were comfortably middle-class, at least at the present moment. About a fifth of these readers, however, had grown up in immigrant families and/or identified themselves as ethnic minorities—primarily Jews. These readers often made analogies between the black and Jewish experiences, and such comparisons of group suffering have been central to the historically vexed relationship between these groups (as discussed in chapter 1). When I visited a group of elderly Jewish women discussing Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones,* a novel about West Indian immigrants in the 1930s and 1940s, one woman remarked that "the characters are similar to Jews, how they were frowned upon as different, and received for being too pushy." From this brief comparison of experiences of prejudice, the group then made a universalizing move, reading the novel as a testament to the universal "pattern of all immigrant groups" as they struggle for integration. Another woman ended the discussion by concluding that "it could have been written about any group of immigrants, not necessarily black." While the comparison of immigrant sufferings could be an important vehicle for reader identification with the characters, their final assertion of sameness led these women to ignore the importance of "brownness" in the lives of these characters, signaled by the very title of the book. As the black activist and Jewish convert Julius Lester astutely argues, "[A] similarity of experience is not the same as shared experience. That is the crucial difference of which many blacks are keenly aware and many Jews are not."[81]

In their zeal to analogize and to universalize, these Jewish readers of *Brown Girl, Brownstones* overlooked the fact that the protagonist Selina and her father

are frustrated by racist whites who thwart and demean their ambitions, an experience that partly motivates Selina's decision to return to Barbados and to reject the American dream her mother pursues so doggedly. Their color-blind point of view led these readers to a fairly shallow reading of Marshall's text, which in fact presents a far more ambivalent picture of black/Jewish relations. Because these readers endorsed the commitment to the American dream evinced by Selina's mother Silla, one white woman praised Silla's speech in admiration of the Jewish business model. In the novel, Silla passionately argues: "Take when we had to scrub the Jew floor. He wasn't misusing us so much because our skin was black but because we cun do better. And I din hate him. All the time I was down on his floor I was saying to myself, 'Lord, lemme do better than this. Lemme rise!' . . . People got a right to claw their way to the top and those on top got a right to scuffle to stay there."[82] Yet no one in the book club noted that Silla's daughter Selina is far more resentful of the Jews in Flatbush who give their Barbardian cleaning women their "throw-offs": "Whenever the mother forced her to wear them, Selina spent the day hating the unknown child to whom they belonged."[83] Significantly, Selina's tentative friendship with Rachel Fine, a blond Jewish college student who encourages her to join a modern dance troupe, is not strong enough to withstand the dividing barrier of race. During their dance recital, the black and the Jewish girls dance "as if guided by a single will, as if, indeed, they were simply reflections of each other."[84] Yet later in the evening, Selina has to endure degrading comments from the racist mother of another dancer, who makes Selina feel "the full meaning of her black skin."[85] In the moment of her racial degradation, she runs away from the white dancers who surround her, feeling that "they were all—*even Rachel*—sinister figures who would cage her in their arms" (italics mine).[86] In *Brown Girl, Brownstones,* Marshall represents a commonly held African American attitude toward Jews, one that "mixe[s] admiration and respect with suspicion and hostility," due to the economic power of Jews and their assimilation into normative white society.[87] In the book-club discussion that I witnessed, the readers noticed only the admiring respect and ignored the role that race plays in differentiating the experience of these "similar" immigrant groups.

A more complex discussion about black/Jewish connections occurred when two book groups in Boston compared blacks passing as white to Jews passing as gentile. In response to Nella Larsen's *Passing,* an elderly Jewish man, who grew up in a working-class neighborhood in West Harlem, began a provocative conversation when he remarked that "every minority group who feels disenfranchised" strives to pass, to "change [their] ways or looks to be accepted by the majority. . . . The Jewish nose job is a quest for passing. My cousin changed his name to something gentile." Another woman noted that Jews and blacks who passed were trying to escape similar stereotypes that they were "oversexed, smelly, lazy, rapacious." This acknowledgment of similarity thus led these Jewish readers to be

empathetic to Clare Kendry rather than to judge her passing as contemptible, as do some of the college students in my classes. Complicating the conversation, the group then admitted that it's "much harder for a black to pass than a Jew" because "racial passing goes deeper than religious passing," at least in the United States. The New Yorker who began the conversation disagreed, retorting that his family's Jewishness is easily visible in their physiognomy and thus he experienced his identity as *racially* defined, especially as a young man. Later on in the meeting, however, he used the telling phrase "whites like me," which suggests the tenuousness (at least in the present) of Jewish claims to identify with blacks as fellow racial minorities. This conversation drew important attention to the similar psychological effects of anti-Semitism and antiblack racism upon its victims, but it also highlighted the fact that Jews have collectively passed over to whiteness in the sixty-five years since this Jewish man's youth in Harlem.

Analogies about passing were also addressed by a group of middle-aged Jewish readers of Danzy Senna's *Caucasia,* where one member urged his groupmates not to underestimate differences in power and situation between Jews and African Americans. In response to the incident in the text when Birdie, passing as white, remains silent while her teenage friends make racist remarks, one woman reader asked her group, "Do you out yourself [as Jews] when people say anti-Semitic things?" Another woman righteously asserted, "You speak up," implying that Birdie should have done the same. In response to her, a man in the group argued strongly that taking an assertive stance against racism may come easily for a wealthy Jew in a liberal city, but it is far more difficult for a vulnerable mixed-race adolescent, at sea in the whiteness of her small New Hampshire town. By exposing the flaws in the analogy, he showed himself to be a more sensitive reader of the text than the woman who judged Birdie's character based on her own responses to anti-Semitism. His remarks warn of a recurrent danger of analogizing forms of empathy—a misrecognition of someone else's circumstances as one's own.

Offering an ideal model of the stance of an "ally," a group at a Jewish temple discussing Gloria Naylor's novel *Mama Day* struck a careful balance between striving for emotional connection and respecting the particularity of black experience. These female readers defined themselves as Jewish in culture and religious tradition but not in race, as did the New York reader of *Passing.* Acknowledging their own whiteness and the power it confers, one woman admitted, "It's very different being white, even though I'm Jewish. Whatever we read, we can't really know how it feels to always be judged by one's skin." The female rabbi and an anthropologist who led the discussion spoke wisely about Naylor's strategy for introducing white readers to the "cultural wealth" of this black community: "This novel is constructed to say, 'We're gonna let you in, but you've gotta understand that difference, what it means to look from the outside in.'" An understanding of

difference, however, did not prevent them from drawing nuanced connections between African American and Jewish religious rituals, communal bonding, and matriarchal traditions. One dared to voice the comparison of group suffering that has frequently touched off arguments between blacks and Jews: "This legacy [of slavery] is like the Holocaust; it has shaped black families." Yet this woman was also a careful reader of Naylor's attention to distinctions between whiteness and blackness. She reminded the group that "Cocoa not only internalized white beauty norms but she was always thinking about Shawn [her husband's white ex-girlfriend]. Remember that Sapphira killed Wade [the white man who owned and "loved" her]. Even though we have so much that is shared, human experiences, those white elephants in the room—race and slavery—don't just go away." Importantly, this group later moved beyond their empathetic reading of Naylor's novel to take part in a local Martin Luther King Day conference where one hundred Jewish and one hundred African American women met to engage in dialogue about their religious traditions.[88] Reading and discussing black-authored fiction thus prepared these Jewish women for a mutually respectful conversation with actual black women, in a city where such public dialogue is relatively uncommon.

Empathizing with black characters on the basis of an analogy to other identities—of gender, class, or ethnicity—thus can have quite variable political consequences, from the dangers of a universalizing color-blindness to the promise of a human solidarity that does not wipe away difference. While some theorists believe that a quest for sameness is constitutive of empathy, I would like to turn now to what I consider a more radical deployment of empathy, one in which readers make leaps beyond familiarizing forms of sameness into the territory of the "strange"—to see from the point of view of their racial "others" and to recognize that they in fact wield power over those others because of their own whiteness and class privilege.

Self-Alienation and Self-Risk: Coming to Terms with Whiteness

While some readers drew on analogous experiences to sympathize with black characters, empathetic "perspective-taking" helped some privileged readers to see the realities of racial inequality in a new light. By identifying with the black protagonists of African American fiction, some white readers were led to disidentify with the novels' antagonists—not only racists but also condescending white liberals. One elderly female reader of Richard Wright's classic *Native Son* offered an astute interpretation made possible only by taking up the perspective of Bigger Thomas, a man driven to murder by an oppressive environment: "The [white philanthropist] Daltons were hypocrites; they would offer education but wouldn't

hire blacks. That's why Bigger hated them; they made him know his place. Mary Dalton is stupid because she doesn't see it from his point of view." Similarly, white female readers of Ernest J. Gaines's *A Gathering of Old Men* disidentified with the condescending Candy, the only white female in the novel, because she was striving to control and protect the black man who had raised her, in effect emasculating him. The structure of Gaines's novel, which offers multiple first-person narratives in the voices of black men asserting their manhood after decades of racist abuse, aided these white female readers in empathizing across gender and racial boundaries. This capacity for cross-gender and cross-race identification occurred not only among white females. As I discussed earlier, a white middle-aged man in a book club reading *Caucasia* imagined himself in the shoes of a mixed-race adolescent girl and passionately defended her choices. In her work on empathy, Rajini Srikanth argues that these kinds of compassionate crossover identifications are more rare than those experienced by people within the same group, who affirm one another's shared humanity far more easily.[89]

Such moments of cross-racial identification can have potentially transformative effects for white readers willing to interrogate their own complicity with racist discourse and practice. During the Oprah's Book Club program on *A Lesson before Dying,* a leftist white man who is a foster parent of African American children admitted that the novel made him think about his unconscious assumption that groups of black teenage boys are gang members up to no good. Reading a novel about a black teen falsely condemned for murder made him realize how his own personal prejudices could have the power to ruin lives. One of the white women selected by Oprah for *The Bluest Eye* discussion confessed that when she had first read the book, she did not feel implicated in this story of color-consciousness within the black community; she regarded the novel as a "black book . . . about 'their' problems."[90] On second reading, however, she remembered that her mother had forced her to end a childhood friendship with a black girl, and she then wondered, "Did I make that girl wish her eyes were blue?" This white reader's empathy for Pecola involved looking at herself from the outside in, to experience alienation from the self. Rather than desiring to see the other as "one of us," this reader of *The Bluest Eye* was moved to self-interrogation and to question her previously uncompassionate and personally disengaged reading of the text. While a facile form of sympathy may do little to destabilize the viewer's own subjectivity, empathy can also be radically unsettling. The unsettling experience of these OBC readers challenges Kathryn Lofton's claim that the program reduces books to the function of "making the reader feel better."[91]

Since it is often more difficult to feel sympathy for someone of widely different circumstances than one's own, it is important to examine the conditions that enable compassion across racial or class boundaries, particularly when the

sympathizer has higher social status than the sufferer. Martha Nussbaum sees empathy as a crucial ingredient in compassionate action, because taking up another's perspective facilitates what she calls "eudaimonistic judgment": "[I]n order for compassion to be present, the person must consider the suffering of another as a significant part of his or her own scheme of goals and ends. She must take that person's ill as affecting her own flourishing."[92] Elizabeth Spelman echoes this point, arguing that privileged people will not "think it desirable to lose that privilege . . . unless they see it not only as producing harm to other[s] . . . but also deeply disfiguring to themselves."[93] In studying white audiences, I am particularly interested in how identifications with the feelings of African American characters can provoke a critical self-interrogation and recognition that racism poisons everyone—that it is not merely "*their* problem" but rather *ours* collectively. Such an acknowledgment of responsibility, I believe, is a necessary precondition for anti-racist political action.

The film version of *Beloved* encouraged several white viewers on *Oprah* to experience such moments of reflective self-alienation through a radical rereading of the racist personal history of their families. Renee, a southern white woman, had been raised with the white supremacist belief that "the black race were animals . . . one step above primates." Although as an adult she had decided "intellectually" that "racism was wrong," she had not felt the true horror of her family's legacy "in [her] heart."[94] Upon viewing the scene in the film when white men drink Sethe's breastmilk, Renee said, "I saw the white men's righteousness from Sethe's eyes, and I felt shame, not pride. Your movie taught me that they weren't the animals; we were. And it's not us and them. It's about what we created."[95] Here, her sensitivity to Sethe's sexual violation as a woman leads her to a crucial moment of disidentification with her own family and to acknowledge race and racism as social constructions created by the powerful. Renee even takes personal responsibility for the past, rather than absolving herself of guilt: "What I was raised upon, who I am, a *part of me* is shameful and wrong."[96] Without denying that she belongs to the powerful "we" of whiteness, she is nonetheless trying to move beyond the divisive binary of "us and them." Experiencing shame or guilt over the conduct of whites past and present can be powerful motivators for anti-racist action.[97] As Spelman contends, "[S]eeing oneself as deeply disfigured by privilege and desiring to do something about it, may be impossible without feeling shame."[98]

Another southern woman whose family had been slaveholders experienced a similarly guilt-ridden recognition of complicity. After being contacted by a descendant of a slave owned by her family, Audrey discovered her family's records of punishment meted out to their slaves. However, the historical data left her with a feeling of disconnection: "[I]t was so distant from me that they were numbers." When Audrey saw the film *Beloved,* however, and witnessed the whipping scars on

Sethe's back, she "felt a gut-wrenching guilt" as her "whole ancestry flashed before [her] eyes." Reading the historical record did not move Audrey as much as this moment of empathetic identification with the bodily pain of a scarred runaway slave. For her, "this is no longer something on paper" now that these numbers have been translated into feeling human beings.[99] These women's responses to *Beloved* suggest that film has "the power to reeducate the look" by replacing a voyeuristic or detached gaze at otherness with an emotional identification that involves a "spectatorial self-estrangement."[100] While some may depreciate guilt as an emotion that leads one to denial or escape rather than committed action, I argue that the guilt this woman feels is an important step in owning responsibility for perpetuating racism and white privilege—the source of others' pain.

Importantly, African American fiction induced some of these readers to acknowledge the ways in which they benefit personally from systems of white privilege. One woman was moved by Birdie's struggles with racial identity in *Caucasia* to reflect on her own privilege to live as "racially unmarked": "I don't see a white face when I look in the mirror, but my black friend and colleague told me that he sees his face as black first. That really shook me up. I realized that our freedom as whites is that we don't have to think about it." Rather than complaining that the black characters they encountered are too angry or antiwhite, a claim that was occasionally voiced among these book clubs, some readers tried to understand the legitimate roots of such black distrust and anger.[101] Alice Randall's book *Pushkin and the Queen of Spades* prompted a Unitarian book club to justify the black female protagonist's animosity for white people, borne of her upbringing in segregated Detroit. Because the book provided a "window" into Windsor's point of view, one woman reader was moved by the story of how Windsor maintained her dignity in the face of racist devaluation by imagining that "whitefolks ain't nothing but a broken-down black pimp's dog"[102] and by accumulating derogatory terms for whites such as "peckerwood." The novel led these white readers to a frank discussion of how whites might deserve the disdain of African Americans for willingly as well as inadvertently accepting the advantages of whiteness. They proceeded to "unpack the invisible backpack of white privilege" (as Peggy McIntosh puts it), enumerating benefits such as feeling protected by the police and courts and counting on the support of institutions.[103] One male reader recalled an incident from his youth, in which his renegade brother had asked an old black man to help him out of trouble. He had never forgotten the wisdom of the man's retort: "White boys never in trouble." Another woman recalled her participation in a multiracial activist group fighting for an integrated neighborhood and school in the 1960s. In response to her disbelief that the candidate they endorsed lost a local election, the black activists were undaunted, pointing out that "you white people are used to winning; we're not." In these cases, readers used previ-

ous encounters with actual African Americans to understand the novel, but the novel also provided them the opportunity for resurrecting and reflecting on these memories of interracial exchange. In their literary analyses and the connections they made to their own life experiences, these empathetic readers were able to look critically at their own whiteness from the perspective of black people.

Some critics are concerned that when sympathizers claim responsibility for easing the pain of others and engage in political activism on their behalf, they effectively deprive those sufferers of agency.[104] Such a view equates sympathy with condescending pity, where the boundaries between the powerful and the powerless remain unchallenged. Yet several philosophers remind that "compassion can coexist with respect for [the] agency" of those in need.[105] Some of the book-club readers not only felt empathy for those victimized by racism and shame at their own perpetuation of white privilege, but they also felt joy at the empowerment of black characters. The temple group reading Naylor's *Mama Day* applauded the self-determination of Sapphira and her descendent Mama Day and implicitly linked their rebellious agency with that of Jewish Zionists: "Naylor turns the story—of slaves who killed their masters and are then killed in retaliation—upon its head. Those rebel slaves didn't get to start a dynasty. She creates an alternative history, a new family story. It's so empowering, the notion that if you have your own land you can be safe and free." A white woman responding to *River, Cross My Heart* on the Oprah discussion boards expressed "pride" in the black characters' "unruly" refusal to accept segregation of public pools. In response to Oprah's selection *Cane River,* a white woman was inspired by the black characters' defiance in the face of oppression, from the slave girl Suzette "peeing on the rose bushes after being slapped" to Emily "sitting up front on that bus" during the civil rights movement.[106] It strikes me as significant that these empathetic white readers moved beyond co-suffering to cheer on the black characters' insurgency against white domination. Emotional connections with African American characters thus encouraged these readers to feel political solidarity with black protests against injustice and their quest for self-determination. Rather than serving as a substitute for action, feeling inspired these readers to desire political change.

The Political Effects of Fiction Reading

But the question still remains: Do such experiences of pain or joy in solidarity with African Americans have any substantive political effects, or are they merely fleeting connections in the private sphere that do little to effect prosocial action or change, as Suzanne Keen and Lauren Berlant have argued? While some discussion of larger political concerns surfaced on the *Oprah Winfrey Show* book-club programs, I had much more opportunity to examine the relationship between

reading and political investment through my ethnographic study of Boston book clubs. Not only did I solicit information via a short questionnaire about the involvement of each book-club member in political causes and social activism, but I also asked them to note their favorite books overall and any titles by African Americans that they had enjoyed reading; occasional book groups were able to provide backlists of their monthly reading selections for many years. Since a longitudinal sociological research project would be necessary to draw a more complete picture of the impact of reading on anti-racist political development, the following arguments are intended to be suggestive rather than definitive.

The *Oprah Winfrey Show* might be considered an unlikely place to find evidence of the political effects of reading, since Oprah herself shies away from any formal political agenda and disidentifies with "black militancy," preferring to frame her project as enabling transformations among individuals.[107] When a member of the *Beloved* discussion program implied that the film was made in hopes of provoking white Americans to make a national apology for slavery, Oprah clarified her mission: "I am hoping for just an opening of the heart. I am not asking for a national apology."[108] In response to Oprah's faith in the power of feeling, a black male participant in the discussion urged others to turn feeling into action: "You can't stop there. You can feel it and I want you to feel it, but we have to begin to effect change in this country at whatever level [we] can effect change."[109] The "level" that another white book-club participant (Renee) chose is that of the private rather than the public sphere: "Even just passing nonracist ideas on to my daughter, start in my own home."[110] While Renee uses qualifying words like "just" and "start" to suggest that such a strategy would only be a preliminary effort, Oprah falsely concludes that private-sphere transformations are enough: "If you do that, then we have already won with this movie."[111] Not only is Oprah claiming a premature victory, but her comments reinforce the gendered division between the public and the private sphere, limiting the scope of women's activism.[112]

While white women must not abdicate a responsibility to counteract racism in the public sphere, I nonetheless want to question the tendency among critics of sympathy to undervalue the political power of individual "openings of the heart." Even if sympathizers are not moved to give time or money to a cause, "the sentiment of bystanders can be crucial to a movement's success," just as the American public's horrified reactions to televised police brutality played a key role in the success of the civil rights movement.[113] Lawrence Blum studied a French town whose spiritual leaders convinced the townspeople to shelter five thousand Jews during the Holocaust, concluding that "a sharp distinction between action and emotion is not always possible. The actions of some are influenced by the attitudes of others, [which] . . . shape our sense of what is right and wrong."[114] The

sociologist Michael Young contends that there is a "fundamental link between transformations of the self and transformations of society," and he points to a "change in . . . emotional culture" as key to the nineteenth-century evangelical movement for the immediate abolition of slavery.[115] In their volume *Passionate Politics,* Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper, and Francesca Polletta claim that an "under-studied aspect" of social movements is the "emotions and experiences that prepare individuals for political action."[116] On this score, we should not underestimate the role of a change of heart in potentially moving people like Renee or her daughter to take anti-racist action in an effort to transform their families, communities, workplaces, or even national policy.

Lauren Berlant is right to be skeptical of the claim that a single novel could produce radical changes in individual readers. However, empathetic reading and viewing experiences can play an important role in a larger chain of events that provoke critical thinking about racism and enable a shift in political perspective. As the white woman Audrey said during the program on *Beloved,* "I understand something now that I didn't understand before, and [the film] has made me want to understand more."[117] Reading can clearly alter one's sense of reality, as evidenced by a reader of *Cane River* who noted on Oprah's Web board: "I don't know if it is heightened awareness due to my reading the novel . . . but it seems like there is so much more in the news about racism; just today I read two articles." Reading fiction can help a person to develop an understanding of the plight of others and a sense of moral outrage concerning injustice, often seen as important precursors for action. In her ethnographic study of white women's reading groups, Elizabeth Long argues that "reading, especially when combined with communal reflection and discussion, provides . . . in some cases, motivation for taking individual or collective action beyond the world of books."[118] Several whites in the online and televised Oprah discussions were putting their anti-racist feelings to work in the public sphere, in their jobs as teachers and social workers serving minority communities. Although books may not have been the sole catalyst for these anti-racist stands in the public sphere, the testimony of these readers suggests that experiences of empathy in cultural space fortified their ongoing political commitments and sometimes even awakened a dormant desire for social justice.

Among the book clubs I visited, the empathetic readers who were most willing to wrestle with the meaning of their own whiteness were also active in the pursuit of social justice and racial equality. In response to incidents of racial hate that targeted a black principal and a multiracial family in a wealthy suburb, several white mothers in my study became involved in their public school system's anti-racist and multicultural educational efforts. Two white women had been activists working to desegregate schools in the 1960s. I met three upper-middle-class white people who currently spend ten to twenty hours per week volunteer-

ing in inner-city high schools and Head Start programs. One retired woman recalled taking the risk of volunteering in North Dorchester schools during the Boston busing crisis in the 1970s, and she was deeply grateful that the black staff members offered her their respect and friendship during this polarizing time. It hardly seems coincidental that the list of favorite titles read by these particular individuals included a range of writing by African Americans (including *Invisible Man, Native Son, The Fire Next Time, Their Eyes Were Watching God, Beloved, The Autobiography of Malcolm X, Soul on Ice, The Emperor of Ocean Park, The Dew Breaker, The Color of Water,* and *The Street*) as well as books by other racial and ethnic minorities (such as Jhumpa Lahiri, Amy Tan, and Sherman Alexie). In contrast to the reading histories of these actively anti-racist people, some book clubs meeting for years and even decades had read only one or two titles written by a person of color.

I observed several potential links between reading and politicization while visiting a book group of elderly women in a retirement home. Earlier in the year, they had attended a one-man play about AIDS in South Africa and had become passionately invested in raising awareness about this tragedy among their friends and families. When their literary discussion of Paule Marshall turned to the color-caste system among black communities, they drew upon their knowledge of Nella Larsen's *Passing* and Dorothy West's *The Wedding* to express sadness that African Americans internalize the racist norms of the "dominant society." The discussion of color-caste prejudice in books veered onto political ground when a moderate member of the group suggested that today blacks "are more represented" in government, given the success of the dark-skinned former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice as well as light-skinned Colin Powell and then-Senator Barack Obama. Several women retorted with these sharply worded comments: "No! That's what President Bush calls diversity, having a few blacks around," and, "They aren't really representative, because they think just like he does. Colin Powell wasn't so different." Even the most moderate woman of the group was well-read in African American literature and supported the Southern Poverty Law Center, which brings legal action against white-supremacist hate groups and produces anti-racist educational material for elementary schools. This level of anti-racist politicization was not what one might expect from white women in their eighties and nineties, living in a retirement complex decked out in white crocheted doilies.

This book group of politically active elderly readers raises the "chicken or the egg" question: Does politicization follow from reading, or vice versa? Ann, the most radical member of the reading group, was clearly committed to fighting racism even as a young woman, when she insisted that her daughter attend integrated public schools in Richmond in the 1970s, long after all the other white

children had transferred to private schools.[119] Ann explained that her empathy for African Americans was instilled during her work as a teacher in New York City, when she visited the homes of her students and was shocked by the harsh realities of their lives. Drawing upon her lifelong commitment to civil rights, Ann interpreted Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones* as "representative of a larger black struggle for autonomy," whereas some of her book-group members argued for the "universality" of the story. Her previous job experiences and personal history of working against racism most likely led her to be the kind of empathetic reader that she is today. Yet Ann also noted that she had enjoyed hearing Paule Marshall give a public lecture decades ago, which suggests that her activism was concurrent with her reading of African American fiction.

As Ann's story suggests, any investigation of the potential effects of fiction reading must take into consideration the age and accumulated life experience of the reader. I had the opportunity to compare five "senior citizen" book groups, three groups with members under thirty-five, many groups of middle-aged readers, and a few that crossed generational lines. While age certainly did not predict the readers' responses to the texts or their racial politics, some differences between the groups were clearly attributable to age—such as the ability to remember textual details, the number of books read, the state of race relations at the time of one's schooling, and the role of reading in one's life stage. Some of the elderly readers had difficulty recalling the plot or themes of the books they had read recently, which suggests that reading now serves as a stimulating diversion that has little impact upon their worldview. The younger groups had obviously read far fewer books, and thus they were somewhat more impressionable. Simply because younger readers have less life experience and breadth of reading to serve as a comparison, one can assume that each book they read has the possibility to play a stronger role in shaping or shifting their outlook on racial issues. For example, despite the weaker short-term memory of some elderly readers, many remembered with astonishing clarity the personal impact of books, such as *Native Son,* that they had read in their formative life stage fifty or sixty years ago.

While younger adults with less rigidly defined identities have the potential to be shaped by books, reading can also serve as a means of self-consolidation or affirmation. For many of the elderly and middle-aged groups in my study, their choice to read socially progressive books reaffirmed their left-leaning identities and gave them occasion to reflect on their own pasts. Although the political identities of the middle-aged readers were more static, reading was also a means of learning and thinking critically about the world around them, a world that they still have hopes of changing for the better. Among nearly half of the book clubs that I visited in the fall and winter of 2004–5 (during and after the 2004 presidential election campaign), the discussion moved organically from African American literature

to passionate diatribes against the Republican president's domestic and foreign policy. While discussing a novel they had read about racial passing, one woman quipped, "Wouldn't it be great if Bush found out he was black?" In a discussion of *The Known World,* one group compared the book's depiction of the mentality of free black slave-owners to poor people voting for Republicans today: "It's just like the Bush administration has also done, gotten people to believe their livelihood is hooked into these policies to benefit the wealthy. It's a public perception job to make oppressed people feel like they do have power." In these cases, reading fiction that addresses social and economic injustice helped to fuel the fire of their left-wing political passions.

These white liberals find literature to be a meaningful way of enlarging and enriching their perspectives on sociopolitical issues, yet critics of sympathy often contend that such encounters devolve into a self-congratulatory posture that merely allows the liberal reader to do nothing while feeling righteous. In her criticism of OBC, Janice Peck views literature rather cynically as a form of "social engineering" that simply reaffirms the status quo.[120] However, even among the middle-aged and older readers, I did see evidence—enumerated earlier in the chapter—of readers grappling with books that altered their worldview, however slightly. Some readers were unsettled enough to consider new kinds of activism. At the end of one middle-aged Jewish group's engaged discussion of *The Known World,* the group leader shared information about a group called ACT Roxbury, which aims to showcase the artistic and cultural contributions of Boston's predominantly black neighborhood in order to draw multiracial crowds and stimulate economic revitalization. She ended with a plea to her friends to get more involved in interracial coalitions like the Friends of ACT: "If they are reaching out to us, we need to reach out to them." This move from reading to activism directly contradicts claims that empathy is merely a self-congratulatory posture of complacency.

While Berlant doubts that emotional shifts in the private sphere ever get converted into a larger politics of change, Lawrence Grossberg argues persuasively that "affective relations are, at least potentially, the condition of possibility for the optimism, invigoration, and passion which are necessary for any struggle to change the world."[121] The experience of empathy may produce merely self-satisfied feelings of benevolence that substitute for committed action, but I contend that the larger impediment to radical change is not empathy itself but conditions that weaken its effectivity, such as widespread public skepticism that protest can actually accomplish social change in a world controlled by postmodern global capitalism. Like Grossberg, I see the social-protest elements of African American and ethnic literature as an underappreciated resource in combating the disaffection that threatens to nullify political resistance in the United States.

My work on the politics of empathetic reading contributes to a recent shift in American studies, calling for an end to the "separate spheres" paradigm that divided public from private, masculine from feminine, the world of political action from the world of feeling. The essays in the influential collection *No More Separate Spheres!* suggest that the line between the public and the private is a blurry one, and that these two "spheres" are, in fact, largely imbricated.[122] With a similar goal, I have highlighted the political importance of empathetic reading in fostering critical self-reflection and a radical interrogation of white privilege. In this particular deployment of empathy, such moments of radical understanding could be seen as an incipient form of political action rather than its antithesis. This form of self-reckoning and perspective-taking operates on a continuum with larger-scale political actions in both "private" and "public" settings. Instead of equating the political only with the arena of elections, protest movements, and collective organizing, scholars also need to consider the importance of local, interpersonal encounters in effecting social change. Experiencing empathy for African Americans in cultural space may move someone to object to a racist joke among colleagues or friends, to vote for a minority political candidate, or to persuade an older relative that mixed-race marriages can produce healthy and happy families. One Oprah reader of *The Bluest Eye* has adopted three abused black girls and is passionately working to help them to develop self-esteem. Is her anti-racist action any less political because it takes place within the "private sphere" of the family? I argue that such local and personal examples of taking a moral stand do work to undermine racism and are probably necessary stepping stones for individuals to move towards more public-oriented anti-racist acts that require greater risk. The power of reading in fostering personal self-transformation should not be undervalued.

From the earliest slave narratives to the social-protest fiction of the civil rights and Black Power eras, much African American literature has had emotional and political designs on its audience—to move readers to feel sympathy or anger and to put those feelings to work. As Larry Grossberg contends, emotive genres are politically powerful because they provoke identification, belonging, and investment, providing audiences with "mattering maps" that reveal "the places at which people can anchor themselves into the world, the locations of the things that matter."[123] At the end of the *Oprah* discussion of her book *Song of Solomon,* Toni Morrison revealed her own dream to offer such mattering maps to readers: "It's the dream of a writer. . . . To have something important, truly meaningful, happen to a person who's ready for the happening and the key to it is the experience of reading a book. . . . It's not a lesson that said do this . . . and this is the solution, but to actually engage in the emotions, the actions, and the company . . . of the characters."[124] The African American novels read by these book clubs

do not often provide solutions to social problems concerning race and gender, but they do offer intense emotional engagement that is an essential ingredient of political engagement.

Conspicuously absent from most literary analyses of cross-racial empathy are reading experiences such as I have spotlighted here, in which whites' identification with African American characters led to a self-reckoning that involved assuming responsibility for the state of racial inequity and for its eradication. Although I have shown how empathy can sometimes slide into a color-blind attitude that ignores power, particularly on the *Oprah Winfrey Show,* my reception analysis also underscores the important role that empathetic crossings within literary space can play in the development of anti-racist sensibilities. Even for informed readers knowledgeable about the history of race in America, fiction can have special power to engage one's emotions and produce a sense of moral outrage necessary for political action. As one leftist professor of social work remarked in a discussion of *The Known World*: "I knew the history [of slavery] intellectually, but hadn't allowed myself to go there on an emotional level. This book took me to the place of being there—I was in the road with Augustus when the controllers destroyed his free papers. Being empathetic with him, the cruelty of it slapped me in the face, to imagine what that might feel like. That's different than just saying 'I know these people didn't really have rights.'" In her analysis, knowing without feeling can result in distance and a complacent sense of mastery. Amidst an academic climate of suspicion toward a politics rooted in affect, scholars need to consider empathetic identification fostered by African American literature as a powerful means of deepening the desire to fight against the racism that is our collective burden. While many lament that black culture is being co-opted for profit, they ignore the possibility that some consumers of contemporary African American culture may be internalizing black perspectives and political viewpoints rather than simply imitating black styles.

In this chapter, I drew evidence from a variety of texts and reading sites to ground my conclusions about cross-racial empathy fostered by African American literature. To complicate those generalizing strokes, the following chapter takes a localizing turn by focusing on two contemporary novels—Edward P. Jones's *The Known World* (2003) and Danzy Senna's *Caucasia* (1998)—and their reception among eleven book clubs in the Boston metropolitan area. Rather than treating African American literature as a homogeneous body of texts, I offer a comparative analysis of how textual differences in form and ways of conceptualizing race affect empathetic reading. Focusing on "reading race" within a particular place also allows me to address the social determinants of reading—not merely the race of the reader, but the neighborhood and local communities that inform his or her reading.

3

Reading Race and Place

Boston Book Clubs and Post-Soul Fiction

For the members of Oprah's Book Club, discussion takes place within the disembodied and dislocated worlds of television and the Internet, but it is important to remember that books are most often read, interpreted, and talked about in the context of a reader's particular locality—his or her "reading habitat." In the previous chapter, I drew evidence from a variety of texts and reading sites in order to ground my hypotheses about cross-racial empathy fostered by African American literature. This chapter takes a localizing turn by comparing two novels, Edward P. Jones's *The Known World* (2003) and Danzy Senna's *Caucasia* (1998), and their reception among eleven book clubs in the Boston metropolitan area. Out of the eleven groups, I visited seven with only white members, one black women's book club, and three multiracial clubs. The questions motivating my analysis of these book-club conversations are simultaneously literary and sociological, knitting together issues of form and reception: How do differences among black-authored texts—such as style, genre, setting, and ways of conceptualizing race—affect empathetic reading? And how is the reading of a racially charged text influenced by the reader's locality, by the particular places and communities in which he or she lives or participates? By focusing on readers consuming and discussing African American fiction in segregated and multiracial spaces, I examine the relationships between reading, race, and place.

While African American literature often foregrounds racial issues, not all texts written by African Americans treat the concept of racial identity in the same way. *Caucasia* and *The Known World* provide rich opportunities for analysis because they destabilize binary ideas of blackness and whiteness and invite audiences to rethink race. Taking on the controversial topic of the existence of free blacks who owned slaves for profit in the antebellum South, *The Known World* complicates

the familiar plots of slavery narratives, which often focus upon black solidarity and resistance in the face of abuse and dehumanization perpetrated by whites. Jones's subject matter itself—black slave owners—is disturbingly oxymoronic in the eyes of many readers. Set in a more recent historical moment, Danzy Senna's novel *Caucasia* similarly upsets rigid notions of racial difference by focusing on a girl who is neither black nor white, but both. *Caucasia* tells the tale of a light-skinned biracial adolescent, who passes not only as white but also as black, as she struggles to find belonging in the segregated landscapes of Boston and New Hampshire in the 1970s and 1980s.

Because these texts critique essentialist notions of blackness and expose race as a socially constructed fiction, both novels could be classified as "post-soul" texts. Trey Ellis, Nelson George, and Greg Tate were among the first critics to use the term "post-soul" to refer to African American writers born after the civil rights movement and thus distanced from the legacy of black nationalism. The term's usage shifted from a simple generational label to a description of a new aesthetic, which Tate and George call the "African-American equivalent of post-modernism."[1] More recently, in his introduction to an *African American Review* special issue on "post-soul" texts, Bertram Ashe has characterized post-soul fiction writers as engaged in a process of "blaxploration" by depicting fluid "cultural mulatto" protagonists who trouble essentialist notions of a static black identity. Post-soul writers create central characters who defy stereotypes, confound racial categories, express allegiances to many cultures, and expose chinks in the foundations of black nationalism.[2] Despite their goal of troubling the color line, these writers often retain a strong commitment to black communities and to detailing the continuing effects of racism.

Even within this recent special issue on post-soul literature, no scholars have yet explored how such anti-essentialist texts are received by readers, both black and white. Do they succeed in challenging people to read race in a new way? How is the cross-racial empathy of white readers affected when the very idea of race is complicated and questioned? Throughout this chapter, I employ the term "reading race" as a figurative concept that invokes multiple significances of the verb "to read": to interpret, to evaluate, to see through, to understand something, or to position oneself as superior in understanding. When the text being read is the "textual body" of an African American character, a power dynamic arises between the reader and the subject under scrutiny.[3] As Judith Butler theorizes in *Bodies That Matter,* "[R]eading means taking someone down, exposing what fails to work at the level of appearance, insulting or deriding someone."[4] Reading race, then, could be understood as a process of putting someone into his or her place in the schema of recognized racial categories, thereby minimizing that person's complexity. In this sense, reading involves an exertion of power over the observed person or fictional character—an assertion that "I know you." Someone

who eludes racial classification, such as a black slave owner or a biracial child, cannot be so easily read and thus demands a more complex understanding of his or her individuality. Post-soul texts that trouble racial categories frustrate the kind of reading that fixes the character or author in place and can potentially open up another kind of reading that is more sensitive to the operations of power.[5]

In studying the reception of these two anti-essentialist post-soul novels, I encountered some readers who were frustrated by their inability to read race in these texts; they could not fully sympathize with characters whom they could not place. Others were moved to recognize the fictionality and fluidity of the racial divide, and this recognition facilitated empathetic perspective-taking. However, some of the white readers who grasped the anti-essentialist message of the texts were perhaps too quick to see the present as a place in which race no longer matters. The most sensitive readers were able to grasp the novels' messages about the absurdity of race but also to understand that race is tenacious because it enables a power inequity that continues to benefit the white ruling class. To account for this range of responses, this chapter addresses several factors influencing reader interpretation and empathy: textual form, the readers' racial and class identity, and the communities—real and discursive—to which readers belong.

Although *Caucasia* and *The Known World* offer similar post-soul conceptions of race, they are otherwise starkly different in form, genre, setting, and subject matter. These textual differences allowed me to investigate the effects of form and genre upon reading and empathy.[6] Drawing on the generic codes of the bildungsroman (a coming-of-age narrative focused on one protagonist's development), *Caucasia* invites sympathetic identification with a central protagonist, Birdie Lee, a biracial adolescent girl whose psychological pain and marginalization are probed through first-person narration. The book clubs' commentary on this text was dominated by emotional and "experiential" modes of response, whereby readers related Birdie's experiences to their own adolescent angst and dysfunctional family dynamics. The immediacy of the novel's setting—the recent past in a location intimately familiar to these Boston readers—also intensified experiential connections to racial issues in their present communities. While Senna's narrative strategies foster reader identification with her heroine, the form of *The Known World* seems designed to minimize emotional identification. Adopting an omniscient third-person rather than a first-person voice, Jones draws upon the tradition of social realism to offer a panoramic picture of antebellum Virginia. Rather than rendering a central character with psychological depth, Jones gives us mere glimpses of the motivations of scores of people across a range of social strata. Unlike many slavery novels, his tone is starkly unsentimental and emotionally spare. The novel's postmodern stylistic devices of nonlinearity, fragmentation, and self-reflexivity also disrupt a reader's immersion in the fictional world and call attention to the text's construction. A substantial

minority of readers expressed frustration with these distancing tactics and complained that they couldn't relate to or understand the characters. Even among those readers who loved the book, their discussions were often characterized by analytical rather than experiential responses, perhaps also due to the historical distance of Jones's chosen setting. My comparative reception analysis suggests that textual form had some impact upon empathy and the kinds of discussions elicited, but did not wholly determine either.

More influential than the formal properties of the texts were the metropolitan area and the local neighborhoods in which they were read. Both of these novels are thematically linked with the conflicted history of race relations in Boston, which helps to account for their popularity among this audience group. Not surprisingly, *The Known World*'s critique of slavery was well received among these liberal northerners, in a city that was once a stronghold of the abolitionist movement.[7] I visited these book clubs composed largely of registered Democrats during the 2004 presidential campaign, and conversations about *The Known World*'s Old South often gave readers occasion to launch into critiques of the Texan Republican George W. Bush. One biracial reader quipped, "I'm going to go with a stereotype here—what a fucked up bunch of people from those damn 'red states' in the South." Despite the fact that Bostonians often take great pride in their "blue state" liberalism, Boston has also been the site of virulent and veiled racism.[8] The displaced setting of *The Known World* allowed some white readers to treat racism as a relic of another time and region, but *Caucasia* confronted readers with evidence of racism in Boston's recent past, notably the violent controversy surrounding school desegregation in the 1970s. As a result, *Caucasia* provoked spirited conversations assessing whether racism in Boston is on the wane or has merely gone undercover.[9] While racially motivated violence is no longer endemic here, twenty-first-century Boston and its suburbs remain classic examples of de facto residential and social segregation.[10] The neighborhoods from which these clubs drew members—and the racial and socioeconomic makeup of those neighborhoods (see tables 1 and 2)—also had an effect upon the kinds of

Table 1. Racial/Ethnic Demographics of Cities and Towns in Greater Boson

	% Whites	% African Am.	% Asian Am.	% Latino	% Multiracial
Wellesley	90	1.6	6.4	2	1.4
Newton	88	2	8	2.5	1.5
Belmont	91	1	6	2	1.4
Brookline	81.1	2.7	12.8	3.5	2
Cambridge	68	12	12	7	4.6
Somerville	77	6.5	6.4	8.8	4.8
Boston (city)	55.3	21.5	8.6	14.6	2

Source: U.S. Census 2000; www.epodunk.com

Table 2. Median Household Income for Localities in Greater Boston ($)

Wellesley	113,686
Newton	85,062
Belmont	80,295
Brookline	66,711
Cambridge	47,979
Somerville	46,315
City of Boston	46,676
Jamaica Plain	58,790
West Roxbury	63,701
South End	46,979
Dorchester	41,974

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2000; www.epodunk.com

discussions elicited. The majority of the eleven groups were based in the affluent and predominantly white suburbs of Newton, Wellesley, and Belmont; a group of professional black women met in a lower-middle-class section of left-leaning Cambridge; two groups met in multiracial urban neighborhoods within the city of Boston (the South End and Jamaica Plain); and one multiracial group drew members from middle- to lower-income cities and towns (Somerville and outlying suburbs near Worcester).[11] Those readers living in diverse communities, and those who have created multiracial communities of friends, were more likely to draw upon personal knowledge of the persistence of racism to read with, rather than against, the grain of the texts. The all-white suburban book clubs, however, were not completely circumscribed by their segregated places of residence. For example, I saw huge variation—from blatant racism to anti-racist activism—in the responses of readers who live in the suburb of Newton, which includes a sizable Jewish population.[12] Conversely, I heard overtly racist commentary voiced by individuals attending Boston's South End public library book club, which attests to the fact that segregated worldviews can be maintained even in integrated places.

Although the following analysis notes salient differences in the responses of groups characterized by racial and neighborhood affiliation, my goal is not to make overgeneralizations on the basis of this small sample of eighty-five white readers and thirteen black or mixed-race readers. Instead, I emphasize the dynamic nature of book-club conversations, attending to the lack of consensus within particular groups and to the individuality of the members. The complexity and diversity of the multivoiced conversations resists any attempt to place the readings of these book groups into neat and tidy boxes according to their social group identities. In drawing attention to individual variation within racial groups, the goal of my reception study is similar to that of these post-soul novels: to question essentialist ideas about blackness and whiteness.

With this goal in mind, my reception analysis offers a corrective to critics who make totalizing claims that racial identity determines reading. For example, bell hooks's essay on the film *Hoop Dreams* treats the white audience as a singular, monolithic block. Without talking to any of the white viewers in the movie theater, hooks concludes that "a voyeuristic pleasure at being able to observe from a distance the lives of two black boys . . . overcame the crowd" as they watched in "lurid fascination."[13] While totalizing claims are often made about white reading and viewing, reception studies of black readers have also tended toward racial generalization, albeit with the important goal of valuing the particularity of black perspectives and experience. Jacqueline Bobo's book *Black Women as Cultural Readers,* for example, draws upon a relatively small audience group to make large claims about black middle-class women as an interpretive community. Like Bobo, I examine patterns of response that reveal the differing discourses that black and white readers use to make sense of cultural texts, but I also attend to interpretive differences *within* racial groups. My work complicates Elizabeth Abel's 1993 essay "Black Writing, White Reading: Race and the Politics of Feminist Interpretation," an insightful analysis of white feminist investments in African American literature and the fantasies of blackness that often color white reading strategies. Written when whiteness studies was a fledgling field, Abel's essay illuminates a once-understudied subject: how whiteness undergirds reading. Extending and revising Abel, I aim to complicate static notions of white and black reading. My reception study of *Caucasia* and *The Known World* uncovers not only the ways in which people are rooted in race and place—which Abel calls the "social determinants of reading"[14]—but also how reading enables resistance to those constricting moorings.

Beginning with *The Known World,* I examine audience responses to the form of the novel and to its post-soul representation of race. Since reviewers and members of the book clubs often speculated about the interpretations of white or black readers of this neo-slavery text, my analysis foregrounds the process of reading race and the influence of race upon interpretation. The closing section on *Caucasia* examines Danzy Senna's own meditations on "race as place" and analyzes the book clubs' experiential conversations about race in Boston, informed by the urban and suburban neighborhoods in which their conversations took place.

Reading Outside the Frame: Displacing the Known World of Race

When Edward P. Jones's slavery novel *The Known World* won the 2004 Pulitzer Prize for fiction, some African American writers and readers expressed skepticism about the motivations behind this critical acclaim. Alice Randall, the author of a revision of *Gone with the Wind* from the slaves' perspective, summed up this

skepticism in an interview: "My experience is that black people don't like the book [*The Known World*], including the ones who have read it. . . . The majority of black people who owned slaves owned their own relatives to free them. And the question I hear that is raised, on many occasions, at cocktail parties where blacks are the majority, is why is it that white America wants to love a book about black people who own slaves?"[15] The implication here is that the novel's focus on black slave owners works to assuage white guilt by apportioning some of the blame to the black community. My reception study of four white book clubs, one racially mixed group, and one book club of African American women reading *The Known World* (see table 3) allows me to interrogate Randall's generalizations about black and white readership, and also to consider the impact of post-soul and postmodern textual strategies upon reception.

The stylistic and narrative devices that Jones employs, in addition to his efforts to blur racial boundaries by focusing on black slave owners, are unusual for a novel with slavery as its subject. Although it shares some stylistic devices with other postmodern neo-slavery novels, *The Known World* does not plumb the depths of individual psyches (as in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*) or focus on African American solidarity and collective resistance in the face of oppression (as in Charles Johnson's *Middle Passage*).[16] Rather, *The Known World* is an unusually detached, almost naturalistic exploration of the effects of environment on behavior, a chronicle of the twisted logic of slavery and the limited worldviews that it fostered among its victims as well as its perpetrators. The plot of the novel revolves around the life and death of Henry Townsend, a freed slave who buys over thirty slaves and establishes a plantation with the help of his mentor and former master William Robbins. While Henry is at the center of the events, Jones does not offer an intimate portrait of his motivations; in fact, Henry dies in the first chapter. Jones portrays a wide social spectrum of individuals in one fictional county in Virginia, including black slaveholders (Henry, his wife Caldonia, and the teacher Fern Elston), white slaveholders and their racist enforcing agents (Robbins, Counsel Skiffington, and Harvey Travis), poor whites (Barnum Kinsey), free blacks who detest slavery (August and Mildred Townsend), "liberal" whites who try feebly to resist the system (Sheriff John Skiffington and his wife Winifred), and the illegitimate biracial children (Louis and Dora) of Master Robbins. The slaves in this fictional world exhibit a wide variety of attitudes toward slavery. Some resist (Alice and Elias), some are blindly loyal to their masters, and some seek to wield power over others (the overseer Moses). One book club compared the novel's structure and its omniscient narrative voice to that of Charles Dickens, who was "examining larger society rather than [delving] inwards toward the self."

As the novel's title suggests, Jones is invested in mapping out a local world and the social mores that structure its functioning. In addition to its realist goals, Jones

Table 3. Book Clubs discussing *The Known World*

Book Club Title	Belmont Book Club	Wellesley Council on Aging	Newton Educators Club	Racially Mixed Suburban Group	Jewish Newtonites Book Club	Black Women's Book Club
Race	All whites	All whites	All whites	4 whites, 1 mixed race (black/Filipino), 1 Ethiopian, 1 South Asian Indian	9 whites (incl. 5 Jews), 1 Asian American	All African Americans
Number and gender	9 women	4 men; 11 women	9 women	7 women	10 women	10 women
Age range	46–59	70–89	59–74	31–45	51–76	41–57
Occupations	Teachers, tutors, journalists, professor, therapist, artist	Retired	Retired teachers, tutors, education administrators, editor, nurse	Social work professor, research scientists, designer	Retired or active teachers, professors, social workers, medical professionals	Journalists, educators, corporate trader
Locality (residence)	Belmont; Newton	Wellesley	Newton	Somerville; suburbs of Worcester (hour west of Boston)	Newton	Cambridge and Boston

Source: Demographic questionnaire filled out by all book group participants

also employs the postmodern aesthetic strategies of nonlinearity and fragmentation to challenge readers to assemble the pieces of this map. Flashbacks and flash-forwards regularly disrupt the progression of the plot, as much of Henry's story is revealed after his death. The flash-forwards, in which the God-like narrator reveals characters' fates many years in the future, break the frame and preclude total immersion in the present world of the tale.[17] Each chapter is a time-shifting patchwork of three stories about different characters in different moments in time, and connections between them are often elusive. Comparing the novel to the work of Joyce, Faulkner, and Morrison, some highbrow readers called it a "collage, like Alice's quilt-map at the end," which is a visual analog for the author's own artistic project of mapping Manchester County, Virginia.[18] A biracial woman and a white woman praised the flash-forwarding and nonlinear tangents as characteristic of the oral tradition of African American storytelling, rather than linking it to the white literary tradition.

A substantial minority (one quarter) of the readers, however, found Jones's postmodern style and refusal of deep characterization to be an impediment to their engagement and identification with the story. This criticism was voiced by members of black and white reading groups with a variety of literary tastes. Several were dismayed that the God-like narrator/author "remains at a distance from his characters" and thwarts human sympathy. As one black woman complained, "None of the characters I understood well enough to be empathetic to them. It never went deep enough into their minds. I didn't understand Henry's motivations or Caldonia's. I felt cheated." Not being able to count on whether or not a character would return later in the tale or be doomed to die, several readers found it hard to get emotionally invested. One suburban (Belmont) book club of white women was strongly divided on the issue of emotional identification and deep characterization in the text. The book-group leader stated that she vastly preferred Toni Morrison's neo-slavery novel *Beloved* because it provides "character integrity, the unfolding of relationships, and individual history," whereas *The Known World*'s style "took [her] out of engagement with the characters, and [she] didn't want that." Half of her book club, however, defended Jones's stylistic choices as befitting his sociological purpose. As one said, "Maybe he is so cavalier with the characters' fates because his purpose is illuminating the evil of slavery and the precarious position of blacks' lives." While some defended Jones's formal choices on intellectual grounds, another white reader argued that the fragmented form in fact enabled her to identify with the black characters. For her, reading this disorienting novel was like experiencing "the frustration that slaves felt in losing loved ones, knowing nothing more of their fate."

Given this diversity of response, it is difficult to conclude that the form and narrative techniques of this novel wholly determined reader empathy or lack thereof,

since so many of the readers reported strong emotional identification despite the author's avoidance of overt strategies to induce it. Therefore, I agree with the narratologist Suzanne Keen's conclusion that "no one ethical effect inheres in a single narrative device."[19] Although he writes in an unsentimental style, Jones's skillful manipulation of plot events nonetheless provoked readers to feel intensely and to empathize with slavery's victims. One retired white schoolteacher stated that "you just feel and really saw how a person can be completely dehumanized. How can you have any respect for yourself afterwards if you were constantly put down?" Her shifting use of the pronoun "you" accentuates the fact that identification is often an act of crossing over to merge the "I" with the "you." Many readers, black and white, were intensely horrified and moved when Henry's father Augustus, a heroic moral force in this world, is captured and sold back into slavery after he had worked so hard to free himself and his family. One white woman explained how an understated narrative voice could have such a strong emotional impact upon her: "I was overwhelmed by the idea that free people could be sold back, by how evil people could be. There's this whole underlying evil that provokes a moral outrage in the reader. It's a very hands-off narrative presence, stating the facts, yet the reaction of horror is very strong." Without resorting to the sentimentalism of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* Jones nonetheless succeeded in moving readers—not merely to pity but also to outrage—possibly because of his expert use of pacing and understatement to let the horrors speak for themselves.

While formal strategies did not have a uniform effect upon these readers, race did have some effect in complicating and intensifying empathy when it occurred. One Asian American woman admitted the distancing factor of race: "As non–African American people, our emotions when reading about slavery will be different from someone whose ancestors went through this." A white woman in the same Newton group disagreed, citing the common bonds of humanity: "Why would it be different? When Moses was bought and had to strip, I felt his individual shame powerfully." But this group, composed largely of Jews, seemed to concede the Asian American woman's point when they acknowledged their own more intense connection to stories about the Holocaust: "There's a kind of immediacy to it being in your family." The intensity of empathetic responses did seem to have some connection to race, since the two groups who voiced the strongest emotional responses to the novel were the racially mixed book club and the group of African American women. Some of the black women's harsher criticism of the book might have been connected to the painful nature of their identification with its characters. The African American group leader began a discussion thread when she remarked, "I was too upset when Mildred and Augustus were killed, I had to put it down. . . . [That was] the most inhuman part." Another black reader added that she connected with Augustus's pain almost as if he were her own direct ancestor: "That Henry didn't appreciate his parents'

sacrifice for him, that was hard. I wanted to whip my niece and nephew's ass and say to them that 'you'd better appreciate the sacrifice!'" Furthermore, the black women's group understood the pain and inner conflict of the black slaveholders, whereas the white readers seemed to reserve their empathy only for the slaves or former slaves. When one African American woman called the light-skinned slave owner Fern "a horrible person," other black readers in the group countered that Fern "had so much rage inside of her" and drew upon their knowledge of fictional and real "tragic mulattoes" to empathize with her plight: "With the light-bright, half-white, it's often the case. Lena Horne, Halle Berry, Mariah Carey don't fit in with either race; it's kind of hard being lost between those worlds. I thought of [Nella] Larsen's *Passing* for Fern." The greater degree of empathy and understanding among the black readers seems to confirm philosophers' claims that empathy is fueled by cultural familiarity and shared experience.

Yet one need not have the same lived experience to identify with a black character. I contend that the diversity of a reader's friendship base also adds significantly to the potential for empathy. The experience of empathy was intensified for four "thirtysomething" white readers of a racially mixed book club whose three other members were Ethiopian American, South Asian (Indian) American, and biracial (African American/Filipino). Building bridges across race is in fact part of the project of their book club and their lives beyond the club (for example, the Afro-Asian leader of the group frequently discussed her white lesbian partner). During this discussion, she also shared a story about how she and her white partner were threatened in a southern town by racist and homophobic locals, thus testifying to the realities of bigotry in the present. Possibly because they regularly feel and express solidarity with their groupmates of color, these white book-club members spent a longer time talking about their empathy for the black characters than did the whites in monoracial groups. Most of the white book clubs felt sympathy for Augustus after he was sold back into slavery, perhaps because they identified with him so strongly as a man who deeply valued freedom, a key American value. However, only members of the all-black and multiracial groups identified with Augustus as a parent whose traitorous son Henry's conduct caused him more pain than his own enslavement. One white woman in the multiracial group echoed the comments of the black women's group: "When Augustus and Mildred went to meet Henry in the wagon and he wouldn't show up—ooohh, that was so sad. I sympathized with Augustus a great deal." These white women concurred with their Indian groupmate who found it "heartbreaking" that Augustus had to decide between freeing his wife or his son. Concerning the moment of Augustus's capture, one white social worker expressed a strongly visceral form of identification, underscoring the power of fictional narrative to put readers in the place of another: "I wanted to jump out of bed and scream, it was so horrible. I couldn't take it. You hear about these stories, but when you're in the person's life

with them, it took me to a different place." Rather than emphasizing their own historical distance from the text by extolling "how far we've come" from this antebellum southern world of racial discrimination, another of the white women said, "This legalization of discrimination, it was so recent, so close to us that it freaks me out." A few other white women in the monoracial clubs sometimes made isolated comments similar to these, but they did not match the consistency and intensity of the conversation among this interracial group of women. All of the members of that group participated avidly and equally, and the tone was one of relaxed intimacy rather than that of a forced interracial "encounter experience." The seemingly effortless consensus and conviviality that this interracial group exhibited could be viewed as a significant achievement within the landscape of socially segregated Boston.

I have thus far been investigating the effects of textual form as well as community upon the experience of empathy, but it is also important to consider how a reader's interpretation of a text and his or her emotional responses are intertwined. Empathy with an African American fictional character is obviously affected by how the reader understands that character's behavior within the larger fabric of the novel, and thus by how the reader interprets and evaluates the novel's messages about race. As I suggested earlier in the chapter, the post-soul themes of *The Known World* require a closer look because they advance an anti-essentialist argument about race. Some readers—black and white—were emotionally and intellectually frustrated by the destabilization of racial categories and were unable to "read race" in Jones's book. Other readers—black and white—applauded Jones's project to examine race as a socially constructed symptom of an unequal distribution of power, rather than a marker of inherent human difference. While these differences in interpretation and response cut across the racial identities of readers, the conversations of the black and white monoracial groups were different enough to warrant analysis of how race shapes the contemporary reception of slavery narratives.

Publishing a novel about free black slave owners was clearly a politically bold move for an African American writer in 2003, particularly in the context of the Republican backlash against affirmative action policies to atone for racial discrimination. Some of the liberal readers in Boston in fact worried that the subject matter might provide fodder for conservative arguments against slavery reparations and civil rights legislation to combat discrimination. As Alice Randall intimated in her commentary on the novel's popularity among white readers, it is certainly possible that this novel garnered extra press attention for bringing to light black complicity with the system of slavery, however small in scale. In the novel itself, Jones distinguishes himself from the conservative backlash by wryly addressing the fact that his subject matter might appeal to racist whites. In *The Known World,* the Canadian pamphleteer who interviews Fern about Henry

Townsend comments that his most successful pamphlet by far, selling out ten printings, is the one concerned with "Negroes who had owned other Negroes." With self-reflexive irony, Jones imaginatively projects that the rare "antique" pamphlet sold in 1994 "for $1.7 million to an automobile manufacturer in Germany," implying that such a find has value in a capitalist economy with historical roots in white supremacy.[20] Unlike neoliberals and neoconservatives with a "race-blind" ideology, Jones is pessimistic about a present or future free of racial oppression: "I see no reason in not saying 'I'm a black man,' because I'll never be just a plain old 'man' in America. That may happen 200 years from now, but it's not going to happen in my lifetime."[21] In response to Orlando Patterson's op-ed piece in the *New York Times* arguing that "race doesn't matter anymore," Jones said bluntly, "I tend to discard stuff like that and go on. . . . My whole attitude about the race thing just is not very positive. . . . I don't think it'll ever be 'morning in America' [a catchphrase of Ronald Reagan's]."[22] Like many other African American writers, Jones remains race-conscious, anatomizing the relationship between racism and power in the past and present.[23]

Despite his acknowledgment of the recalcitrance of race in America, Jones's post-soul concerns are also evident in *The Known World,* in which he troubles the rigid division between black and white that often undergirds slave narratives and neo-slavery fiction. He offers readers a panoply of white, free black, and slave characters whose attitudes toward slavery run the gamut from complicity to resistance. Because of its attention to individual difference within and across the color line, Jones's novel avoids a simple equation of race with a moral stance. The moral center of the book is clearly Henry's father Augustus, a man of deep integrity who frees himself and his family, helps others to escape slavery, and dies resisting his reenslavement. Yet resistance in this novel is not located solely among slaves and former slaves. Significantly, Jones draws parallels between several minor characters—black and white—who renounce their participation in the slaveholding system or who die trying: Caldonia's wealthy black father, whose wife poisons him for trying to free their "legacy"; sheriff Skiffington's father, who resigns his overseer position because of a foreboding dream; Barnum Kinsey, a poor white patroller who flees Virginia disgusted by the perversion of justice; and Caldonia's brother Calvin, who finds a home with Caldonia's escaped slaves in Washington, D.C. In Jones's fictional world, resistance to slavery transcends categories of race and class and is attributed to the character of individuals with the courage to buck the system.

Unlike most African American depictions of slavery, the novel devotes less attention to the resisters than to those blacks—even former slaves themselves—who embrace an economic system supported by an ideology of race hierarchy. While many of the black slaveholding class, such as Fern and Caldonia, are light-skinned and free-born, Henry Townsend was a slave until age fourteen and is notably "two

shades darker" than his own slave Moses.[24] In a departure from the majority of slave narratives, Jones suggests that the experience of being enslaved does not automatically lead a person to abhor the institution on moral grounds. Henry and Moses abandon all conscience in their zeal to become masters, to ensure their own power and economic prosperity. Boldly sympathizing with Lucifer in Milton's *Paradise Lost,* Henry would "rather rule in hell than serve in heaven."[25] Just as Milton sought to reenvision the devil as a fallen angel engaged in heroic struggle, Jones aims to complicate a reading of Henry or Moses as unsympathetic villains by demonstrating how both have been warped by their environment, by their inability to imagine a world outside of the frame that has been constructed for them. Henry's virtuous parents agonize over whether he would have been a different man had they been able to free him sooner from the influence of his white master William Robbins. Jones gives further proof of the corrupting influence of slavery through a flashback to Moses's past. Although Moses appears to be a cruel, self-serving man who abandons his wife and child in a bid to become his owner Caldonia's new husband, readers are given a glimpse of his younger self as a tenderhearted slave who tries to protect a lame slave woman, Bessie, of whom he says, "We is one as a family."[26] Rather than celebrating an essential black soul or depicting all blacks as family, *The Known World* examines the perverting effects of a desire for power upon human solidarity—within and across races.

Jones's novel takes on a naturalist tone with its emphasis on the controlling effects of the environment upon behavior, but it also implies that exceptional individuals can resist the ways in which their lives have been framed by racist ideology and their vision closed off to other possibilities. A recurring image in the text attests to the power of race as a frame and to the human desire to resist confining boundaries. Caldonia's brother Calvin was born into a free black slave-owning family, but he detests slavery. Gazing upon his treasured photograph of a white family and dog in New York, Calvin idealizes this northern world as a space of freedom and possibility:

> They seemed to live on a farm in that city and on either side of their house Calvin could see trees and empty space rolling off and down. . . . In the front yard, alone, was a dog looking off to the right. . . . From the first second Calvin had seen the photograph he had been intrigued by what had caught the dog's attention and frozen him forever. . . . There was a whole world off to the right that the photograph had not captured. Whatever it was might be powerful enough, wonderful enough, to wait until Calvin could arrive and see it and know it for himself.[27]

Frustrated that he cannot convince his sister Caldonia to free her slaves after Henry's death, Calvin returns to the image of the photo: "She could not see any of those thirty or so human beings living as free people any more than she could see from Virginia all that the frozen dog in the New York photograph was seeing."[28]

If one views the frame as a metaphor for race, the photograph hints at the hope for freedom that will break open the conceptual framework in which people are trapped and frozen. The visual nature of this image is pointed, for it suggests that race is a lens that warps our sight and prevents us from imagining an unknown future world "off camera." Although most of the black and white characters in the novel are thus blinded by the racial lens through which they see the known world, a rarer few seek out the unknown. In disgust after witnessing Augustus's capture, poor white Barnum Kinsey resigns from his job as a patroller and flees Virginia to remake his life in the West, and Alice and Calvin end up finding a space for freedom in Washington, D.C. Significantly, neither complicity nor resistance is wholly determined by racial identity.

By refusing to provide a simplified mapping of racial difference onto clear moral coordinates of good and evil, this post-soul novel challenged the expectations of black and white readers in my survey group. My reception analysis calls into question Alice Randall's assessment that black readers unequivocally reject the book for the same political reasons, while white readers adore it for assuaging white guilt about slavery. In support of Randall's argument, one could point to the fact that *The Known World* garnered paltry sales on the leading Web site devoted to black readers, the African American Literature Book Club (aalbc.com), despite being a national best seller.[29] Members of the black women's book club that I visited voiced stronger politically motivated criticisms of the novel than did white readers or the multiracial group. However, the African American group as a whole expressed diverse points of view, some grappling with the complexity of Jones's ideas about race, and others rejecting his post-soul strategies outright. Their heated debates give the lie to any idea of a singular "black response" to the text. The white readers expressed similarly wide-ranging interpretations and evaluations. A few seemed to confirm the black readers' concerns that the novel would give whites the occasion to pin blame on blacks, but the book more often provoked soul-searching conversations among these white book clubs about white responsibility for racism. The anti-essentialist strategies of the novel confused a few readers, but most whites were able to grasp the message that race is a fiction. Some whites misread Jones's emphasis on individual difference to conclude that slavery was simply a moral problem deep in the past rather than an institutionalized system of white supremacy that continues to influence our own society. While a reader's race certainly did not predict her response, some patterns of discussion emerged that were tied to racial discourses and communities.

When I visited a Cambridge book club of ten African American female professionals, negative responses to *The Known World* at first outweighed the positive, and their criticism was partially rooted in a critique of the position of African Americans in the mainstream literary marketplace. The organizer noted that she chose this book "reluctantly": "It was incumbent on me to read it because of the

attention it got, but I came to it conflicted, because when there is a story that garners interest in the mainstream it always has to do with slavery. That's what I'm sick of. And that doesn't take nothing away from his skill and his talent and originality." The most outspoken critic in the group echoed Alice Randall's points: "I know the white literary world thought that this was really cool. I couldn't really find the strength to it. Maybe one or two blacks in history owned some slaves. White folks latched on to that. I really think it's about their total guilt. They think slavery is the only history we've got. I want mainstream America to see African Americans as bigger than that." For these readers, Jones's novel and its success must be read in light of the problematic fetishizing of slavery and the resulting erasure of other stories about the diversity of African American experiences. A dissenting thread ran among the group, however, as two women championed the book for "reconciling with our past." As one said, "I still believe slavery should be right in front, we shouldn't forget. I bought this book as a gift for my relatives because it creates a platform for dialogue about how the past is connected with our present. Now that I know that black slave-owners existed, I can understand some of the behavior that we have toward each other." While the group had divergent opinions about the value of slavery fiction, many read the novel's plot as inextricably linked to a larger political discourse about blame and responsibility: "After *Roots* came out, they [whites] felt vindicated that blacks already owned slaves in Africa. That became the myth of the slave trade." These readers' responses were thus shaped by their concerns about how and why whites read African American texts, and by their recognition of the political power of fiction to shape attitudes about the past and present.

Beyond their shared concerns about the mainstream reception of Jones's controversial subject, these African American women readers disagreed over whether to praise or criticize Jones's post-soul strategy to highlight "unlikable" and "unredeemed" black characters. Expressing a preference for heroic narratives about black solidarity and resistance to white oppression, a few were critical of Jones's purposeful deviation from the codes of the slave-narrative genre. As one woman admitted, "Perhaps I have been romantic about slavery. I have seen so many stories of redemption, triumph against odds, stories like Harriet Tubman. There was no similar triumph here of a person or spirit. Moses didn't lead nobody nowhere. Even though Augustus is the moral compass, they didn't treat him right. There's supposed to be some redemption." Jones's unromantic analysis of ruptures in black communal feeling violated this woman's sense of what she believes that African American narratives are "supposed to" provide for black readers: pride in the moral righteousness and fortitude of black people. Similarly upset by the novel's anti-essentialist sensibility, another reader complained that "Jones takes whites' supposed bad traits and gives them to blacks" by creating characters such as the black slave trader who sells Augustus. The relative paucity of heroic black

characters thus made it difficult for some black readers to find anyone with whom to identify.

This desire for positive images of blackness—a common refrain in African American cultural criticism from the 1960s through the 1980s—was not the dominant response of the book club, however, for many read the novel's characterization of black slave owners as essential to Jones's larger critique of the entrapping effects of socialization. As the session leader replied, "It's the institution of slavery. It doesn't matter your color, if people have a vested interest. It corrupts everyone and everything. You could see the title *The Known World* as being trapped in your psychological state as well as in the physical world. It's about social boundaries, what you know inhibits where you go" and what you can imagine. Others in the group qualified this reading of the novel as a grim naturalist text by emphasizing that some black characters—Alice, Augustus, Celeste, and Stamford—were able to see outside of the boundaries of the "known world" to achieve limited redemption, freedom, or moral transcendence. One woman pointed out that "Alice's art tries to redefine the world at the end," and the book-club leader weighed in that "she was Harriet Tubman if you were looking for one. She got herself out, plotting all along." By debating and revising each other's comments in this way, the group collectively voiced a nuanced interpretation of the novel's goals—to underscore the corrupting influence of slavery without denying the ability of some African Americans to transcend the constraints that antebellum society placed on their own self-actualization. While some black readers wanted the lines between good and evil—and black and white—to be more clearly defined, others appreciated Jones's anti-essentialist representation because it illuminates past and present tensions within the African American community—"that stuff that we never seem to be able to settle within our own race," as one woman put it.

These black readers produced diverse and complex readings of Jones's text, but how did white readers respond to its post-soul attempts to disrupt facile forms of "reading race"? Did this novel appeal to white desires to divert blame and responsibility for slavery, as the black readers feared? Among the conversations of five book clubs with white members, many readers commended the book for its attempt to break down racial typecasting: "There are no stereotypes here. The slave was certainly not monolithic in this book. You learn all their quirks; some have toothaches and others eat dirt. It was a collection of individuals with all the oddities that people have." Another woman applauded Jones's refusal of Hollywood dichotomies: "Rather than a good guys/bad guys tale, here there are many hues of good and bad." Her choice of the word "hues" indicates her understanding that those moral dichotomies are often racialized. A small number of readers, however, were wholly confounded by Jones's anti-essentialist flouting of the racial types that people their worldview. Just as the text challenged those black readers who desired an equation of blackness with triumphant heroism,

Jones's critique of the white liberal characters dismayed one elderly white reader in Wellesley, who had expected white Sheriff Skiffington to become a noble savior rather than a lecherous murderer. The absence of white heroes also disturbed another woman in the Wellesley senior citizens' book club, who asked if the text was biased because "all the evil here was created by white people." While black readers worried that the text might be read as blaming blacks, this lone white reader implied that the novel places too much blame on whites, even the "noble and good ones." These few readers with rigid ideas about white goodness were clearly disturbed by the novel; indeed, they might have been similarly disturbed by the great majority of texts written by African Americans that often undermine the myth of white heroism.

Rather than focusing on the white characters, the majority of the white readers were far more interested in the black slave-owning characters. Jones's quest to disentangle race and class by depicting well-educated and wealthy blacks caused some confusion for one white liberal, who was unable to visualize a black slave owner: "Caldonia was just like a white woman, and I had trouble remembering she wasn't white." This confusion over reading the race of the black slave owners is perhaps justified given that almost none of these black or white readers knew of this historical anomaly before reading this book. In one disturbing strain of commentary, a few white readers judged the black slaveholders more harshly than they did white slave holders. Four white readers (out of forty-five total) actively tried to deflect blame for slavery, as the black readers expected. One of these four voiced the defensive mantra that "to this day in Africa they still have slaves, so that Africans sold other Africans to whites." These women, two of whom were in a Newton book group of retired schoolteachers, were quick to villainize the black slaveholders and "wannabes" like Moses, whom they regarded as almost inhumanly evil. One former teacher made the astonishing claim that "in some ways blacks owning slaves was *even more cruel* than the reverse, white slave-owners, because there was an economic reason for that, that the economy would not survive without slavery." Thankfully another member of the group shouted out, "But look at how slavery bent Moses!" However, no one raised the more obvious counterpoint to her racist logic: Doesn't William Robbins—the white plantation owner who hypocritically claims to love his black mistress and children—deserve more condemnation than his protégé Henry or Moses, who are desperately seeking to better their abject station in life? Even more problematic was the fact that a few of these retired schoolteachers and ardent Democrats used their judgmental conversation about the novel's black slave owners to launch into a critique of their own black teenage former students, whom they perceive as full of "rancor and animosity," demanding special treatment with a "chip on their shoulders." The displacement of guilt evident in their reading of the novel was thus informed by their own defensive posture in regard to contemporary

race relations—their fear that aggressive blacks are now seizing "entitlement" from beleaguered whites, even the "good liberal" ones.

This group's obviously racist readings were not the norm, but another group of elderly suburban readers misread the text in another way by asserting a color-blind message contrary to Jones's politics. In one sense, this group of readers associated with Wellesley's Council on Aging certainly got the text's anti-essentialist point. Of the black slaveholders, one woman summed up the statements of others when she said: "You figure out that they are just like other people [by which she means whites]. Human nature is human nature—they were slaveholders like any other." Another reader added that "the author's point is that black people are members of the human race, and when they change their economic status, there's good and bad in all of them, as there is in all humanity." Their final conclusion to the conversation, however, took a turn toward erasing race too simply: "It comes down to personalities, regardless of race. Skiffington turned out bad." Jones's novel certainly sheds light on the darker side of human nature by asserting that all human beings, regardless of race, can be seduced by money, power, and status. However, reducing everything to a matter of personality—and the moral ability to recognize wrong from right—ignores the state-sanctioned systems of power that led whole populations of purportedly "good" white people to condone racialized cruelty. By attributing Skiffington's murder of Mildred not to his whiteness but only to his individual badness, these wealthy white readers inadvertently absolved themselves from collective responsibility.

In contrast to these color-blind readers who see slavery only as a moral wrong, other whites were able to recognize one of the main themes of the book: that slavery is essentially about power, not simply bad morals. As one white group leader of the Jewish Newtonites Group noted, "It's more of a power thing than a racial thing in the minds of these black slave owners. It can happen to all groups of people who gain power, identifying with the aggressor." This recognition tended to coincide with an understanding that race has been a tenacious concept because it is fueled by a continuing imbalance of power. The group leader above also gave testimony of the persistence of racism in the present, telling of a wealthy black friend who is regularly mistaken for a servant when strangers come to her door. The racially mixed group had an even more pessimistic take on humanity: "It's a bad time to be reading this book because it's hard to feel hopeful about things getting better. These things are happening all over our planet; it's all about power, and it's not shifting in the right direction." Distressed by the Republican win in the 2004 presidential election, a white social worker analogized black slave owners to people in low tax brackets "thinking they can be rich someday, so they protect that way of life" by voting for George W. Bush. Their recognition of the harsh realities of racial inequality and economic disparity echoed Edward P. Jones's quip that "it'll never be morning in America."

Contrary to what some of the black readers assumed, many of the white readers understood and applauded Jones's racial politics in the same terms that the black readers used themselves. To one white woman's defensive assertion that Africans owned other blacks and were "part and parcel of the oppression," another woman retorted, "Al Sharpton would see those as fighting words." Her ventriloquism is interesting here—she isn't quite willing to fight herself, but at least she voices a black man's critique. Similarly, another book-club leader imagined an African American criticism of the book: "If we were lucky enough to have black people in this group, I wonder what their reaction would be. They might say, 'What does this little group of black slave-owners have to do with the real history of white slave-owners? It doesn't matter in comparison.'" Several spoke directly to Randall's charge, arguing that "this book certainly didn't make me feel any better about being white." Many appreciated Jones's criticism of white liberal hypocrisy, pointing out that the "northern antislavery Winifred felt she was enlightened, but she wasn't above it. The sign they posted for the return of Minerva alluded that they owned her, like a dog." Rather than identifying with Winifred Skiffington—who would seem to be their own counterpart in the novelistic world—these northern white liberals keenly understood why the slave Minerva fled from Winifred and rejected her false claim of kinship.

Although a few white readers used the novel to deflect blame away from whites, in fact the opposite response was dominant in the five discussions that I witnessed, where a frank examination of white responsibility was far more prevalent. Feeling personally implicated or hailed by the text, many readers admitted that slavery and labor exploitation continue to be practiced globally while Americans turn a blind eye, reveling in the consumer goods that such exploitation makes available: "T-shirts are so cheap it means that somebody is working for nothing." Reading this novel gave the white women in the multiracial group a new perspective on the plight of illegal immigrants and other underpaid workers in the service sector: "There are various levels of servitude going on today. What about Asian immigrants with few options but to give pedicures for their life's work? Here we are looking back on this as in the past, but what will people say of us in 150 years? Will people say it's a human-rights issue?" Another white woman in that group brought it all back to the power of white dominance, rendered as a collective "we": "It was painful to see what *we* are capable of, [because of] accepted behavior norms. It was what people did. The ugliness of the world [depicted in this book] was hard to bear at times, but this is an important part of our history. We need to look it in the eye." Although the novel's historical setting could have easily allowed white northern readers to treat these problems as dead and gone, some worked to connect the legacy of slavery to the present-day conditions facing many African Americans, just as the black readers did. One white teacher at an inner-city high school sadly reported a conversation she had with a black student who knows several gang

members: "He told of how going to jail made you feel respected, a big guy, a hero. There's not much to live for outside of jail. His friends have absolutely no self-worth and are only to get it from murder. I look back at this book, and how our behavior is historic." Unlike those whites who are determined to end affirmative action, this woman attests to why it is still urgently necessary.

The insights that these white readers gained from *The Known World* prompted several to seek further connections with African American coworkers and acquaintances. A member of the black women's book group remarked that her "white colleague read this book, and it gave her a new perspective and the opportunity to share that with me." Recognizing the homogeneity of her Newton book club's point of view, one white woman invited a black coworker to discuss *The Known World* with them: "I really wished to talk to a black person about their understanding of history, to see if they had anything different to say, if they had learned something that we had not." Although her comment reflects a problematic belief that a black individual represents the voice of all black people, her invitation is still rooted in a sincere desire to look at things from an African American perspective. Regardless, the black woman rejected their invitation with the comment, "I don't read books like that," echoing other black readers' distaste for slavery fiction, or perhaps politely avoiding an uncomfortable situation in which she might be forced to represent difference for these white readers. A different group of black women in my larger study recalled an unsuccessful attempt to invite white coworkers to join their book club; the whites were too afraid to park their cars in Roxbury, an urban black neighborhood. A significant element of these similar stories is that blacks and whites in Boston are often "colleagues" or "coworkers" but meet far less often in private social spaces where racial issues might be discussed productively and lasting friendships might be built. In my larger study of twenty-one Boston book clubs reading African American literature, only two contained both black and white members, which reflects the larger social segregation of Boston, in which public or private cross-racial dialogue about race is relatively uncommon. Yet it is nonetheless significant that reading books led some to seek change in their segregated social worlds, as did the aforementioned group who decided to reach out to the interracial cultural coalition ACT Roxbury after reading Jones's novel.

My reception study of *The Known World* revealed that black and white readers falsely assumed that those on the other side of the color line would read the text in a univocal way—reflecting the "white" or "black" perspective, in the singular. Among all the book groups reading *The Known World,* only one man bucked this trend when he complained that inherent in their musings about "the reaction of black people" is "the false idea that all blacks or whites think alike." As Edward P. Jones was at pains to illustrate in *The Known World,* essentialist ideas about blackness and whiteness can prevent a deeper understanding of the tension between

socialization and individuality. As his novel suggests, any human being can become entrapped in a world and a circumscribing worldview, but a rarer few struggle to read outside the frame of race and to imagine an unknown world of racial justice and equality.

Race as Place in *Caucasia*: Boston in Black and White

Like *The Known World,* Danzy Senna's novel *Caucasia* is concerned with the circumscribing effects of place and the imbrication of place and race. Experimenting with the anti-essentialist idea that "race isn't so much a physical condition but a geographic location,"[30] Senna gives readers a visually ambiguous mixed-race protagonist who experiences a chameleonic identity shift from black to white, based on her relocation from black and racially mixed communities in the South End of Boston to a white New Hampshire town, where she passes as a white Jew. When her white mother and black father split up, Birdie is forced to choose between two segregated worlds and two distinct racial identities. During her sojourn in the white space of New Hampshire, aptly referred to as "Caucasia," Birdie feels rootless and homeless. In search of a place to belong, she flees back to "Chocolate City" (Roxbury) in search of her father and sister and eventually to the multiracial space of Berkeley, California. Senna's novel thus emphasizes the virtual absence of integrated spaces in New England in the 1970s and 1980s and invites Bostonian readers in the twenty-first century to reflect upon the racial landscape of their past and present. Despite the fact that *Caucasia* was published six years before I met with these twenty-one Boston book clubs, Senna's novel was the second most selected choice, largely because of its local setting.

Echoing Senna's exploration of the connections between race and place, my analysis of Boston book clubs reading *Caucasia* foregrounds the impact of locality—particularly the segregated or integrated worlds in which people live—upon reading. Of the five book clubs that I observed discussing the novel, two all-white groups were based in the affluent (and 88 percent white) suburb of Newton, one group of white women in their twenties and thirties drew members from urban neighborhoods of Dorchester, Cambridge, and Brookline, and another all-white group met at a public library in the integrated yet rapidly gentrifying neighborhood of Boston's South End. The only interracial group included a black Brazilian woman, a white group leader with a Latino ex-husband and bicultural children, and white members from the multiethnic Boston neighborhood of Jamaica Plain, where Danzy Senna herself grew up. (See table 4 for a demographic summary of the five *Caucasia* book clubs and table 1 for racial demographics of Greater Boston's neighborhoods.) Since these five book clubs were intimately familiar

Table 4. Book Clubs discussing *Caucasia*

Book Club Title	Newton Women's Book Club	Newton Jewish Couples Book Club	Urban Young Women's Book Club	Jamaica Plain Book Club	South End Library Book Club
Race	All whites	All whites (incl. 9 Jews)	All whites	6 whites, 1 black Brazilian	All whites
Number and gender	8 women	6 women, 4 men	5 women	7 women	10 women, 3 men
Age range	52–62	57–68	25–40	46–57	30s to 70s
Occupations	Educ. administrators, teachers, editors, management consultant	Business exec., real estate, teachers, ecologist, software engineer	Grad. students, scientist, consultant	Personal trainer, nurse, manager, public health consultant, recruitment officer	Artist, teachers, public health, retirees
Locality (residence)	Newton	Newton	Brookline; Cambridge; Boston (Dorchester)	Boston (Jamaica Plain, South End, West Roxbury), Newton	Boston (South End)

Source: Demographic questionnaire filled out by all book group participants

with Senna's setting, their conversations moved seamlessly from literary analysis to discussions about the state of race relations in Boston, from the 1970s busing crisis (discussed in the novel) through to the present. Whereas the book clubs reading *The Known World* concentrated on analyzing the style and sociological themes of Jones's historical novel, the immediacy of *Caucasia*'s subject led to far more experiential conversations, with Senna's book serving as a provocation for analyzing their own "known world"—Boston and its environs.

Although my reading of *Caucasia* foregrounds the context in which people make sense of what they read, the text's form and characterization strategies are also relevant to its reception. The genre of the coming-of-age narrative, coupled with Senna's post-soul explorations of race as performative and contingent upon environment, had a significant impact upon reader response.[31] By depicting Birdie's soul-searching and often painful adolescent development in first-person narrative voice, Senna invites readers to identify strongly with her and to care about the racism, color-consciousness, and segregation that literally tears Birdie's family in half. Many readers noted that Birdie was such an emotionally rich character that they could feel her pain viscerally; one noted, "I was so upset by the scene with the father and the policeman and Birdie." Female and feminist readers often empathized specifically with her experience as a teenage girl struggling to define her identity in relation to other female models. The book group of women in their twenties compared Birdie's encounters with racism to their own experiences with gender discrimination, and a few male readers were able to identify with Birdie by remembering their own troubled adolescence. The groups I witnessed, however, did not dwell on gender or universal adolescent experience but quickly made their way to confronting a central question of the text: Is race a fiction? And if so, why is it such a powerful force, capable of ripping families apart? The genre of the post-soul bildungsroman encouraged them to grapple with the specificity of Birdie's situation as an ambiguously raced person who confounds onlookers' attempts to read race in an essentializing way.

Using multiraciality to question essentialist ideas about race is a central goal of much of Danzy Senna's work. In her satirical essay "The Mulatto Millennium," Senna jokingly remarks that "pure breeds (at least the black ones) are out and hybridity is in," but her goal is more pessimistic than some proponents of the multiracial movement, for she does not celebrate miscegenation or naively believe that mulattoes are "going to bring about the end of race as we know it."[32] The daughter of a "Mayflower white" mother and African American/Mexican father, Senna herself could easily serve as a poster girl for the multiracial movement.[33] Senna's parents raised their children in Jamaica Plain, one of the few racially mixed neighborhoods in Boston, and "fought with doctors at the hospital where she was born so they could write 'Brown' under the racial category on her birth certificate."[34] Despite her mixed-race origins, she argues in her essay

that "in all this mulatto fever, people seem to have forgotten that racism exists with or without miscegenation."[35] Weary of the fact that multiracialism is now a hip marketing fad, Senna satirically declares herself a "Postlatto" and implicitly questions "post-race" or "post-ethnic" positions.[36] Figuring race as a function of environment and community offers a freeing shift away from the essentializing view of race as a unitary identity inhering in the body, but *Caucasia* reminds that one may just as easily become trapped and fixed in a place as in a body, particularly in the racially segregated landscape of much of the United States. In comparison to other utopian figurations of multiracial or mestizo identity, Senna implies that for the black and white "mulatto" child, dwelling in the borderlands is often a fantasy rather than a reality.[37] By setting her novel in what she calls the "apartheid state" of 1970s and 1980s New England, Senna challenges idealizations of America as a melting pot.[38]

In some ways, the character Birdie is the post-soul "cultural mulatto" figure expressing allegiance to many cultures. Birdie's childhood is marked by her immersion in African American music (Roberta Flack, Stevie Wonder, and Earth, Wind, and Fire) and double-dutch jump-roping. As a "white" girl, she treasures relics from her "black" childhood—the "Negrobilia box" given to her by her father, which includes a James Brown eight-track cassette, a black Barbie, and an Afro pick. Yet Birdie has also quite literally ingested white cultural practices, namely the well-balanced but bland dinners of "white rice, broccoli, creamed chicken, and asparagus" that her mother serves.[39] As children home-schooled by their mother in the finer points of English grammar, Birdie and her sister Cole discover that they "talk like white girls" when they read an article on Ebonics.[40] Later on, with her white friends in New Hampshire, Birdie "sway[s] [her] hips to the sound of heavy metal, learn[s] to wear blue eyeliner," and adopts expressions such as "awesome" and "bummer" from her white prep-school friend Nick.[41]

Birdie's hybrid cultural inheritance disturbs either/or conceptions of race, but Senna goes even further by treating race as a social construction dependent upon the dominant behavioral scripts of one's habitus. In an interview, Senna commented: "My experience has constantly shown me the absurdity of the whole idea of biological difference. . . . [R]ace isn't so much a physical condition but a geographic location. What Birdie is depends on where she is."[42] But instead of championing this racial malleability, Senna shows that the cost of such a chameleonic shifting is often invisibility and self-alienation. Birdie Lee can never occupy both sides of herself simultaneously; her identity is ascribed as either black or white in alternation, depending upon whether she finds herself in the geographical space of Caucasia (New Hampshire) or Chocolate City (Roxbury). At the end of the novel, Senna uses Birdie's voice to question the current idealization of multiracial identity: "They say that you don't have to choose. But the thing is, you do. Because there are consequences if you don't."[43] Continually torn

asunder by racism, Birdie feels as if her two halves can never cohere into one self: "I felt myself to be incomplete, a gray blur . . . half a girl, half-caste, half-mast, and half-baked."[44] When she decides to abandon her white self to search for her black father, she describes it as "killing one girl in order to let the other one free. It hurt, this killing."[45] Such a violent schism between parts of the self presents a striking contrast to idealizations of multiraciality.[46]

Central to Senna's commentary on racial mutability and performativity is Birdie's vision of a place called "Elemeno," a fantasy land imagined by her sister Cole. The chameleonic Elemenos "were a shifting people, constantly changing their form, color, pattern, in a quest for invisibility. . . . [T]heir changing routine was a serious matter—less a game of make-believe than a fight for the survival of their species. . . . [T]heir power lay precisely in their ability to disappear into any surrounding.[47] While passing as white, Birdie enacts this childhood fantasy, living as a racial chameleon in a "perpetual state of reinvention."[48] Even earlier, Birdie first "learn[s] the art of changing" when she passes as black by adopting terms like "nigga," donning gold hoop earrings, and curling her hair to fit in at a Black Power school in Roxbury.[49] But even as a young girl, Birdie has reservations about Cole's Elemeno fable of mutability, asking, "What was the point of surviving if you had to disappear?"[50] Although she skillfully blends in at her white New Hampshire school by feathering her hair, wearing jelly shoes, and listening to the J. Geils Band, she feels invisible and erased.[51] In her whitewashed incarnation, Birdie yearns to be part of "the visible world" of color once again.[52] Here Senna suggests that the mulatto's potential for mutability can be a curse—an erasure of self—as well as a strategy for survival in a white-supremacist society. Birdie's chameleonic existence leaves her feeling like an alien in her own country, without a place of secure belonging, wondering if "placelessness" is the "only space [she] could possibly inhabit."[53] Although she leaves Caucasia to find a home with her lost African American father and biracial sister, when she finds her father his hollow "welcome home" rings false to her, and even her sister fails to complete her as she had hoped.[54] Signifying upon the experience of transplanted diasporic peoples, Senna deliberately chose a name for her protagonist—Birdie—that conjures up images of flight and migration rather than rootedness.

Yet subtle details suggest that Senna does not endorse escape from the United States to other possible homelands as a solution. In a post-soul move, *Caucasia* ironizes an earlier African American generation's romanticization of an originary African homeland or an idealized "mulatto nation" in South America. When Birdie rejoins her father, she finds a book on his desk about the history of Liberia, a country based on the concept of repatriation of African Americans to Africa. She asks herself "what the book mean[s]," but Liberia does not provide any satisfying answers to her search for identity.[55] Deck has similarly distanced

himself from the Afrocentric romanticism of the 1960s and 1970s generation; in his Afrocentric soul phase, Deck had escaped segregated Boston for the promise of Brazil, which he idealized as a "grand Mulatto Nation," only to have his utopian fantasy shattered.[56] He returns disillusioned that "the Brazilians were more racist than the Americans," since "everyone in the middle was obsessed with where they and their children would fall on the spectrum of color."[57] Thus *Caucasia* reminds that racial boundaries and hierarchies can be recalcitrant even when people live in spaces of confluence. By giving the space of whiteness prominence in her title, Senna implies that the United States remains the land of Caucasia, where people of color are often erased and homeless. *Caucasia* draws important attention to the virtual absence of black/white integrated spaces and communities in the United States and the wider world and suggests that one must face racism rather than seek escape to a home where racial conflict supposedly does not exist.

Senna's novel endorses an anti-essentialist view of race, yet without denying the continuing effects of racism worldwide. Birdie accepts her father's social-constructionist idea that "race is a complete illusion, make-believe . . . a costume" that we all wear.[58] Yet she reminds him that race is nonetheless a very powerful fiction with real consequences: "[I]f race is so make-believe, then why did I go with Mum? You gave me to Mum 'cause I looked white. You don't think that's real?"[59] I concur with the critic Gayle Wald, who argues that *Caucasia* "denies Birdie and the reader the fantasy of boundarylessness" and racial transcendence.[60] *Caucasia* details many incidents of everyday racism to underscore this point: an elderly couple and a policeman harass Deck and Birdie in Boston's Public Garden because they believe he is a sexual predator rather than simply the girl's father, color-conscious Carmen rejects Birdie for being too white-looking, Cole's racist white grandmother ignores her in favor of the whiter Birdie, and Birdie's white friends make racist jokes that she endures in painful silence.

Senna does not end her novel in a dystopian spirit, however, but tentatively gestures toward the possibility of a home for Birdie in the multi-ethnic space of Berkeley, California. In the last paragraph of the text, Birdie watches a school bus, filled with "black and Mexican and Asian and white" kids and a "cinnamon-skinned girl" like her. The bus "lurched forward, and the [girl's] face was gone with it, just a blur of yellow and black in motion."[61] This gesture of hope for a more racially integrated future in the mythic space of the West, however, is tentative, for the bus is lurching forward awkwardly, and the blurring of the colors and faces carries the negative connotation of erasure and loss. While Senna posits that an integrated space might be more freeing for Birdie, she hesitates to envision a borderland of peaceful intercultural exchange. Senna's novel about the persistence of the color line offers a reality check to people like the sociologist Orlando Patterson, who claimed that "by the middle of the next century, the social virus of

race will have gone the way of smallpox" due to miscegenation, cultural mixing, immigration, and residential integration.[62] *Caucasia* may be post-soul, but it is certainly not post-race. Although envisioning race as a place may help us to move beyond essentialism and biological notions of racial difference, Senna suggests that it is the place itself—racist America—that has to change in order to become a true homeland for all its citizens.

Senna's fictional exploration of race and place had a powerful impact upon these Bostonian readers because the novel quite literally hit them where they live. As I turn to analyzing the role of neighborhood and racial community upon readers' interpretations of the novel's racial politics, I want to emphasize a few points. These groups' diverse responses revealed not only the continued existence of racial segregation in the Boston area but also the development of more integrated friendship and workplace networks. In short, place did not totally predict these readers' responses, since their social connections did not always match the relative segregation or integration of their residential communities. Those white readers with ties to people of color, however, did read the text differently than those who had few such connections. One could say that these twenty-first-century readers are less constricted by place and race than are the characters in Senna's 1970s setting. Another surprising point is that the majority of the white readers were receptive rather than hostile to the novel's exposé of the psychology of whiteness. However, a few of the readers missed some of the lessons of *Caucasia* because they were either blinded to their own white privilege or enamored with ideologies of color-blindness or post-racial harmony.

Senna's novel takes pains to disrupt ideologies of racial essentialism, but some white readers were resistant to or confused by the fluidity of Birdie's identity. For example, several members of the South End library club described Birdie as "lying" when she was passing as white; as one man said, "She didn't believe the lies because she knew the truth behind it." A common refrain used to criticize racial passing, such a statement implies that the "truth" of Birdie's essential self is blackness, which should not be concealed from unsuspecting white onlookers. Another woman wondered "if Birdie will ever stop lying," as if to suggest that a biracial identity could not possibly be a true and authentic one. Ironically, these people who seem to require Birdie to choose a side live in the South End, one of the more diverse neighborhoods in Boston. A similar resistance to hybrid identities was voiced by a few members of both of the Newton book clubs, who continually referred to Birdie as a "white kid" and her sister Cole as "black," despite the fact that they share the same biracial heritage. As one man said, "Cole knows who she is," a pithy phrase that suggests she inhabits an essential and singular black self and that blackness is about being, not becoming or choosing. Cole is black to these readers (and to many of the characters in the novel as well) because she

looks black, despite her mixed parentage. Senna expressed dismay when a reviewer from the *New York Times* similarly imposed a binary racial rubric upon Cole and Birdie, calling them "sisters from an interracial marriage, one white and one black."[63] Senna bemoaned that she "had been under the impression that the book interrogated this exact simplistic notion,"[64] but some of the Boston readers could not fully appreciate her deconstruction of the black/white binary.

Since being forced to choose sides in this restricting binary rubric is the root of Birdie's heartache, it is illuminating to examine how some readers reacted to her final choice of a black identity. One of the Newton readers was incredulous and even incensed that Birdie turned her back on her whiteness: "I want to talk about her prejudices. Why does she accept only a black point of view? Is she really trying to claim black because it's looked down upon? Has she absorbed black self-hatred?" It is telling that this reader employs the conservative "reverse racism" discourse by first suggesting that Birdie is prejudiced against whiteness. This woman's own pro-white prejudices are apparent here. Rather than viewing a black identification as a sane political and emotional choice, she interprets Birdie's abandonment of the privileges of whiteness as tantamount to masochistic self-hatred.[65] When one of her group members pointed out that "[Birdie's] mother raised her as black," this woman countered with this declaration: "But that's not *real.* Her self-perception is different from how she looks." This white woman reader seems to need the reassurance of clear and legible racial categories, where the "real" phenotypical appearance matches the public identity, and therefore race can be easily read. Once again, Senna's own comments on how her book has been misread help to illuminate this reader's reaction: "For Birdie, there is no final answer to that question, 'What race are you?' . . . The people who try to answer this question for her are only revealing their own deepest desires and fears about the fiction we call race."[66]

In contrast to those who read race reductively, the majority of the white readers were fully able to grasp and even endorse Senna's belief in the fictionality and fluidity of race. Almost all of the groups cited Deck's belief that "race is a complete illusion, make-believe . . . a costume,"[67] and this passage was usually the only one read aloud from the novel. One woman in the Newton couples club asked, "Is she just going to switch costumes over and over? Maybe the point is that race doesn't or shouldn't define you so much." A woman in the South End library club disagreed with her groupmates who thought that Birdie was lying and instead viewed her changeability as a "reinvention through fashion" that underscores the performativity of race. The racially mixed group from Jamaica Plain reflected at length on the absurdity of socially constructed racial categories, citing the documentary video *The Illusion of Race* and their own experiences living in integrated communities and families; it's significant that two of them are

raising biracial children (white/Latino and white/black), and another has adopted Asian nieces. One of this group highlighted a subtle anti-essentialist point made by Senna's text: "It's an interesting irony in the end that Deck realizes that Birdie looks like his mother, and Birdie realizes that Cole looks like Sandy, but it took the whole book for them to notice these family resemblances across racial boundaries." Lamenting that racial identity and racist ideas are taught and imprinted upon children, this group felt strongly that biracial people should "not have to choose. You're just a person, a human being." The black Brazilian member of the group offered examples of the fluidity and "circulation" of her own mixed-race children, who identified with blacks and Indians when they lived in Kenya and now with Jews in Newton.

As *Caucasia* reminds us, however, there are hidden dangers in believing race to be a fiction; such a celebration of fluidity may "draw attention away from persisting inequality"[68] and minimize the importance of black solidarity as a tool of resistance. A few of the white readers in these book clubs were perhaps too optimistic about the possibility of a post-race or color-blind present or future. The aforementioned woman in the Newton couples club who was strongly invested in Birdie claiming her whiteness also celebrated rosy representations of multicultural harmony. Saddened by Senna's treatment of mixture as invisibility and erasure, she preferred the "empowering version of mixture" in James McBride's memoir *The Color of Water: A Black Man's Tribute to His White Mother.* Taking this woman's two seemingly contradictory strains of commentary together, one could argue that post-race treatments of America as a multicultural "family" are less threatening to conservative white readers than Senna's critique of ongoing racism and white privilege. Critical race theorists and legal scholars have made similar arguments about facile versions of multiculturalism that resurrect "color-blind" rhetoric and leave institutional racism unchallenged.[69]

Some readers in the Newton women's book club, for example, endorsed multiraciality by employing the familiar rhetoric of color-blindness. As one woman said, after invoking Tiger Woods as a multiracial icon, "I would think we all should be getting to the stage where the question [of race] would be irrelevant."[70] Even though she uses the subjunctive tense here and made many references to a racist present, she still seems to cling to the strategy of color-blindness as a panacea for racism: "The first time my kid described someone as black I felt I had failed." Two of her groupmates went on to rhapsodize about innocent color-blind children as an ideal. One was proud of her son for claiming that his beloved African American piano teacher "is not black!" when he was asked about her racial identity. The mother said that "he didn't distinguish at all because he loved her. That's the way it should be." Yet she didn't address the fact that the child's defensive marking of his loved one as "not black" could imply that he has already learned to devalue

that category. As I have discussed in the previous chapter, color-blindness could be called a particularly white way of seeing or, rather, *not-seeing.* Not all of the white readers saw things through the same lens, however. Another white member of the same book club resisted these "color-blind" sentiments, and her statement was the final word of their session: "I don't see that as a goal. In this racist world, I don't see that as realistic."

The tendency of some whites to minimize the recalcitrance of racism and racialization sometimes led to opposite and extreme readings of Senna's novel. One of the more reactionary voices in all of the book clubs, a retired white male English professor in the South End, offered a neoconservative reading of the novel that de-emphasized the existence of white racism. In his view, "Birdie is a victim of the black kids" (not white society), and "Sheila is a victim of her own imaginary desire to be a victim of white society." He saw no evidence of white racism in the text and seemed to believe all such claims are "imaginary." Collapsing the novelist Senna with her character Birdie, he argued that Senna is complaining too much about the difficulties of being racially mixed because "she hasn't been injured by her own past—she's well-balanced and creative." This tactic of noting only the success stories and ignoring the casualties of racism is a common argument made by conservatives attacking atonement policies such as affirmative action. In sharp contrast to this neoconservative reading of the novel, another woman in the same book club seemed to view Birdie as a happy poster girl for the multiracial movement. She read the last line of the book as an optimistic vision of multiracial utopia: "The novel wasn't a downer. Birdie's honored her uniqueness and she's OK with it now. I find that positive. She can enjoy life with that last line." Hoping that multiracial people will live happily ever after may be an honorable desire, but such a future isn't quite in sync with the ambivalent tone of the book's closing chapter. Believing that Birdie is enjoying life, or that we have entered a post-race era, does not necessarily make it true.

Yet for every reader who seemed blind to some part of Senna's message, there were many more who were able to appreciate the anti-essentialist ideology of the text while simultaneously grasping Senna's political emphasis on resisting white power. Several of these liberal whites applauded Birdie's allegiance to black communities as a commendable political choice rather than an essentialist and divisive one. A white woman from the twentysomethings club argued that this book is about the "simplicity of labels that don't fit the reality of human beings," but she also appreciated Birdie's disagreement with her father's "post-race" stance. Recognizing the continued importance of racial solidarity for African Americans, including those of mixed race, she commented: "I felt like Birdie saw herself as black, not partially white and partially black. . . . In New York City she felt an instant connection to black kids, and she had to find her sister to get back in

touch with her black identity. I liked the way Senna and Birdie subverted white values. Birdie questioned her grandmother's values and instead saw cultural value in breakdancing on the street. She didn't value money as much as white culture told her to." These comments made by an anti-racist white ally contrast sharply with those of the woman dismayed by Birdie's abandonment of her white life.

Although none of the readers had read Senna's essay "Mulatto Millenium," many were able to see in the novel a pointed critique of fables of multiracial utopia. The Newton women's group rejected as "unrealistic" the idea that Berkeley, where Cole and Birdie end up, is a "color-blind mixed community with no prejudice." As one reader pointed out: "What, California didn't have any race riots?! The ending doesn't imply that it's going to be easy to blend in with those kids on the bus." Explicitly rejecting post-race ideology, another white woman said: "I don't think the message was that race wouldn't matter anymore. Her father attests to its reality. Even in Brazil, it's still racist." The dark-skinned Brazilian woman in the Jamaica Plain group echoed Birdie's retort to her father's theories, noting that it's all well and good to speak of race as an illusion until you are the victim of race prejudice. The Brazilian woman said of her light-skinned biracial stepdaughter who goes to high school in Newton, "she hasn't decided yet what she is going to be, because U.S. society asks her to make a choice." She added poignant examples of her own experience of segregationist behavior: "Black and white people here don't want to get closer to each other, to start something new and think differently. Black people I know only want to be with blacks. Black people I pass will not greet my husband, only me, and white people—they don't greet me, never."

This immigrant reader's emphasis on how race operates in her new home—the "here" of the Boston area—became a major topic of conversation in all of the book groups I visited. The conversations about race in Boston often took up more time than the readers' discussion of *Caucasia* itself. Some literary aesthetes might view this as an example of book clubs' disinterest in the finer points of textual interpretation, but instead I see this emphasis on experiential connections as an essential element of the cultural power of fiction and of the book club as a social institution—the power to provoke reflection about the world we live in. In these book clubs, Senna's novel encouraged nuanced political conversations with the agenda of determining if race relations in Boston have changed since the 1970s setting of the novel.

Interestingly, three of the all-white book groups located in Newton and Brookline did not ignore racism but instead emphasized that present-day Boston is "a terrible city in terms of prejudice" and residential segregation. The Newton women's club recounted incidents of racial profiling in Wellesley, where a former member of the Celtics basketball team (Dee Brown) was falsely arrested for "resembling" a bank robber, and discussed their personal observations of the

targeting of darker passengers by security personnel at Boston's Logan Airport. Both Newton groups pointed to the paucity of black leaders in the city (this was a few years before the state elected its first black governor, Deval Patrick) and to the persistence of a glass ceiling for African Americans in business and education fields. A young woman in the Brookline club shared testimony from a friend, who currently works in public relations for the liberal *Boston Globe*: "She was shocked that so many racist people call up to complain about positive articles about black people." Two white Newtonites who work in diversity recruitment discussed the difficulties of bringing minorities to work here because black job-seekers perceive it to be a white city, despite the fact that the city of Boston is 22 percent African American, nearly double the national percentage. While these white women are strongly committed to inclusivity and fair workplace practices, they readily admitted that their own segregated lives have perhaps hampered their ability to address racial problems more effectively: "We don't know what it's like to be black here." One woman noted the fault lines that still prevent communication between blacks and whites: "I facilitated diversity classes, yet it's hard to get black people to share what they felt so we could learn from it. It's a trust issue."

Although incidents such as these are hardly limited to Boston, several readers who had lived elsewhere (Chicago, New York, and Brazil) judged Boston to be "more segregated, even now, than other places." One of the Newton readers stated that "black people like Deck Lee had reason to be angry then, and they still do. We've come some way, but things are so slow to change here. In Chicago you see blacks in ritzy places, the theater. Yet just the other night I saw three teenagers hanging out, and two of them were African American. I thought to myself, you don't see this often in Newton." Some others pointed out that localities in the greater Boston area differ widely in this respect. One woman told of a white friend with an adopted black child who chose to move to racially mixed Hyde Park (within the city of Boston) because her child was miserable in the white environment of a South Shore suburb, "where people wouldn't let their kids play with him." Even in neighborhoods that are ostensibly diverse, tensions sometimes persist. A white participant in the Big Sister program noted that her Peruvian little sister is one of "few to mix with all races at Waltham High, where it's so atomized." As one mother said of her daughter's school in racially mixed Cambridge, "it's a diverse school in numbers, but not integrated socially." These white suburban readers reveal a perception that the Boston area is largely segregated and that some of its more racially diverse neighborhoods are not always models of social integration.

Members of the book clubs in the two communities with closer ties to Boston's racial wars of the 1970s—Jamaica Plain and the South End—expressed far more wide-ranging attitudes about race in their city today. One white woman

from the South End unabashedly revealed the fear that motivated racial violence and distrust during that heated time: "I was scared in the 1970s by anti-white people over there in Roxbury, down the road. I didn't feel comfortable outside at night—there were lots of muggings. My son was frightened when he had his bike stolen by a bunch of black kids, so I told him to avoid them. My kids had negative interactions [with African Americans] so they didn't seek more." Despite her fear of black people, whom she sees mainly as criminals, she refused to move because "the housing prices were cheap." Such economic motivations led to the current gentrification of the South End, a phenomenon that has fueled racial tensions in the present. Unlike the Newtonites, who lamented racial segregation but admitted that they watched the busing conflict from a safe and distanced position in the suburbs, this white woman's close proximity to people of color seemed to exacerbate rather than lessen her racist attitudes. It is telling that she mentions "antiwhite people" but not the antiblack protestors who threw rocks at buses transporting black children to white schools.

On the other end of the political spectrum, a few of the left-leaning mothers in the racially mixed Jamaica Plain book club fully supported school desegregation and willingly sent their white children to schools in Roxbury in the 1970s. One woman believed that such efforts were largely successful: "Boston has changed since then in schools and families. My kids have had friends of all races. They will rail against someone using someone's race to describe them when it's unnecessary." Another added, "There are a fair number of interracial marriages in our circle. In more enlightened places, racial differences aren't terribly important anymore." After this positive view of race relations in the city, a few members acknowledged the persistence of distances. One of the mothers whose kids went to Roxbury schools admitted, "I live in a less integrated part of Jamaica Plain. Boston is still a segregated city by housing. West Roxbury is still white Irish. That affects your after-school relationships. Yet my kids did play in the only integrated baseball league in the city and made black friends." To close the session, one woman pointed to the television, flashing images of a sea of white fans at a Red Sox game; no black faces were visible in the crowd. She summed up her group's perspective: "Boston hasn't changed completely, even if it's come a long way."

These comments on race in Boston suggest that residential neighborhood does not necessarily fix or predict a white person's attitudes about racial politics, since some of the more radical commentary came from people in heavily white suburbs and the most racist from whites in mixed urban neighborhoods. Nonetheless, living in mixed neighborhoods and sending one's kids to integrated schools did change the lives and point of view of the Jamaica Plain book club, which was also one of the few racially integrated book clubs in my study. Being part of social networks with people of color gave some white readers regular exposure to firsthand

testimony about the continued existence of racism and color-consciousness. One Brookline woman reported that her husband's best friend, a black law student, was "practically strip searched" when he went to hear courtroom trials, whereas her white husband was waved on through. Nine whites who had strong connections to interracial families (via adoption or intermarriage) drew upon their experiences to make sense of Birdie's in *Caucasia.* As one Newton woman said: "I'm very mindful of forms with racial categories because I have several friends whose kids are biracial and are forced to check one box. Why should they be made invisible?" The Newton couples book club—the club that seemed to be the most removed from people of color—turned to one of their members who volunteered at Dorchester High School for a more informed perspective on urban black kids. His insider commentary worked to dislodge stereotypes about the "urban black experience" implied by his groupmate's question, "Are inner city blacks still angry like in *Soul on Ice*? Has it gotten easier?" He replied pointedly, "The kids are all different, you can't make stereotypes. Some are hopeless, others work hard. If you can help a few of them it's worth it." Such firsthand experiences with black communities or individuals enabled a sharing of testimony that played a crucial role in these book-club conversations and enriched the readers' collective understanding of the text.

Although most of the white book-club members agreed that Boston has not completely shed its segregationist past, the self-aware critique of whiteness among these book clubs suggests that something has indeed changed. While one might have expected Danzy Senna's satirical exposé of white privilege in New England to ruffle a few feathers, in fact a good number of white readers praised the book for turning a critical eye on the "sanitized world of whiteness." A middle-aged reader in the South End enjoyed the sendup of Birdie's snobbish blueblood grandmother and Nick Marsh's privileged parents. The twentysomethings group delighted in the fact that Birdie rejected "white values." They found this book far superior to *The Secret Life of Bees,* which they deemed "really offensive" for its depiction of "a white girl taken in by three black sisters who seem to exist to be her salvation."[71] A member of the Newton women's club passed around Adam Mansbach's "The Case for White History Month," an op-ed piece criticizing the way in which white history has come to stand in for "universal" history. Referencing Harvard's Project Implicit, which aims to test implicit racial bias, she commented that "it's so hard for whites to confront these issues and recognize white privilege, the many things that we don't have to worry about on a daily basis."[72] This line of thinking prompted her book-club members to discuss Sandy's white privilege in the novel, when she gets a job simply because of her looks and apparent "good breeding." What struck me as significant is that these readers were not among those whites who find it so hard to confront white privilege. Does this mean that anti-racist

whiteness studies is making an impact upon the consciousness of educated, liberal white adults? Or are these readers just adopting a new "politically correct" rhetoric, akin to midcentury liberal discourses of "color-blindness"? Even if it is only talk, this voiced disidentification with whiteness strikes me as important because it has the potential to influence how white people conduct themselves in the public sphere or interact with people of color.

Some of the more interesting conversations developed when the novel moved the white readers to consider self-reflexively how they might feel to be a minority. One woman admitted that "we are so raised with the idea that you've got better chances if you are light-skinned. But you kept seeing how Birdie was discriminated against in the black neighborhood. It got you thinking." In the twentysomethings club, one woman asked her groupmates, "How do you feel when you go to neighborhoods where you are a minority?" The resulting honest conversation uncovered that whiteness often involves a fear of the other, but also a fear of *being othered,* of being vulnerable to scrutiny or attack by people of color. One woman remembered feeling uncomfortable in a Vietnamese grocery store: "It felt like everybody was staring at me, so tall and blonde. I didn't like it. Everyone seemed to be thinking, 'That's the one who's different, keep an eye on her.'" Such experiences of otherness can be valuable in developing empathy for people of color, provided that fear does not block the empathetic perspective-sharing. This woman also mentioned being lost once in Roxbury; when a cop warned her that she wasn't safe there, he "scared the crap out of [her]." While this discussion could have resulted in yet another expression of white fear of otherness, another young woman in the group brought a self-critical tone to the conversation. She compared her friend's panic to that of Sandy's boyfriend Jim in the novel, when he stupidly provokes a fight with black teens in New Haven: "Jim totally overreacts. He sees them as hoodlums, not as children." This commentary usefully pointed out that her friend's fears may have been completely unwarranted, simply a product of whites' defensiveness and tendency to see themselves as beleaguered victims.

Another self-critical examination of white motivations arose among two groups who discussed white desire for knowledge of the exotic other. When one member of the Newton couples book club declared, "I don't think [white] people read black writers to be voyeurs, but to learn about their culture," her groupmate honestly replied, "Yet there's something of the exotic that attracts us too. Why do we read so many books from all around the world?" The leader of the Brookline book club engaged in an even more sensitive and self-conscious discussion of her desire to learn about African American perspectives. When she and her husband invite their only African American friends to dinner, she struggles between wanting to learn from them and being hesitant to put them on the spot as native informers: "I wanted to relate to them as people and not make them feel like my 'black friends.'

I wanted to understand better where they were coming from, but also view them as individuals. It's the same when we read books by Native Americans like Sherman Alexie's *The Lone Ranger and Tonto*. In a way, you are putting a burden on the book to educate you about a culture or a group of people. Nobody should be seen as representative of a culture or race." This woman's self-aware and thoughtful commentary, sensitive to the power dynamics of the white gaze, suggests that whiteness in Boston is lived far differently—at least by some individuals—than is often assumed.

My research with Boston book clubs reading *Caucasia* and *The Known World* has underscored the dynamic and multivocal nature of such literary conversations and the complex and diverse ways of reading race in these spaces. As my examples above have shown, no group was univocal in its perspective on whiteness and blackness, since group members often disagreed, corrected each other, and added nuances and complexity to the discussion. This kind of in-depth conversation about racial issues, prompted by fictional worlds, offers a vital means of interrogating the readers' own world and worldviews. One could argue that the monoraciality of the white clubs was in some ways an asset rather than a liability, in that these safe spaces allowed them to analyze their ideas about race honestly without fear of offending anyone. The intimacy and trust exhibited often led members to take risks in asking taboo questions, and to revise their interpretations and claims based on the commentary and personal testimony of others with more knowledge or connections to people of color. The few racially mixed groups discussing these novels demonstrated exemplary models of interracial dialogue, but there is certainly still a need for the self-examination that monoracial clubs can enable.

This chapter's twin emphasis on reception and textuality allowed me to examine the way that particular kinds of texts impact readers. In this case, the plots of these post-soul novels challenged audiences to question the color line, and many took up the challenge. Both *The Known World* and *Caucasia* treat race as a socially constructed fiction with devastatingly real consequences. Among this audience group, these texts sometimes engendered confusion or resistance among those who read race in a fixed and reductive way, or who prematurely celebrate a post-race present. However, the majority of these readers, black and white, collectively created sophisticated readings of each text that grappled with the authors' double-sided agenda to critique racial essentialism while acknowledging how power continues to be unequally divided on the basis of race. My reception study underscored that these readers' race and neighborhood sometimes informed their responses to the texts but did not wholly determine them, thus calling into question racially deterministic theories of reader response. These particular novels succeeded in reaching readers because they provoked thoughtful

reflection about their local worlds and elucidated connections between the past and the present. While reading *Caucasia,* one middle-aged liberal white woman was moved to reexamine her past perspectives with a more empathetic lens: "I remember the busing. We were educators back then, very idealistic. I remember the hours of intellectual discussion about whether there should be busing. But I have to say that I never thought about it from the emotional perspective of the families going through it, until I read this book." By troubling the process of reading race, these post-soul novels enabled white readers to turn the lens inward with a critical eye—to *read themselves* and the racialized worlds they may have helped to sustain. Such a self-implicating understanding of the perverting effects of race is a necessary stepping stone on a path of resistance.

4

Deconstructing White Ways of Seeing

Interracial-Conflict Films and College-Student Viewers

The previous two chapters have demonstrated the power of books and engaged discussion to engender cross-racial empathy. Can visual culture do the same? Many academics and film critics believe that film has *superior* power as a medium to provoke viewer empathy.[1] The writer and philosopher Iris Murdoch calls film (as well as fiction) an "anti-egoistic" medium, while the cognitive film theorist Alex Neill believes that the visual and musical elements of cinema induce empathy even more strongly than does literature.[2] Professor Brenda Allen argues that the video documentary *Skin Deep,* which spotlights college students discussing their views about race, allows her students to develop "closer identification" and a "deeper and more enduring empathy" than they did while reading autobiographical narratives.[3] Social-science and ethnic-studies professors often use film in the classroom because the medium personalizes abstract issues and provides emotional immediacy for students.[4] I am skeptical of the conclusion, however, that film encourages empathy more so than other narrative media. My own experience teaching African American film has shown me ample evidence of how white viewers' "ways of seeing"[5] can unfortunately work as roadblocks to the development of empathy. However, sustained viewing of African American film, particularly when the films are understood within an embedded sociopolitical context, can produce the same kinds of self-critical forms of empathy and shifts in perspective that I witnessed among white book-club readers.

Ideally, films that are written and produced by African Americans encourage viewers to explore cultural investments and political points of view different than the white norm, and to encounter evidence of racism and the destructive effects of white privilege to which they may have previously been blind. To examine the ability of films to foster empathy, I sought a film-reception site that would

be analogous to book clubs, but film-discussion clubs are much less prevalent.[6] Discussion about film is often more informal and casual, such as sharing reactions when the credits roll in the movie theater, or posting a brief "thumbs up" on Facebook. My film- and ethnic-studies college classrooms, however, offered a preexisting reception site that involved in-depth discussion of African American films. My role as teacher bears some similarity to that of a book-club facilitator; I offer questions to prompt discussion, but I do not lecture in order to give students space to develop independent critical thinking skills. Due to my non-didactic and discussion-centered teaching style, my classroom reception site engendered a wide variety of student interpretations of African American films in discussion and writing. This chapter examines how 130 college students responded to two racial-conflict films produced by a black and a white director—Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* (1989) and Paul Haggis's *Crash* (2005). In the past ten years, I have taught these films at three Massachusetts institutions (Bentley College, Harvard University, and Bridgewater State University) and have studied student responses to these texts via online blackboard posts, response papers, formal papers, final exams, in-class discussion comments, and post-course questionnaires devised specifically for this research project. In these contexts, I have witnessed white students engaging the work of black filmmakers with empathetic as well as defensive responses, which has allowed me to better understand impediments to cross-racial empathy and also the conditions that enable it.

A reception study of these audience groups reveals that some white viewers were provoked into a defensive, neoconservative position by Spike Lee's film. Unable to empathize with the black characters and accusing Lee of antiwhite racism, a significant portion of the white students failed to see or accept Lee's examination of institutional racism and the economic structures that disempower inner-city African Americans—a message that my African American students often understood implicitly. In contrast, *Crash* is often the favorite film of the white students in my introductory film courses, despite its similarly pessimistic view of racial harmony in Los Angeles. Despite Haggis's liberal aims to expose racism and critique a segregationist mentality, the mainstream film *Crash* nonetheless appeals to the students' white biases, reinforces stereotypes and distrust of affirmative action, and allows a complacent view of racism as simply an inevitable aspect of human nature. As the cognitive film scholar Paul S. Cowen argues, viewers such as my students often interpret films "at times in a biased or distorted way, guided by their needs, values, and beliefs, and especially those concerning 'self' and 'others.'"[7]

This reception pattern was not universal, however, but occurred in particular circumstances. First of all, these responses were most common in introductory-level courses on the history of race in film, where white underclassmen were

largely unfamiliar with black points of view. *Do the Right Thing* was often the first or second black-produced film these students had viewed at that point in the semester (or indeed in their lives), because the chronologically organized courses often began by examining white Hollywood's stereotyped representations of African Americans and ethnic minorities. These non-empathetic white viewers simply did not have enough exposure to critical black perspectives to view Lee's provocative film empathetically. They lacked an interpretive lens for viewing the film in an embedded context, as informed by larger sociopolitical and economic concerns of the black community. Viewing a Spike Lee film did not disrupt their worldview—or perhaps it disrupted their worldview so much that they tried to contain that disruption by dismissing him as a lone voice or reimagining the film's arguments to fit their own white ideologies. Secondly, non-empathetic responses were also more common among my white students at the business-focused Bentley College, where the students were strongly invested in capitalism and the myth of America as a land of equal opportunity and meritocracy.

In contrast to these non-empathetic students who viewed the films through the protective lens of dominant ideology, many white students in seminars and upper-level English courses focused largely on African American culture expressed markedly different responses to the films. In these context-rich courses, the students encountered numerous and diverse African American texts, as well as anti-racist white voices that provided a model for empathetic ways of seeing. More extensive reading and viewing of black texts gave the students a fuller knowledge of the context in which Lee's films are embedded. Significantly, these students' responses to Lee's films were more empathetic and nuanced, and their responses to *Crash* were more oppositional. In these context-rich classes, viewers of *Do the Right Thing* were more likely to move past a white defensive fear of black rioters targeting white property and to empathize with circumstances that lead to African American feelings of disempowerment and frustration. Viewers of *Crash* were able to adopt a critical perspective learned from black writers and filmmakers in order to resist some of *Crash*'s problematic white biases. In short, *more* reading and viewing of black-topic texts seemed to correlate significantly with *more empathetic and anti-racist* reading. A few moments of radical, self-implicating forms of white empathy were also facilitated by the outspoken commentary of black and ethnic classmates, who provided corroborating testimony of the effects of white hegemony; such powerful moments of learned perspective-taking were similar to those observed in interracial book clubs. A comparison of these reception groups reveals that cross-racial empathy is far more likely to occur when viewers have access to a multivoiced and deep cultural context for understanding African American experience. This comparative reception study also suggests that white points of view—particularly of adolescents and young

adults—are permeable and open to change rather than entrenched. An empathetic perspective can be acquired by sustained reading and viewing of black-produced texts that provide a critical lens to examine white privilege and institutional racism. Just as hip-hop consumption and participation was an avenue for Danny Hoch and Adam Mansbach to become politically sensitized to racial injustice, multiple or sustained encounters with African American film and literature can facilitate viewers' development of anti-racist reading practices.

Focused on the visual medium of film, this chapter also draws special attention to the relationship between empathy and point of view. In her well-known essay "The Oppositional Gaze," bell hooks investigates the negative critical reactions of white male reviewers to a black woman's film, Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust*. Hooks concludes that "clearly the impact of racism and sexism so over-determines spectatorship—not only what we look at but who we identify with—that viewers who are not black females find it hard to empathize with the central characters in the movie. They are adrift without a white presence in the film."[8] Although my reception study of *Do the Right Thing* also uncovered failures of empathy among white spectators, I do not conclude that race or gender positioning wholly determines viewer response. Some white students in the introductory classes *were* able to empathize with the black characters, perhaps because they had already acquired some knowledge of the history of racism and white privilege or were unusually empathetic people. Bell hooks's analysis leads to the reductive conclusion that spectatorship positions are racially fixed and static, and thus that only black women can truly see and understand a black woman's text. In contrast to hooks's static view of white looks as a form of imperialistic power, I aim to rescue the progressive potential of sight as a conduit for understanding, respect, and empathy. Like Anna Deavere Smith, I connect an "inability to empathize" with a "reluctance to see," and I draw upon C. Daniel Batson's notion of empathy as "perspective-taking," or seeing through another's eyes.[9]

Yet clearly there is more to this kind of empathetic seeing than literal sight, or else watching a film would lead everyone to the same empathetic response. Seeing is a metaphor for knowing; sometimes we can only see what we already know or think we know. As Arnold Farr argues in his article "Whiteness Visible," white ways of seeing can operate like an "epistemic grid" that blinds the viewer to black experience.[10] Even when white viewers see a film produced from a black point of view, they may actively re-envision the text to fit their own view of how America works. With more exposure to African American and anti-racist forms of knowledge and experience, white viewers can develop a sharper and clearer vision not only of others but also of themselves and their own interpretive blind spots. Some of these student viewers were able to experience what the film theorist Kaja Silverman calls "spectatorial self-estrangement," looking at the self from the

outside in.[11] As I discussed in the introductory chapter, most critics of sympathy and empathy are concerned about how these emotions can collapse difference, allowing "a substitution of oneself for another that may well be a colonization."[12] Doris Sommer "caution[s] against empathy, which plays treacherously in a subject-centered key that overwhelms unfamiliar voices only to repeat the solitary sounds of the self."[13] In contrast to these colonizing forms of empathy, the self-alienating look that I describe requires an attention to the self, but specifically to the self's participation in systems that disadvantage others. Such a look enables an empathetic gaze upon African American film that does not collapse racial difference but recognizes the way that race structures privilege and impacts life experiences in contemporary America.

Do the Right Thing's Oppositional Point of View

Although white viewers do not always sympathize with Spike Lee's goals, *Do the Right Thing* reveals an African American point of view through the oppositional value system embedded in Lee's screenplay drafts and the final cut of the film. The film's basic premise is to record racial tensions on the hottest day of the summer on one city block; the local setting is the impoverished black and Latino Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York. The conflict centers on a pizzeria owned by Italian American Sal and patronized by the local black community. The film's central character is Mookie (played by Lee), who is a pizza delivery boy employed by Sal. Ethnic and racial tensions escalate in the evening when Sal destroys the boom box of a black teen (Radio Raheem), a fight ensues, and the cops kill Raheem with a choke hold. Stunned and angered by the police brutality, Mookie throws a garbage can through the window of Sal's pizzeria, inciting the neighborhood residents to destroy and burn the pizzeria until they are subdued with firehoses reminiscent of those used against civil rights protesters in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963.

Through their cinematic choices, Spike Lee and the director of photography Ernest Dickerson aim to construct a black "insider" lens to view the people in this African American neighborhood. They employ crane shots and a moving camera to take us on an intimate journey through this Bed-Stuy block alongside Mookie as he makes his deliveries. Like Mookie, we move along with the camera in and out of African American and Latino spaces on the street—including his sister Jade's apartment, his Puerto Rican girlfriend Tina's apartment, stairwells where he encounters the disabled man Smiley, the brownstone of the community matriarch Mother Sister, and the radio station where DJ Mister Señor Love Daddy rules the roost. At one point in the film, the camera moves in a long-take out of Mother Sister's apartment through an open window back onto the street;

the street thus becomes a black space, much like an extended living room. The three men loafing on the corner (the "corner men") with their umbrella and lawn chairs, people congregating on stoops, and kids playing in the street further exemplify the breakdown of the barrier between public and private spaces. The camera grants the viewer the position of a black "eye" or insider point of view through its meandering approach and unlimited access to indoor and outdoor spaces of this minority community.

While the cinematography encourages the viewer to see this community as a black insider would, Lee also depicts conflicts between insiders and outsiders and represents how people of different races see each other with a skewed lens. By using slow-motion photography, for example, the film accentuates the hostile gaze of white policemen patrolling the neighborhood, whose dehumanizing view of the three corner men is summed up in their disdainful comment, "What a waste." In contrast to the cop's gaze, Lee invites viewers to gaze at these men in a more empathetic way, as resilient and witty survivors full of "dignity and humor."[14] Dickerson's camera work also highlights people's biased gazes at others in his representation of the repeated conflicts between Sal and his African American customer Radio Raheem. While Sal sees the rap music that Raheem blasts through his boom box as "jungle music" that disturbs the peace, Raheem views his broadcasting of Public Enemy's oppositional anthem "Fight the Power" as an extension of his identity and agency, the locus of his "self-worth."[15] Dickerson films this conflict with canted angles to suggest that both men see each other through a lens that is askew and pointed in different directions; their viewpoints on the world are literally and figuratively opposed.

These cinematographic explorations of point of view are related to the film's larger effort to represent the cultural, political, and emotional points of view of the African American community, and specifically of the black underclass. I am not using the term "black point of view" in an essentialist way to suggest that the African American characters all share the same politics, but rather I consider point of view as a means of reading and understanding an implicit structure embedded in a situation. Spike Lee presents his own pointedly black ways of understanding the American political and economic systems that disenfranchise the residents of the urban ghetto.[16] In a reception study of the 1992 L.A. Riots, Darnell M. Hunt found strong evidence of particularly black ways of seeing those events—not as a "riot" or a random "crime" spree but as a justified protest against not only the Rodney King verdict but also against "racial and economic injustice in the U.S." more broadly.[17] Preceding the L.A. Riots by three years, *Do the Right Thing* presents a similarly black way of seeing economic and racial injustices in urban America.

Do the Right Thing foregrounds the unequal distribution of money and property, suggesting how race shapes who has it and who does not. Mookie is obsessed with

getting paid from the beginning to the end of the movie because he has no stable place in the economic order. I argue that Lee's film offers a critique of how the twin structures of capitalism and racism have kept the black underclass from achieving economic security.[18] Despite having a job, Mookie is nonetheless broke by payday without any possibility of accruing savings; he can't afford his own apartment and makes a measly $250 a week delivering pizzas, which puts his yearly income at thirteen thousand dollars. Yet Mookie seems comparatively well off in relation to the unemployed corner men and Da Mayor, who sweeps Sal's sidewalk to earn two dollars to buy a beer. Despite and indeed because of their poverty, the young black men in the film are obsessed with displays of wealth; Mookie sports a gold tooth, Radio Raheem carries an expensive boom box and huge brass knuckles, and Buggin' Out buys one-hundred-dollar Air Jordan sneakers. Lee is critical of this materialist obsession, yet he understands the conditions that shape these youth and lead many to deal drugs. Lee remarked to his actors during a read-through of the initial script, "How are these kids able to get gold and one-hundred-dollar Air Jordans? They're getting money somehow. This film is about the black underclass, one of the most impoverished drug-ridden neighborhoods in the U.S. In Bed-Stuy, you'll see thousands of people hanging out, with no job, no direction in life. That's the way the fuck it is. I don't want to dress it up."[19]

To symbolize the inaccessibility of the American dream for the black members of the neighborhood, a subtle shot of the film shows Mookie treading upon a young black girl's white chalk drawing of a single-family house and yard, complete with

Figure 4. Chalk Drawing, *Do the Right Thing* (40 Acres and a Mule Filmworks, 1989)

a car in the driveway—a visual representative of the (white) dream of suburban home ownership that is nearly an impossibility for urban blacks. Although the girl is signing her name to this picture as if to claim this future, it is significant that her black baby doll sits on the edge of the frame, as if cast out of the white fantasy. Right before this shot, Mookie has stormed out of the pizzeria after an argument with Sal, who has refused him an advance on his pay because he judges Mookie to be lazy and untrustworthy. Because Mookie is working for subsistence wages without a possibility for significant savings or any real chance at advancement, he cannot invest either figuratively or literally in the American dream; it is reduced to a cartoon that will wash away with the rain.

The American dream has also proved to be out of reach for the older generation of residents on the block. Although Da Mayor seems to be a caring, sensible, and intelligent man, he has been reduced to a life of alcoholism and homelessness in his old age. The young men call him a "Tom" for his obsequious behavior to whites, but it is clear that such behavior did little to ensure his success in a white world. To disrupt stereotypes about alcoholics and the homeless, Lee allows Da Mayor to voice his backstory, asserting that a lack of economic opportunity, powerlessness, and emasculation contributed to his downfall: "What do you know? Until you have stood in the doorway and heard the hunger of your five children, unable to do a damn thing about it, you don't know shit. You don't know my pain, you don't know me." In contrast to Da Mayor, the elderly Mother Sister is the only black resident of the block who owns her own brownstone, a fact that is notable as an exception to the rule. Another scene draws attention to what the b-boy Buggin' Out calls "motherfucking gentrification," a process that only benefits whites who have the cash flow to buy up undervalued property in urban neighborhoods. Buggin' Out confronts a white property owner (Clifton) with the challenge, "Who told you to buy a brownstone in my neighborhood?" Clifton's retort, "It's a free country," is met with sarcastic jeers by the onlooking black teens. Shouting, "I should fuck you up for saying that stupid shit alone," Buggin' Out reveals just how "free" he feels in America. Amidst this gentrification process, Mother Sister is notable for being the only black person on the block to own property. However, she reveals that "my ex-husband lost all my property, all my money in his scheme to build a black business empire. Needless to say what happened, this house is it, all I got." By remarking that it is "needless to say" that this scheme was a failure, Mother Sister assumes her listener's knowledge of various obstacles—namely, white resistance to black entrepreneurship and also the economic desperation that fuels unwise decisions. The tale of her ex-husband recalls the schemes of Walter Lee Younger in Lorraine Hansberry's classic play *A Raisin in the Sun,* who loses his inheritance in a foolhardy get-rich-quick scheme to open a liquor store with an untrustworthy partner.

The men on the corner are what Walter Lee Younger may have become twenty years after his failed attempt at making something of himself. The three corner men—M.L., Coconut Sid, and Sweet Dick Willie—engage in a frank, heartbreaking, yet humorous discussion of race and success in the American capitalist system. Observing that the only two businesses on the street are owned by Italian Americans and Korean Americans, M.L. opines:

> Look at those Korean motherfuckers across the street. I betcha they haven't been a year off da motherfucking boat before they opened up their own place. Got a good business in our neighborhood occupying a building that had been boarded up for longer than I care to remember. . . . Either dem Koreans are geniuses or you black asses are just plain dumb. I will be one happy fool when we open our own business right here in our own neighborhood.

Coconut Sid replies that "it's gotta be cuz we're black. No other explanation. . . . Ain't they always trying to keep the black man to be about shit?" Sweet Dick Willie, the realist, calls that an "old excuse," but he simply accepts the situation and humorously declares, "I'm gonna give them Koreans s'more of my money. It's Miller Time." The painful irony is that Sweet Dick Willie rejects a racial explanation for differential success yet nonetheless feels powerless to change or resist the status quo. Alcohol is an avenue to numb himself to this realization, and humor allows him to survive with some semblance of dignity. By depicting the common stereotype of lazy, unemployed black men with little ambition, Lee shows the ways in which their behavior is conditioned by a pervasive feeling that action is pointless because the larger world expects and often ensures their failure. The Marxist critic Wahneema Lubiano finds this scene insufficient as a critique because the men "make no mention of differential capital bases or accesses to bank loans" that might explain the economic status of blacks and Koreans.[20] I contend that the existence of a racist white power structure is strongly implied by the phrase "*they* always trying to keep the black man to be about shit." In discussing this scene in interviews, Lee refers to the economic effects of slavery and racial discrimination as a "given" for black viewers;[21] unfortunately, however, white viewers do not always understand the structural context to which Lee and his black characters refer.

My analysis of the economic argument of *Do the Right Thing* shares some similarities with Houston A. Baker's reading of the film as a fable of "domestic colonialism—an economic and spatial domination of Black life" by the white-owned business of Sal's Famous Pizzeria.[22] Using overly strident language, Baker reads the Italian pizza parlor as a "behemoth of monied, colonial exploitation and denigration."[23] Yet Baker rightly calls Sal "condescending" to his patrons and overly proud of his paternalistic handouts to Da Mayor, whom he pays a pittance

to sweep his sidewalk, a job Sal's son Pino thinks is beneath him. Despite Sal's pride that the black neighborhood kids have "grown up on my food," he admits that he located his business in a black neighborhood for economic motives—so that he wouldn't face competition from other pizzerias in an Italian neighborhood. Spike Lee often frames Sal standing directly behind his cash register and handling money to underscore his profit motive; the white cops even jokingly call Sal "Mr. Trump," capitalist supreme.[24] Sal's monopoly on the food supply in this Bed-Stuy block ensures that any boycott, such as the one Buggin' Out tries to instigate, would be ineffectual. Also, Sal's position of power allows him to flout one of the central mottos of consumer capitalism: "the customer is always right." His problematic customer-relations strategies are rooted in an intense dislike of angry black men, whom he calls "troublemakers" and eventually "niggers" in the heat of an argument with Radio Raheem. When Buggin' Out requests that Sal put pictures of black people on his Wall of Fame instead of only famous Italian Americans, Sal rebuffs him, arguing that he should open up his own pizzeria if he wants "brothers" on the wall. Buggin' Out believes that the black customers who "spend much money here" should "have some say," but the film reveals the supposed power of the consumer—especially the black consumer—to be anemic in the face of white business interests. When Radio Raheem blares rap music in the pizzeria, Sal takes up a baseball bat and destroys his radio and his only sense of voice and identity; a gesture of compromise might have been to pipe in the black musical styles of WE LOVE radio station for his patrons' pleasure. Although Sal is certainly within his "rights" as a property owner, he is staunchly unwilling to cater to the cultural values, tastes, and needs of the black community he supposedly serves. Sal makes no investment in this community; he only reaps profit from it.[25]

Yet it is clear from the ways in which Lee represents the benevolent side of Sal that Lee doesn't intend to villainize him as an individual but rather to attack the system in which he participates. The final scene, where Sal laments the loss of a business that he built with his "bare hands" and expresses concern for Mookie's well-being, reminds us of Sal's basic humanity. Rather than a corrupt colonial ruler, he is a cog in the wheel of domestic colonialism who willingly accepts the benefits of whiteness.[26] Spike Lee's point here is that all the economic and political power in New York is in the hands of whites, thus creating a black underclass whose only form of agency is to lash out in rebellion against those centers of power, or any peripheral representatives. As Dan Flory argues, no matter how benevolent and paternalistic Sal seems, he nonetheless represents to these ghetto residents the power of white privilege and ownership of private property, and by extension ownership of America itself.[27] When Mookie remarks that he can't control Buggin' Out's plans to boycott because people are "free to do whatever

they want to do," Sal replies, "What the hell are you talking about, free? There's no free here. I'm the boss. No freedom." This suggests that in his pizzeria and in America at large, "white Americans like himself may exercise freedom of expression, not his African-American patrons. They, in contrast, must abide by his (the white man's) rules, dictates, and desires."[28] Not only is Sal in total control of his own turf, but he operates with the full support of larger centers of power. After Sal destroys Raheem's radio, insults him, and provokes a fight, the police rush in to protect Sal. While Raheem is killed with a police choke hold, and Buggin' Out is arrested, the police treat Sal and sons as if they are innocent victims. Baker's analogy to colonialism is especially apt here: "For the colonizer (read: Sal) never occupies the colony with only mercantile personnel; the army/police are indispensable to his enterprise."[29] In addition to the police, Sal has insurance companies on his side, who will allow him to rebuild and recoup his losses after his pizzeria is destroyed by the neighborhood residents.[30]

To link his film's plot with a larger real-life context, Lee alludes to many racist incidents of collusion between white police, white governmental power, and white property interests in New York City in the 1980s. The final frame of the film is dedicated to the families of black victims of police brutality and white mob violence, and Lee has stated that the film was inspired by the 1986 incident of a white mob in Howard Beach.[31] One of the dedicatees, Michael Griffiths, died in the Howard Beach incident, in which a group of white men converged outside a pizza parlor and used baseball bats to beat three black men whose car had broken down in a white neighborhood.[32] Lee evokes that tragedy with his pizza-parlor setting and Sal's use of a baseball bat, which symbolically connects him to the white mob. Other actual victims of police brutality in the late 1980s that are referenced in the film include Yusef Hawkins, Michael Stewart, Eleanor Bumpers, and Tawana Brawley.[33] To sum up black response to these numerous incidents, Lee stated: "There's a complete loss of faith in the judicial system. And so when you're frustrated and there's no other outlet, it'll make you want to hurl the garbage can through a window."[34]

Lee's film captures the black community's feelings of political disenfranchisement during the reign of Ed Koch, New York's mayor, and during the Reagan and Bush presidencies. Outspoken in his criticism of Koch's inaction against racial injustice, Lee calls out the mayor's stereotypical views: "Anytime you hear Ed Koch talk about 'savages' and 'animals,' you know he's talking about young black males."[35] In the film, Lee registers a black view of this political context with graffiti on the set reading "Dump Koch." The morning after the riot, DJ Mister Señor Love Daddy reports that "the mayor has commissioned a blue ribbon panel to get to the bottom of last night's disturbance. The city of New York will not let property be destroyed by anyone." Significantly, the mayor's panel is not interested in

getting to the bottom of Radio Raheem's death at the hands of police; only the loss of white property warrants an investigation.[36] The DJ concludes his report by urging listeners to get out and vote, ostensibly for Koch's opponent, the African American David Dinkins, who successfully unseated Koch in November 1989, a few months after the film's release. This sense of black political disenfranchisement extends beyond the local to the national arena in the 1980s. The Reagan and Bush presidencies had a resoundingly negative effect upon the lives of many urban African Americans, who suffered from governmental policies undermining welfare and demonizing black welfare mothers, the rising incarceration of black males as a result of the War on Drugs and the racial biases of "tough on crime" sentencing practices, and the rising gap between rich whites and poor blacks as a result of "trickle down" economics.[37] In an interview, Lee claimed that Reagan and Bush are "dismantling affirmative action and all the stuff we fought and died for. . . . The mandate handed down by Reagan . . . said, Look we are tired of you niggers. You've got about as much as you're gonna get from us, and that's it. Period."[38]

Like the 1992 L.A. Riots, the riot within the film is motivated not only by immediate anger over police brutality against minorities but also by this larger context of economic and political disenfranchisement experienced by urban blacks.[39] In my view, Mookie's decision to throw the trash can should not be read as a betrayal of an individual (his boss Sal) or a misdirected and irrational form of anger but as an act of protest that signals his solidarity with the black community.[40] It is not so much the ideal or "right thing" as the only form of agency available in the circumstances. Hunt's study of white and black people's responses to the 1992 L.A. Riots revealed that blacks were much less likely than whites to view the violence and looting as undesirable, unjustified, or criminal, often using more positive terms such as "uprising," "rebellion," or "protest" rather than "riot."[41] Lee's film similarly suggests that the black neighborhood's decision to destroy Sal's is a rational form of rebellion against institutional oppression. The actions of the crowd, although emotional, are clearly a protest against Radio Raheem's death and similar incidents. The crowd yells "Howard Beach," the names of other victims, and statements such as "you can't kill us all," "it ain't even safe in our own neighborhood," and "never was." Lee also suggests they are protesting against a racially unequal economic system by offering close-ups of the cash register during the destruction; the hands inside the till can only grasp at coins, since Sal has already removed the bills from a "great day" of profits. To elevate the scene to the status of uprising rather than merely unmotivated riot, Lee directs the police and firefighters to turn firehoses upon the crowd, which connects this "riot" to the nonviolent protests of the civil rights era. Smiley closes out the scene by pinning the picture of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. on the Wall of Fame, finally turning this white-owned space of private property into a public sphere where black leaders are represented.[42]

The film hardly presents rioting as an ideal practice but nonetheless defends it as justifiable. The pan shots of the wreckage and detritus left on the street the next morning, accompanied by mournful music, do not imply that a great victory has been won. Mother Sister remarks, "We're still standing," to imply that the neighborhood will keep on surviving, if not thriving. Spike Lee made the following comments about how riots of the past have had both positive and negative consequences: "Anytime there's a riot, the National Guard, police . . . contain that riot to the ghetto. And so the buildings they burn down will never be built back. . . . So, in a way, we do lose out. But people don't feel they lose out, because they feel they have lost already. People have nothing to lose."[43] Despite the film's suggestion that not much will change after the destruction of Sal's, Lee nonetheless notes that the emotional benefits of the protest are important to the residents, who "felt that for once in their lives, they'd taken a stand. And they felt that they had some kind of say. They felt powerful," even if only for a day.[44] While Lee notes that rioting is a symptom of nihilism, a "feeling of helplessness, or powerlessness," the film also implies that the neighborhood uprising may be a necessary antidote to such nihilism.[45]

The question of whether the film's riot should be seen as productive or counterproductive, or perhaps both, is raised by the film's closing invocation of two quotations by Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X. Dr. King philosophizes that violence is "impractical and immoral" and "ends by defeating itself," whereas Malcolm X contends that violence is "necessary" and intelligent as a form of "self-defense." The title of the film itself is an allusion to Dr. King's famous saying, "The time is always ripe to do right," which Da Mayor repeats to Mookie. Many have argued that these two closing quotations offer a non-didactic, ambiguous, and postmodern ending that allows the viewer to come to his or her own definition of the "right thing."[46] While Lee is clearly aiming for an open rather than closed ending, I would argue that his heart has always been with Malcolm's message, which is why Malcolm's lines are given the important clincher spot, the final word. Lee commented, "I have deep respect for Dr. King, but I've always been more drawn to Malcolm. I just cannot get with Dr. King's complete nonviolence philosophy."[47] In fact, earlier drafts of the screenplay began with an even more incendiary quote from *The Autobiography of Malcolm X,* which calls for an African American revolution: "It is a miracle that 22 million black people have not risen up against their oppressors—in which they would have been justified by all moral criteria, and even by the democratic tradition!"[48] This early preface to the script strongly suggests that Lee sees his film's riot as a justifiable form of self-defense against economic and political tyranny.

Although I have argued that Malcolm X's message of intelligent self-defense and the need for black economic empowerment have dominated the film's ideology, brotherhood—a shared black cause and point of view—is also a less-recognized

message of the film. Lee's decision to end his film with the two quotations came after he discovered the photograph depicting the amicable union of the two men, who were working for the same cause despite being perceived as diametrically opposed in their methods.[49] Dr. King and Malcolm X were united in their critique of institutional oppression and of America's failure to live up to its key principles of liberty, justice, and equality. Arguing that these quotations are in fact a false dichotomy, Lee reasons: "When I used the statements from Malcolm and King, I wasn't saying it's either one or the other. I think one can form a synthesis of both."[50] To further suggest the idea of synthesis, the quotations are followed by the photograph of Dr. King and Malcolm smiling in agreement, which evokes black solidarity and togetherness rather than ideological division. Few have remarked that it is the photograph of black leadership in solidarity that gets the last "word" in the film.

My reading of the film as an African American critique of systemic racist oppression draws upon subtle cues in the dialogue, mise-en-scène and cinematography, knowledge of Spike Lee's stated goals for his film, and a keen understanding of the history of racism and white privilege in America. Even when my white students read interviews with Lee, they often resisted or ignored the larger economic and political context that gives the film its animus. As *Do the Right Thing*'s opening salvo to "wake up" makes clear, Lee viewed his project as a form of agitprop to jolt viewers into awareness of the realities of racial inequality in America. While the film certainly succeeded in agitating white viewers, it did not always succeed in moving those same viewers to wake up to black realities. This "failure" should not be attributed to the filmmaker, however, but to the difficulty of dislodging white ways of seeing. Just because a film encourages viewers to see systemic problems from a particular perspective does not mean that all or even most viewers will automatically do so. My introductory-level students are a case in point. The sheer number of non-empathetic responses that I witnessed suggests that decontextualized and isolated viewings of African American film, rather than sustained consumption of black texts, may not be enough to alter white attitudes.

Love and Hate across the Color Line: Responding to *Do the Right Thing*

Although I have already discussed my methodological choices for this classroom reception site in the introduction, a few points are worth underscoring. Given my presence in the classroom as a participant observer, this reception study differs from the previous chapters because my anti-racist pedagogy may have influenced my students; in fact, that is one of the goals of my teaching. Ethnographers regu-

larly encounter the similar problem of a "social desirability bias"[51]—that subjects' comments will be shaped by what they think the ethnographer would approve of. To address this problem, I privileged comments drawn from response papers and online blackboard posts written in advance of our class discussions and anonymous questionnaires filled out after the class had concluded; these forms are less likely to reflect the students' desires to parrot my own ideas. My nondidactic role in discussion allowed a wider variety of student responses (even on final papers and essay exams) than a lecture-style course model might have done; my most frequent contributions to the discussion take the form of questions, not statements, so students are unable to simply echo my own analysis. Because I am committed to fostering independent critical thinking, I often withhold my interpretations to allow students room to develop their own. Such a nondidactic teaching approach mitigates, although it can never erase, the social desirability bias.

The opposite problem is that students may censor their racist ideas because they know them to be socially *un*desirable. In my classrooms, however, many white students offered opinions in discussion and in writing, public and private, that revealed more subtly racist biases and white ways of seeing that are simply invisible to them. If I were a teacher of color rather than a white professor, it is possible that white students may have felt more need to self-censor comments about racial issues; in my experience, white people regularly say racist things among other whites that would never be uttered were a person of color in the room. Thus the racial diversity of the enrolled students in each classroom is also a relevant dynamic when considering ideas that are publicly voiced in discussion or posted on an online classroom discussion board. Writing meant for my "white eyes" only (final papers, exams, or post-course questionnaires) sometimes revealed biases that students perhaps feared to voice among a racially mixed group of students. The white business students at Bentley College knew that their blackboard posts were being read by five or six minority students in the class, but this factor did not significantly contribute to "politically correct" self-censorship. Furthermore, many of the white students' final papers, exams, and post-course questionnaire answers echoed the same attitudes that they had expressed at the outset of the discussion, indicating that their minds were unchanged by any antiracist interventions that I attempted to make in the conversation.

Since I have taught *Do the Right Thing* to students at different institutions under varying course contexts, one might assume that the institutional or situational variables would make any reception pattern difficult to observe. My students at the private Bentley College were nearly all business majors, mostly from comfortable middle-class backgrounds, and 75 to 85 percent of them were white males. In contrast, my students at the public Bridgewater State University have been 75 percent female, 90 percent white, and largely from the lower middle class.[52] While

most of the students at Bentley are business majors, my Bridgewater general education course called Race in American Film drew students from a wide array of majors across the college, from English to aviation. One section of my Bridgewater Race in American Film course was all white, another nearly so, and the Bentley course, focused solely on Spike Lee's films, included only a few minority students. However, my African Americans in Film course at Bentley included a sizable minority of 25 percent students of color. Despite all these variables in class, gender, student majors, and racial diversity of the class population, the responses of many of the white students in these courses bore striking similarities, which suggests that the students' race and their limited educational exposure to black points of view were the dominant factors influencing their reception of the film. In the Spike Lee course at Bentley and the Race in Film course at Bridgewater, almost 50 percent of the white students disliked the film, whereas 100 percent of the Bentley students of color reacted positively to it. Even among those white students who praised the film, many of their positive interpretations and judgments were nonetheless colored by white values and ideologies that differed markedly from the points of view voiced by black students.

Notably, all of these courses were general education courses aimed at non-English majors and underclassmen. The course content and students' relatively weak knowledge of African American culture and history are relevant to my argument about the importance of sustained exposure to black points of view. Because these were general education courses fulfilling humanities and writing requirements, the course content was designed to introduce students to film as a medium and art form and therefore focused largely on the texts themselves to build students' skills in interpreting visual texts and writing about them. The African Americans in Film survey class devoted half the content to investigating white-produced films (Hollywood's largely racist representations of blacks), and the Race in American Film course did the same, comparing white representations with minority-authored films. The readings included a film textbook, *America on Film,* documenting shifting representations of ethnic minorities on the screen, mixed with a few scholarly articles and director interviews. When students in the Race in Film and African Americans in Film courses first encountered *Do the Right Thing,* we had only discussed one film by a black director, Oscar Micheaux's melodramatic silent film *Within Our Gates* (1920). White students had no difficulty sympathizing with the black victims of lynching and rape in Micheaux's film, but they viewed it as a historical document far removed from their own present world. *Do the Right Thing,* however, presented a major roadblock to empathetic viewing, particularly for students who had not previously been exposed to African American critiques of the continued effects of racism and white privilege in more recent decades. After viewing Lee's film, the students also read the work

of two African American scholars (Wahneema Lubiano and Houston A. Baker) analyzing the film, and they responded just as negatively to the oppositional points of view voiced by these scholars as they did to Lee's film itself.[53] These resistant viewers had not yet acquired wide-ranging contextual knowledge that can be gleaned from repeated exposure to black cultural production, and this depth of context could not easily be provided in an introductory general education course that necessarily prioritizes the development of basic skills in visual literacy and argumentative writing. Although these students (nearly 50 percent of the whites in these classes) were clearly unable to appreciate oppositional black viewpoints at this point in their development, one should not necessarily conclude that their vision will remain forever fixed in white ways of seeing.

These students' lack of contextual knowledge about the continuing existence of institutional racism and economic racial disparity made it impossible for them to recognize this backdrop as a motivating factor for the black characters' behavior in Spike Lee's film. A significant percentage of my white students believe that racial injustices were solved during the 1960s, after which time African Americans began rapidly ascending the ladder to success.[54] Baker's reading of the film as a fable of domestic colonialism thus struck many of them as outrageous, since they view America as a land of economic opportunity and freedom for all. This idealized view of American capitalism and meritocracy was most pronounced, not surprisingly, among the white Bentley business students. Some of the students at Bridgewater, despite their relative lack of class privilege, also voiced a belief that education and individual fortitude are all that are needed for success; the fact that many of them are first-generation college students understandably strengthens their belief in the possibility of class mobility through education, regardless of race. They are not familiar with the uglier truth—that the majority of the urban black underclass still does not have equal access to quality education or loans that would enable class mobility. Seizing upon Lee's procapitalist statements and endeavors, such as his direction of Nike commercials, one Vietnamese male student saw the film as an advertisement for the American dream, urging black youth to "reap the benefits that capitalism offers" as if there were no impediments to such reaping. Using the word "past" twice in his online post, he wrote that youth today face a different situation than the elder black generation, who experienced "past exploitation and lack of jobs for blacks in the past." Reflecting on this issue in his final paper, one white Bentley student went even further to say that "there is evidence in the movie to suggest that society has reached a point where African Americans are no longer held back by the race issue from becoming successful." He views the film positively as a call for "African Americans to stop using excuses as to why they are losing control of their neighborhoods, and go out and do something about it" through economic entrepreneurship and "ambition" such

as that demonstrated by the model-minority Korean shopkeepers. While Lee himself is a strong believer in economic empowerment and is certainly critical of the passivity of the inner-city black community, these procapitalist students do not recognize the evidence of racism in the film (and in real life) that "holds back" African Americans born into poverty from becoming successful.

Perhaps because they imagine themselves to be powerful agents of their own destinies, these white students tended to see the film's events as the fault of the black characters themselves, not of systemic oppression. As the sociologists Brett Stockdill, Lisa Sun-Hee Park, and David N. Pellow note, it is often "difficult to guide students beyond narrow notions of individual responsibility and prejudice towards a more complex comprehension of social inequality."[55] Several white students in my introductory courses believed that the poverty depicted in the film is the fault of the black poor, who "do not seem to be working toward improvement" and are a "bunch of lazy people without jobs, compared to all the non-black people who are working." Certainly Lee's depiction of the corner men dances close to stereotype, but these white students do not share Lee's empathetic analysis of the lack of opportunity that has resulted in such "laziness." One startling, anonymous post-course questionnaire by a Bridgewater student even blamed Radio Raheem for his own death: "We have freedom in America, and it's Radio Raheem's own fault that he died. He started it." This student places blame upon the victim, as if the police brutality were justified because of Raheem's "free" choice to be an instigator. This investment in the hegemonic ideology of America as a land of freedom prevented them from seeing the ways in which Raheem is not fully free, most obviously because racist police brutality could get him killed at any moment.

Many white students lacked empathy or sympathy for Radio Raheem, Mookie, and Buggin' Out, arguing that they were unjustified troublemakers who "caused" the riot. This case corroborates Suzanne Keen's point that "empathy for a fictional character need not correspond with what the author appears to set up or invite."[56] Often voicing the discourse of "individual responsibility," the students saw them as men who made "bad choices" rather than as mouthpieces for a communal feeling of frustration and anger at systemic oppression. Whereas the DJ concludes the film's dialogue with an elegiac tribute to Radio Raheem, "We love you, brother," some white viewers did not express similar feelings of mourning or brotherhood for Raheem. An emotional failure to register his death as tragic led them to view the resulting riot as "unjustified," a word often used in discussion as well as in their private and public writing. Similarly, rather than seeing Buggin' Out's attempt to boycott the pizzeria as a rational action of protest, many saw him as an "instigator who blamed things on racial issues falsely." Although Lee draws the Afrocentric Buggin' Out as somewhat of a caricature of the angry

black male, there is certainly some validity to the character's complaints. White students in this cohort, however, tended to see Buggin Out's protest about black exclusion from the Wall of Fame as wholly and utterly trivial.[57] One Bentley man echoed a common sentiment: "I thought the boycott and rioting was unjustified. I was mostly disappointed by Mookie's character for throwing the garbage can. It showed a lack of loyalty to Sal, who gave him a job and was real lenient with him." They tended to view Mookie's actions through the lens of American individualism and rigid moralism, without an appreciation for the crucial value of solidarity within the black community. Furthermore, their investment in capitalism often led some white students to mourn the destruction of white-owned property more than the loss of a "trouble-making" black kid's life.

Lacking empathy for the black male youth, the white students were full of empathy for Sal, whom they saw as a generous boss and benevolent member of the community. They were unable to see any of Sal's paternalist and racist behaviors, or to recognize him as a cog in a larger system of economic disenfranchisement for urban blacks. Their only concern was to decide if Sal was a racist individual, which stems from a neoliberal belief that racism is an individual problem rather than a systemic one. One Bridgewater woman wrote in her response paper that "Sal does not seem to be racist. He's more than fair to Mookie who is not a good worker. Radio Raheem started the trouble with Sal." Another white student admitted that blacks might see Mookie as a hero and Sal as the antagonist, but that didn't stop him from declaring that "what Mookie did in the end was terrible. I felt bad for Sal because Mookie betrayed him." The critic Dan Flory writes astutely about the fact that many white viewers of *Do the Right Thing* have a biased and favorable view of Sal, seeing him as "as a good person who does a bad thing, or a rational person defeated by an irrational world, but not [. . .] a racist."[58] Flory gives ample evidence of Sal's racist actions and statements in the film, which many of my own students missed or explained away; only two white students used the word "racist" to describe Sal. In a final paper, one woman defended his actions throughout, arguing that "Sal is compelled to smash the boom box due to the extreme and unrespectful [*sic*] actions of the two boys." Ignoring Sal's use of the word "nigger," she instead called Radio and Buggin' Out "immature and racist" and actually determined that Radio was the ultimate symbol of abusive and "poorly used power." Reacting against Baker's "twisted and leftist" critique of capitalism in their posts and final papers, many Bentley students strongly disagreed with his view of Sal as an exploitative colonizer, instead viewing his pizzeria as an "integral part of the neighborhood instead of an oppressive force." Sal was often viewed as "a good man who at times lets his emotions get the best of him" and ultimately a man who "cares about the urban black community like it's family." This is how many white students viewed the man who responded to the

crowd's devastation at Radio Raheem's death with the callous and empty phrase "you do what you gotta do."

Dan Flory argues that such a sympathetic white response to Sal was an intentional "Brechtian move" on Lee's part, but I am not convinced that this was Lee's intention.[59] Flory argues that Lee deliberately depicts Sal as a "sympathetic racist," whom white "viewers may initially forge positive allegiances with . . . in spite of [his] anti-black beliefs and actions," only to then "alienate viewers from such characters by revealing the harmfulness of these typically white beliefs and actions." Lee's larger goal, according to Flory, is to "challenge white viewers to inspect their own presumptions about how they see themselves and others."[60] While this is certainly a desirable reception possibility, in actuality, the final portrayal of Sal as sympathetic was due more to the actor Danny Aiello than to Lee's direction. Interview comments reveal that Lee fully intended Sal to be perceived as racist: "Pino didn't pick up that stuff [racist ideology] out of the air. Some it had to have been taught to him by his father, Sal."[61] Aiello, however, did not interpret Sal as racist and held up filming of the fight sequence because he refused to say the word "nigger," believing it to be out of character for Sal.[62] In the video documentary *Making Do the Right Thing,* Lee is even more direct: "I think Sal was a racist but Danny didn't. One thing we had to fight against was he tried hard to make Sal a likable character." Lee lamented: "He wanted Sal to be the most lovable pizza owner in the world, but that's not the character I wrote."[63] Because films are more of a collaborative medium than literature, these white students may have been responding more to Aiello's acting choices than to Lee's written intent to depict Sal as a racist representative of an exploitative economic system. They were not automatically alienated by the character construction, as Flory contends, to inspect their own subtly racist beliefs, but "resist[ed] . . . seeing him [Sal] from a non-white perspective."[64]

Nonwhite student interpretations of the film's economic argument were markedly different than those voiced by these white students. In her final paper, a black woman in my African Americans in Film course voiced a viewpoint concerning race and capitalism that was rarely held by the white business students. Her analysis might be seen as a retort to the views aired by her white male classmates online and in discussion:

> Lee looks negatively upon the idea of Sal remaining in the neighborhood for purely economic reasons. Lee's portrayal of Sal is to show his exploitation of the residents of the community. He does not show any appreciation of the customers' loyalty which he could do by putting up black pictures on the wall. Mookie should not be seen as a bad employee because he doesn't look forward to Sal's offer of long-term servitude. The bigger message of the film is that racism often prevents blacks from

> achieving economic success. The film suggests that a sizeable amount of Black people, especially the poor, commonly and justifiably blame their lack of success on "The Man." "Fight the Power" is symbolic of what they must fight against in order to gain economic success.

In his online post, a Vietnamese working-class student also interpreted the film's cataclysmic ending as a result of economic disempowerment and white privilege: "The scorching day fueled their hatred for white people because only white people had the power. They were the only ones that hold decent jobs, have money, are mobile, and especially have domination over the blacks by selling products or supplying their services." Another black woman suggested that Mookie's "actions could be perceived as heroic as opposed to violent, because he is revolting against hundreds of years of economic oppression." Despite the fact that these minority students were pursuing careers in business, they drew upon knowledge of the ways that capitalism often disproportionately benefits whites.

Nonwhite students often viewed the film's riot as a rational uprising, whereas white students interpreted it as entirely undesirable, just as whites responded to the L.A. Riots in Hunt's study. Hunt's white research subjects argued that "violence is never the answer," valued "calm," and concluded that the "riots were just too destructive and counterproductive . . . [leading to] the disintegration of order." They judged "voting" to be the only "appropriate outlet for change."[65] In their commentary on the L.A. Riots, the white respondents' antiviolence stance was thus rooted in faith in a political system that protects them and ensures their safety, if not that of minorities. My students echoed all of these sentiments, complaining that Spike Lee's film promotes violence or implies that "violence solves problems." Arguing that "fighting doesn't resolve anything" and that "people should try and take measures to sort out their conflicts," the white students missed Lee's analysis of the *inevitability* of violence, given such systemic inequalities. They expressed a strong preference for legal, orderly means of registering dissatisfaction, such as voting or other political action, as a "better outlet for a means to power." Several agreed with DJ Love Daddy's recommendation to get out the vote: "Instead of using this aggression towards a pizza shop owner, they should be using these feelings to vote so changes will happen or protest racial discrimination, which Lee strongly pushes during the movie." Rioting was not seen as a legitimate form of protest, only as "senseless aggression."

Viewing the black community's violent reprisal as "senseless" stems from a white valuation of rationality as a supreme good. In his book *White,* Richard Dyer contends that whiteness is often associated with reason and the mind, the "attainment of a position of disinterest—abstraction, distance, separation, objectivity," while blackness is associated with irrationality, the body, emotion, and the

animal within.[66] In an online post, a white male Bentley student was dismayed at how the bystanders "misdirected their anger" and felt that they "should have acted in a more reasonable sense." No one pointed out that the cop's violent actions or Sal's were "unreasonable" but reserved this term only for the blacks. Similar to the white students, an Indian student suggested that education is the solution for "irrational" African Americans: "The more people know, the more logical thinking is involved, which turns the situation into a rational one rather than an irrational one in this scene. If people just take the time they will be less opposing, negative, and aggressive. This will reduce racial violence."[67] Although education is certainly an important tool for understanding and defusing racial tension, this student doesn't fully grasp that violent actions by the black poor are not simply irrational but may be rooted in a keen understanding of racial injustice. Education cannot simply erase the anger of the have-nots by itself, unless such education leads to social and economic mobility. This student seemed to see racial violence as something fostered by African Americans, not by "rational" whites.

The white students' faith in love and nonviolence over "hate" led them to privilege Martin Luther King Jr.'s ideology and disparage Malcolm X. It also led them to misdiagnose the causes of racial hatred and to see African Americans as the source of hate. While Lee's ending includes both quotations to suggest that they form a "double truth, Ruth," the white students saw Dr. King's words as unequivocally the "right thing." The only student in all three classes who praised Malcolm X's black nationalist ideas, which he represented as "standing up and defending yourself," was a black male student. In contrast, the white students expressed allegiance to Martin Luther King Jr.'s more moderate integrationist views, equating them with "brotherly love." One white woman argued in her final paper that the film clearly demonstrates Dr. King's view that violence is "impractical and immoral" and "only causes more problems." Referring to Malcolm X's argument for intelligent violence in self-defense, she argued that "Raheem's actions do not meet this qualification because Sal did not attempt to hurt Raheem in any way." She and other students restrict the definition of self-defense to a legalistic one in which a person is facing imminent physical harm or possible death. Sal, however, uses a baseball bat to destroy an object that is an extension of Raheem's soul and taunts, "I *killed* your fucking radio." This taunt could certainly be construed as a form of emotional harm and racist intimidation, since the word "kill" is not usually used to refer to an inanimate object. The student did not see the riot in response to police brutality as having any relation to Malcolm X's version of self-defense. When they granted any legitimacy at all to Malcolm's argument, the white students tended to view self-defense too literally, reserving it for physical attacks, whereas Malcolm refers to an entire system of dehumanization and

denigration of black Americans to second-class citizens. Reading more of Malcolm X's speeches may have helped these students to understand this quotation in a more fully developed context. What little knowledge they have of Malcolm X is often threatening to white students, but the quotation by Dr. King appeals to their desires for peace, calm, and brotherly love. One student who hated the film believed that it tarnishes the memory of Dr. King, a "great man." He felt that Lee dragged King's name through the mud when Smiley pins his picture on the Wall of Fame: "Everything in this film is counter to his message and his hope for the world." In the white students' lexicon, King represents love, and Malcolm X represents hate.

Just as they viewed Malcolm X as an antiwhite "racist," some students felt that the film itself is an antiwhite diatribe that fosters hate. One Bentley student argued in his final paper that "Spike Lee's racist views of whites have done nothing to promote a peaceful coexistence of blacks and whites in a race-free America." His belief in a "race-free" nation may be admirable, but ignoring racial conflict will not bring about peace. This position is ideologically similar to the "reverse racism" charge because it equates black distrust and anger at whites as the bigger problem, rather than the root cause, white oppression of African Americans. Spike Lee famously argued that "black people can't be racist" because racism is an "institution" that involves not simply dislike of or prejudice against another race but the power to perpetrate or support discriminatory acts and laws against that group.[68] African Americans, even if they may dislike or distrust whites, aren't usually in situations to lord power over whites and erect barriers to their advancement. Black prejudice against whites is often rooted in a self-preservationist caution borne of experience and knowledge of history. Yet students often use the blanket word "racist" without regard to these distinctions. The student who idolizes Dr. King argued vociferously that *Do the Right Thing* "took the form of a vehicle of hate" when Mookie/Lee incites the riot, which "fuels racial animosity instead of helping people grow toward a solution. Lee's cloaking of racial intolerance as legitimate protest is not admirable. Spike Lee aims to drum up hatred of white people, plain and simple." As an antidote to hate, white students proposed "love," "integration," and "tolerance"; one student wished that the film had "promote[d] tolerance rather than encouraging people of different skin color to hate one another." The liberal ideology of tolerance may be a nonviolent improvement, but it does not imply any real change in the structures that create legitimate animosity in the first place. What good is a hate-free zone if it's created by silencing the angry voices of victims of discrimination?

The students often took the cue for their arguments about love versus hate from Radio Raheem's fable about his brass knuckles, but they read this fable in a reductive way. In the film, he describes the two knuckles—the left hand reads

Figure 5. Radio Raheem's Brass Knuckles, *Do the Right Thing* (40 Acres and a Mule Filmworks, 1989)

"Hate," and the right hand reads "Love"—as properties in perpetual combat: "Left Hand Hate is kicking much ass and it looks like Right Hand Love is finished. Hold up. Stop the presses! Love is coming back, yes, it's Love. Love has won. Left Hand Hate KO'ed by Love." This speech appealed to the white students' hope that love is ultimately more powerful than hate, but they failed to notice that Love is a violent, retaliative force in Raheem's story, figuratively knocking out its opponent who had been "kicking much ass." Rather than depicting love as benign and nonviolent, Raheem connects love to black solidarity and resistance when he ends his speech by telling Mookie, "I love you, my brother." The Left Hand, with which "Brother Cain iced his brother," could be read as individual selfishness or a failure of human solidarity. One could thus connect the left-hand Hate with the acquisitive and oppressive history of white civilization "kicking much ass." When Mookie screams "hate" as he throws the trash can through the window, he implies in sorrow and anger that love seems to have been overpowered by the hatred of murderous whiteness once again. Following from Raheem's speech, one could also read Mookie's violent retaliation as an act of "love" in solidarity with the black community. While Lee sees hatred as a force generated by white supremacy and racial oppression, two student discussion leaders at Bridgewater understood hate only at an individual psychological level, rather than connecting it to larger systems of oppression. Choosing the brass-knuckles scene for their clip-discussion assignment, they argued that "the clash between love and hate is what prevents the neighborhood from prospering. Individuals attempt to develop relationships with one another, but to some degree hate plays a factor in these

relationships and causes destruction rather than bettering the relationships and developing bonds." Equating hate with a general evil of human nature, the white female students (who were two of the best students in the class) did not fully grasp the causes of racial hatred or stop to consider whether some hatred might be justified as a retaliatory blow against oppression. Thus they talked about the riot as a form of violent "hate" but did not always acknowledge white-supremacist hatred as the larger force creating the cycle in the first place. As a white male Bentley student argued, "Instead of feeling hate, these [black] men should focus on the love that will unite their people and help them achieve equality." These students may have had an admirable goal in mind—ending racism—but their responses to this film repeatedly placed the onus for ending violence and hate upon blacks rather than on whites.

I would be remiss if I did not mention that a few white students in these three classes did empathize with black points of view in the film; however, their views placed them in a small minority. One praised Mookie as an integrationist, called out the gentrifier Clifton as "not trying to fit in," and deemed Sal a racist. A white student saw the film as a fable about "the struggle blacks have to endure against the Man and the other higher powers." Since this student went to a predominantly black high school, he has been exposed to many more oppositional black viewpoints than his white peers at Bentley. In an essay on a final exam, an Iraq War veteran (whose best friend is black) at first called the rioting "too arbitrary in its target" but then conceded that "it's probably true that white owned businesses deprive black neighborhoods of their autonomy." Individual experience and friendships forged with African Americans in high school or the military may account for the empathetic responses of these two men. A handful of students—black and white—interpreted the film as an impassioned plea to the black community to find more empowering forms of protest that are not so destructive to black interests. Two white Bentley students praised Lee's film for powerfully "illustrating the downside of destroying your own community" and concluded that rioting could do little to achieve the important goal of economic advancement, "empowerment, and unity" for the black urban poor. Their statements were echoed online by those of two black women in the class, who understood the riots as the "direct result of exploitation by larger economic forces that surround them" but ultimately deemed such destruction counterproductive: "Mookie did the inevitable thing, but not necessarily the right thing. It's only temporary relief." These two black women were in the same Bentley class (African Americans in Film) as the two white men with similar responses. Just as interracial book clubs fostered anti-racist reading, the presence of outspoken black voices in the blackboard discussion forum and the classroom may have helped these individual white students to see from a different perspective.

By far the most astute analysis of *Do the Right Thing* among these three classes came from an Italian American male (Tim) at Bridgewater, who wrote his final paper on the film. Tim interpreted Sal as "at times inherently exploitative . . . feeling above the community he serves." In spite of his sympathetic treatment of some of his customers, Sal expresses a "deep-seated rage when he is challenged," and Tim was the only one to judge that "keeping the baseball bat on hand and actually using it is completely out of line." Despite these negative judgments of Sal, Tim viewed him judiciously as a man shaped by larger social forces rather than an individual agent:

> Sal has not acted any worse or better than some other characters in the community, but he has to pay for the long history of white on black crime that is symbolized in Radio's death. Radio Raheem's death and the burning of Sal's are "inevitable banalities" as William Lyne argues, not tragic accidents that could have been avoided if only certain individuals had made better choices. The problems of the characters do not stem from their hatred for one another, but from their situational desperation. No one is incorrect to feel the way they do; they are products of their environment. While white society forces situations on other races, Sal is also a victim of the social and economic forces that have shaped his situation. The film blames the problems on the culture and structure we have, not on one specific individual.

Tim was able to put aside his own ethnic "point of view" as an Italian American to analyze Sal's position dispassionately and judiciously. More impressive is the fact that he fully grasps the systemic conditions that Lee subtly references throughout the film. Refusing to blame or demonize individuals, Tim deliberately refutes white neoliberal judgments rooted in a code of "individual responsibility." He drew from the critical analyses by the African American critic Houston A. Baker and the white anti-racist William Lyne to defend his own perspective on the film.[69] Although he made these statements in a final paper that gave him time for careful reflection, he still reached far different conclusions than many of his classmates did on their own papers and exams.

The existence of white students like Tim and the few others who empathized with black points of view reminds us that white identity is not always a monolithic force of domination. But why were there so few of them? Why were the majority seemingly impervious to the arguments expressed by the film and critical articles, and to my pointed questioning of their discussion comments? Unlike the book clubs of liberal adult readers with an interest in African American fiction, these students were primarily drawn to these courses because they fulfilled a humanities requirement, and they relished the chance to get credit for studying film, which they perceive as "entertainment." Many had thought little about racial issues before taking the course. One could argue that this reception group

is closer to the dominant white norm than the more liberal white audiences discussed in previous chapters. Simply exposing these students to a few alternative black viewpoints via film was not enough to provoke a thorough reconsideration of their own worldviews, especially when the film content is so racially charged and oppositional. It is particularly instructive that Tim was a senior English major who had already studied African American literature in a previous course, and thus his enhanced exposure to black viewpoints distinguished him from his younger classmates, many of whom disliked reading and were avoiding literature by taking a film course to fulfill their humanities requirement.

Although pessimists might conclude that these resistant viewers and reluctant readers may be unlikely to ever change their white ways of seeing, it is also important to note that they were nineteen- and twenty-year-olds with more years of education and experience ahead of them. This first encounter with Spike Lee may have laid the seeds for empathy to develop in the future through continued encounters with African American texts. Two students from my general education Race in Film course at Bridgewater decided to major in English and went on to take my upper-level courses in African American and ethnic literature and culture. One of those (a white male student) later wrote an excellent senior-seminar paper focused on how blacks' achievement of the American dream of riches or fame often alienates them from a black identity or community. Two years later, another white female student from that introductory class wrote a strong research paper on Langston Hughes's jazz poetry and the appropriation of jazz rhythms by the white poet Vachel Lindsay. A third student (a Puerto Rican woman) from that introductory film course went on to become a student leader of the Social Justice League, a group that uses film to provoke campus-wide conversations about social justice issues. I continue to teach these introductory film courses in the hopes that some students will be sparked, as were these students, to read and view more African American literature and film, and thereby develop interpretive lenses to view their world anew. The final section of the chapter will examine how more experienced readers and viewers of African American literature and film engaged much more positively with *Do the Right Thing*. To further explain the limitations of white ways of seeing, I will turn now to an instructive comparison by examining white student viewers' overwhelmingly favorable response to a white-authored racial-conflict film, *Crash*.

Crash, Neoliberalism, and "Universal" Racism

Produced more than fifteen years after *Do the Right Thing, Crash* (2005) can be seen as a fuller exploration of a subject raised by Lee's famous montage scene depicting a litany of racial slurs—how people view other racial and ethnic groups

through the lens of stereotype, fear, and hostility. Written and directed by the white director Paul Haggis, *Crash* offers a panoramic view of the lives of diverse Los Angelinos as they interact (largely negatively) with people from different racial groups in a thirty-six-hour period; the ensemble cast includes white American policemen, a wealthy white district attorney and his wife, a Latino locksmith, Latino and African American police officers, African American carjackers, an African American TV producer and his wife, a black HMO manager, Asian American human traffickers and their Asian victims, and an Iranian shopkeeper.[70] Both *Crash* and *Do the Right Thing* explore the volatile nature of interracial conflict or "crashes" in urban spaces, and steer clear of sentimental representations of America as a melting pot of racial harmony.

The similarities between the two films were noted by several reviewers, but their differences are far more salient. A *Hollywood Reporter* writer astutely predicted that *Crash* would be a much more lucrative movie, attracting a larger mass audience than any Spike Lee film.[71] In contrast to *Do the Right Thing,* which was snubbed by the Cannes judges and the Academy, *Crash* won the Best Picture Oscar and grossed large profits.[72] As one Latino *Los Angeles Times* writer suggested, "Some Oscar voters were assuaging liberal guilt over the safety of their own isolation when they feted *Crash* for 'tackling' that old devil racism."[73] Whereas Lee's black point of view concerning a riot against white business interests was deemed too threatening by many mainstream reviewers, *Crash* presents a message more palatable to white neoliberal viewership: that racism is a universal human foible rather than a product of structural inequality for which whites in power are largely responsible. For example, the film critic David Denby feared that *Do the Right Thing* would cause riots but extolled *Crash* as "breathtakingly intelligent" and "exhilarating" for suggesting that "no one is entirely innocent or entirely guilty."[74] Of the students (all white) in my course on Race in Film at Bridgewater State College, 50 percent claimed in a post-course questionnaire that they disagreed with the "violent" message of *Do the Right Thing,* whereas 95 percent of the students strongly approved of *Crash*'s neoliberal representation of racism as a "universal" human problem.

The neoliberal, post-9/11 political context in which *Crash* was produced and received is crucial to understanding the film's goals and its reception. The post-civil rights era ushered in a discursive shift among Republicans and Democrats toward a new political rhetoric of "neoliberalism" that called for "national identity" and "universalism" and "deliberately fostered neglect of issues of race."[75] The Reagan, Bush, and Clinton administrations aimed to avoid a "divisive" attention to race despite the fact that their pro-business economic policies exacerbated racial inequality by concentrating wealth in the hands of the white elite.[76] Ward Connerly's Racial Privacy Initiative in California, which aimed to prevent the state

from collecting racial data used to bolster antidiscrimination laws, and George W. Bush's tax cuts and assault on civil liberties further diminished the government's role in fostering social justice. Policies that eroded the state's commitment to racial and economic justice were masked by a rhetoric encouraging citizens to take "personal responsibility" and accusing the black poor of "irresponsibility."[77] Such rhetoric was employed by student viewers of *Do the Right Thing* who judged the black young men to be irresponsible hoodlums who did the "wrong thing." Proposing that the end of racism could be achieved by individuals behaving with "tolerance" and "civility" rather than by progressive government action to ensure equality, neoliberals and conservatives trumpeted "individualism over and against the state."[78] The post-9/11 years strengthened the rhetorical power of neoliberalism's universalist and race-blind discourses. After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the conservative president George W. Bush's "us versus them" patriotism aimed to unify the nation against all foreign threats. Yet rhetoric concerning unity and universal American values belied the way that government tax cuts and attacks on civil liberties disproportionately hurt minority citizens and residents of color, who have been subjected to increased harassment and anti-immigration initiatives. Despite a growing rhetorical investment in the idea of a "post-race" nation, the first decade of the twenty-first century could be viewed as a period of "rabid racial backlash" against Muslims, South Asians, and Latinos.[79] In this context, *Crash* aims to expose post-race rhetoric as a fiction but nonetheless participates in neoliberal misdiagnoses of the causes of racism and effective means to counter it.

The screenwriter and director Paul Haggis clearly views his film as an attack on the xenophobia and racism fostered by the Bush administration after 9/11. In the press release for the film, Haggis writes, "We live in a society of fear, where people like our President use that fear in order to control us. . . . That fear resonates and distorts how we perceive the world around us."[80] He envisioned the film as a critique of "upper-middle-class liberals" not unlike himself, who "like to think that if there really were race and class problems in our city—or any city—we would have fixed them."[81] Haggis began writing the screenplay fifteen years before the film's release, after his own car was stolen by black youth with guns; he claims that the carjacking incident "forced me out of my complacency. I began considering the lives of my attackers. I became acutely aware of my own urban isolation. After 9/11, the subject seemed, to me, to become even more urgent."[82] Understanding what drove the carjackers to crime is analogized to the need to understand why Muslim terrorists attacked the United States; such an endeavor has the potential to reveal the complicity of powerful white elites in provoking violent reactions among the powerless. Haggis's emphasis on the realities of race and class disparity, including residential segregation, and his critique of the

president's distorted view of foreign "others," suggest that the film was *intended* to "[explode] the assumption that racism is a thing of the past in America."[83] Given the mainstream media's embrace of the neoliberal status quo, Haggis had difficulty getting initial studio funding, according to the film's eventual producer Cathy Shulman, because producers felt that "racism had 'been done' or was passé."[84] Along these lines, a British reviewer praised the film as a critique of neoliberalist idealizations of America: "[A]t last, a film that challenges U.S. cinema's idealized notion of society as a happy melting pot where tolerance prevails."[85]

One of the film's more progressive elements, flying in the face of neoliberal race-blindness, is its emphasis on racism and racial profiling experienced by black characters, themes that drew praise from black audiences. A climactic scene depicts the murder of a black hitchhiker (Peter) by a white off-duty police officer who had given him a ride; the liberal Officer Hansen's unconscious assumptions about black criminality lead him to shoot an unarmed man without cause or provocation and to dump his body on the side of the road. The fact that Peter is in fact a carjacker does not lessen the tragedy of his undeserved death, which is ironically triggered when he reaches into his pocket to show the officer that they share a common faith in a St. Christopher medal. Earlier in the film, a wealthy African American couple (Christine and Cameron Thayer) are pulled over by this same seemingly liberal officer and his overtly racist partner Ryan, who (Christine surmises) was disturbed at the sight of what he thought was a white woman performing fellatio on a black man. White Officer Ryan harasses the couple, sexually assaulting the belligerent Christine as he aims to silence and humiliate her. Because of her husband Cameron's fear of the police's disregard for black life, he can not object to the debasement of his wife and is further emasculated. The next day in his job as a television director, Cameron is again humiliated when his white boss criticizes him for directing a black character to speak in standard English when the script had called for stereotypical Ebonics. In these scenes, Haggis condemns the media and the police for stripping African Americans of agency, self-determination, and life itself.

Haggis's desire to give voice to the grievances of the black community is evident in his decision to spend opening night watching the film at a theater in Compton, a black neighborhood in Los Angeles.[86] He reported about how white guilt colored his motivations: "I was the only white guy in an all-black audience. I felt so guilty. The first half-hour was so brutal. The rape scene was hard, she's humiliated on screen, there's dead silence. Somebody humiliates someone of color every day. It was right in their face. They got to feel some release."[87] This comment reveals an admirable desire to acknowledge the realities of black pain on screen, yet also a discomfort and guilt at being a white agent of further emotional distress among his black viewers. Haggis's arguably paternalistic desire to give black viewers

"release" was well-received, however, since the film drew overwhelming support from black media producers, reviewers, actors, and influential viewers in the African American community. They were able to overlook other moments in the film that stereotype blacks as criminals and crackhead welfare mothers.[88] In the preproduction period, Haggis and his script were championed by Anita Addison, the first African American woman to hold a top executive position in network media, while the actor Don Cheadle worked tirelessly as a spokesperson and producer to draw black talent to the production.[89] In a *Jet* magazine cover story on the film's black actors, Thandie Newton, who plays Christine, applauded the film's honest representation of the black middle class: "[Christine and Cameron] are constantly asking themselves whether they're real, whether they're just playing roles. That's the tragedy—the feeling they are not entitled to their wealth or class as Black people in American society."[90] To court the support of black audiences and to create buzz, the marketing division of Lions Gate prescreened the film for minority audiences nationwide, including NAACP officers in Milwaukee and "influential activists and pop icons, including Rep. Maxine Waters . . . Jay-Z, and the Reverend Al Sharpton."[91] After the film's release, Vicangelo Bulluck, the director of the NAACP's Hollywood Bureau, reported that African Americans "are encouraging everyone they know to go out and see it."[92] The film's commitment to exposing the realities of antiblack racism and police brutality earned it a favorable review from Esther Iverem, an African American film critic at the *Washington Post*.[93] *Crash* went on to win the Hubert Humphrey Award from the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights and was picked as the "best film of 2005" by the African American Film Critics Association.

Despite Haggis's successful attempt to draw attention to racial profiling and the psychological trauma engendered by antiblack racism, there are also numerous ways in which the film and Haggis's own rhetoric draw upon a white neoliberal worldview that obfuscates institutional racism. In an interview, Haggis downplayed race and called for unity, arguing that "*Crash* is not 'about' race. It's about strangers, others. About how we love to divide ourselves."[94] This suggestion could imply a belief that ethnic neighborhoods are the cause of the problem of atomization, rather than a symptom of housing discrimination or a defense against the racism of the dominant white community. The use of the universal pronoun "we" reveals his investment in the neoliberal rhetoric of universality and "common humanity." In the press release, Haggis continues: "My aim with this film is to explore how intolerance is a collective problem . . . film enables us to walk, however briefly, in the shoes of strangers. In that sense, I hope that *Crash* succeeds not so much in pointing out our differences, but in recognizing shared humanity."[95] Although he admirably envisions his film as a call for greater empathy towards others, empathy is anemic when it denies difference in the pursuit of sameness.

His call for greater "tolerance and compassion" also implies a neoliberal investment in the civility of individuals as a cure for the ills of racism.

Numerous critics have convincingly uncovered the film's neoliberal or even reactionary ideology.[96] Susan Searls Giroux and Henry A. Giroux take Haggis to task for reinforcing "the neoliberal mantra" that racism is a "function of private discrimination—a matter of individual attitude or psychology" rather than "a systemic political force with often dire material consequences."[97] They regard the film's message of civility—"Can't we all just get along?"—as numbingly naïve.[98] Also decrying the film's occlusion of institutional racism, Hsuan L. Hsu calls *Crash* a participant in "antirace-ism," a form of "race blindness," with its problematic suggestion that all people are equally intolerant and benefit from racist behavior in equal measure.[99] Tim Wise sums up the progressive critique of the film's neoliberal or reactionary elements by arguing that the film falters in three ways: "[F]irst, by presenting racism as more or less an issue of individual bias and bigotry, rather than institutional or systemic inequality; secondly, by presenting racism as if it were an equal opportunity pathology, to which all persons—white or of color—were equally likely to fall prey; and third, by playing into several white fears and insecurities, about black crime and so-called reverse discrimination."[100]

Although I agree with all of these points, I would like to offer a partial defense of the film on the charge of privatizing or reducing structural relations of power to the level of the individual. This is hardly a new problem, as Sue J. Kim notes, since it is in fact central to the functioning of most film and television narratives.[101] Mainstream as well as independent films, rooted as they are in melodramatic formulas, often seek to render complex social problems within the realm of individual, emotionally charged stories. The sociologist Ruth Frankenberg also offers an important defense of personal, subjective narratives: "[H]istories of structural and institutional racism are frequently embedded in apparently trivial actions, words, or gestures. If nothing else, attention to the 'subjective' might thus be used as opportunities to make those histories more visible and to learn from them."[102] Film offers an excellent opportunity for investigating the ways that systemic forces subtly undergird individual actions and phrases. Yet progressive critics often demand that such connections be spelled out for all viewers, which would make for quite didactic art. Wahneema Lubiano, for example, criticized *Do the Right Thing* for not making more explicit the point that structural racism fuels economic disparity. Such a requirement would reduce cinematic art to a sociological or political treatise.

Unlike many mainstream films, *Crash* at least sheds some light upon whites in institutional roles wielding power irresponsibly.[103] District Attorney Rick Cabot and his election team engineer fake "politically correct" publicity ploys to manipulate public opinion and court the black vote, Cameron's television-executive su-

pervisor enforces media stereotypes of black speech, and two white police officers terrorize and murder innocent black citizens. Yes, these are all "individuals," but their connection to larger centers of white power—government, media, police—is certainly implied. The fact that even the "good" liberal cop ends up murdering an innocent black man suggests that he has been unconsciously conditioned by the larger racist infrastructure of the LAPD or the surrounding media culture. It is true that we don't get to see a white racist police captain (only a black one, a point to which I'll return later), and the "white male corporate elites behind the scene remain unexposed."[104] In some smaller details, *Crash* alludes, albeit briefly, to the epistemic dimensions of racial disparity. While the Latino locksmith Daniel works to ensure the safety of the rich white D.A. by installing new locks, the film offers an ironic, contrasting portrait of the unsafe neighborhoods that minorities are often forced to inhabit, as the locksmith's daughter Lara is haunted by nightmares about gunfire in her former neighborhood. The locksmith, ironically, is powerless to keep his own neighborhood safe. The film makes note of the disproportionate population of minorities who ride the bus (Anthony even calls it a conspiracy to "humiliate people of color who are reduced to riding it"), whereas whites can afford the isolating "protection" of their own cars. This fact of economic disparity serves as a clear motivation for why the two black men, Anthony and Peter, resort to stealing the cars of rich whites. In isolation, these details give evidence of a white-supremacist social system, yet the problem is that they are drowned out and undermined by an opposing message concerning "universal racism."

As I argued in chapter 2 concerning viewers of the film *Beloved,* film's tendency to put an individual face on experiences of racism can have positive consequences in fostering empathy and outrage, but such a response is hardly guaranteed. In their account of teaching *Crash* to secondary education students, Roberta Ahlquist and Marie Milner draw upon the film's emotional power to get students talking about "power and powerlessness" in the film's situations and in our society at large. In their classroom, they invite their students to analyze their emotional identification patterns in order to turn a critical lens upon "their own racialized identities."[105] While some of *Crash*'s individualizing narratives have the *potential* to allow viewers to empathize with the characters of color and to think critically about white supremacy and institutional racism, this was unfortunately not the film's dominant effect upon the students in my Bridgewater class on race in American film. Despite Haggis's good intentions, the film often induces whites' emotions in other political directions—some reactionary, some complacent—that are not necessarily productive for the cause of racial justice. For example, the film's contradictory treatment of the Iranian character Farhad reifies post-9/11 stereotypes of Middle Eastern immigrants despite Haggis's efforts to show him as a victim of vandals who target his store and of a discriminatory gun-store clerk

who calls him "Osama." It turns out that the gun clerk had been right to assume that Farhad would plot the murder of innocents, as he nearly kills a little girl in his quest for vengeance. Despite Haggis's claim to oppose Bush's Orientalist fearmongering, this plotline stokes white fears of Middle Eastern people as irrational, violent terrorists driven by revenge.[106] Since he pits an Iranian against a Latino family (in this case, the Latinos are rendered sympathetically as victims), Haggis passes up the chance to investigate how the American government and white citizens have menaced both Latino and Middle Eastern citizens and immigrants.

To my mind, the film's most dangerous tactic is to give voice and even credence to the viewpoints of reactionaries who oppose affirmative action, adopting the "reverse racism" plea to support their belief that whites are the real victims, rather than the holders of power. As the anti-racist activist Tim Wise notes, "Whites, according to the available evidence, are far more likely to believe that reverse discrimination against us is a problem, than we are to believe that discrimination against people of color still is."[107] It is significant that a good number of the film's minority characters occupy positions of power—a black police captain, black and Latino police detectives, a black HMO manager, a black woman as the D.A.'s lead assistant, an Asian American insurance agent, a black television director—as if to suggest that affirmative action has turned over power to the hands of minorities who are now in a position to abuse power and to oppress whites.[108] In an effort to keep his own reputation clean, the black police captain rejects Officer Hansen's report about his partner's racist actions and is therefore "complicit in maintaining the existing power structure."[109] Even if it is intended as a critique of a corrupt system, as Ahlquist and Milner seem to believe, this plotline suggests that there is no benefit to promoting police officers of color. Giroux and Giroux point out that all the black police officers are shown to be susceptible to corruption. The dead black officer caught in a shootout with Conklin was illegally accepting profits of the drug trade, and even the good black cop, Graham, agrees to withhold evidence in a deal to keep his delinquent brother Peter out of jail. Thus black officers in positions of power are rendered "complicit in their own degradation."[110] Other misleading examples of minorities as the face of power include several references to the "black vote," as if white politicians were totally under the sway of black voters rather than largely beholden to the ideology of the white mainstream electorate.[111] Perhaps the most egregious villainizing of minority power is the representation of the Asian American human trafficker and his wife, who chain up and sell Asian people. As Hsu notes, this "projection of both slavery and global practices of exploitation onto unsentimental Asiatic profiteers" conveniently sidesteps the historical reality of white participation in practices of labor exploitation.[112]

The scenes detailing the confrontation between the black HMO official Shaniqua Johnson and Officer Ryan allow for an even more reactionary interpretation. The film sympathetically treats the case of Ryan's father, who suffers from prostate cancer but cannot get a correct diagnosis from his incompetent doctor. When Ryan asks Johnson, the HMO representative, to bend the rules to allow his father to see a specialist, she refuses and thus becomes the *black* face of an oppressive insurance system, surely one of the most popular villains in American society.[113] The insurance denial for the white victim also runs against the grain of actual statistics—it is most often minorities that suffer from inadequate care and are excluded from health insurance. Johnson rejects his plea, furthermore, because Ryan angrily voices the conservative white complaint against affirmative action. Despite his father's equal opportunity hiring practices in his janitorial business, his business went under when government contracts were awarded only to minority-owned companies. Ryan's father is thus a sympathetic white victim of "reverse racism" on two counts, and the film does nothing to counter that argument's appeal to white viewers. As Wise argues, "The fact that roughly ninety-four percent of government contracts go to white male-owned businesses—so that the story Ryan tells Johnson is utterly contradicted by the way affirmative action actually operates—is irrelevant, one supposes."[114] Giving credence to the idea that Johnson is a bad affirmative-action hire, the film represents her as a mean-spirited bureaucrat whose own racism is confirmed when she voices stereotypes about Asian drivers in the film's final scene.

The fender benders that bookend the film—the opening scene in which the Latina cop Ria and an Asian American driver exchange racially based insults, and the closing scene where Shaniqua tells another Asian driver to "speak American"—are examples of the many scenes in which minority characters utter prejudiced statements against other ethnic groups in the film. When I taught the Bridgewater course on Race in Film to an all-white group of students (75 percent female), these scenes led to a general interpretation of the film as being about the universality of racism, and many endorsed that concept as a true representation of reality. Viewing racism as universal reinforces a color-blind ideology that conveniently assures whites that they have no special responsibility to bear. In a post-course anonymous questionnaire, many students revealed color-blind rhetoric that continued to inform their interpretations even after the course had been completed. To sum up *Crash*'s argument, one student jokingly referred to the spoof song from the musical *Avenue Q,* "Everyone's a Little Bit Racist." Drawing upon humanist discourses about shared human emotions, another student argued on the questionnaire: "We all feel anger, pain, love, joy. *Crash* shows that every race acts racist and is affected by others' racism." Another questionnaire respondent remarked

that "Haggis represents these emotions as universal human conditions—anger, frustration, prejudice, fear, and that desire for touch." Treating racism as an innate and universal human emotion equivalent to "prejudice" ignores the fact that racism is a system that is culturally constructed for the benefit of those in power. This equalizing rhetoric leads white viewers quite easily into the color-blind idea that race is no longer important: "People tend to judge people before getting to know them. The movie showed that there is good and bad in all people, and judgment based on race is not relevant." The students' anonymous questionnaire responses thus corroborate Wise's critique of the film: "By presenting racism as an equal opportunity infector, *Crash* further validates color-blind formalism as the best solution for racism and racial tension. . . . So by ignoring power, and making racism about personal bias, shared by all, *Crash* encourages radical color-blindness as the answer."[115]

The biggest problem with this "equal opportunity" rhetoric is that it suggests that all kinds of prejudice are equivalent, as if all people suffer and benefit equally from racism. Giroux and Giroux call the film "politically and ethically irresponsible" because it "overlook[s] how some groups bear the burden of racism much more than others."[116] The film neglects to emphasize that racism against nonwhite people in this country has far more devastating consequences due to structures of inequality. While a black woman may absorb dominant stereotypes about Asians, minorities are not often in positions to enact policies that deprive any group of access to equal opportunity and protection. As Wise eloquently argues about American society, "[T]he drivers, so to speak, on the racial highway have vastly unequal degrees of power, and some drive far more recklessly than others."[117] Universal racism is a seductive ideology for whites because blame is being actively diverted away from them, and the benefits that white privilege accrues are left unexamined.

The defeatist nature of the film's final scene also feeds into white students' sense of complacency. Ending in the same figurative place where it began, the film closes with yet another car crash accompanied by ethnic minorities hurling insults at one another. The overhead shot used in this scene suggests the idea of fate, or of God looking down upon human beings with disdain or bemusement. One student stated in her response paper that "*Crash*'s ending suggests these are commonplace events with a cyclical nature, destined to continue over and over again in history. We can't do anything to stop it." Another echoed the same sentiments on her final exam: "No matter how hard people try to reject stereotyping, it is inevitable for people to either willingly or unwillingly use them to pass judgment on others." While prejudice against difference is certainly widespread among human societies, this conclusion that racism is an inevitable function of human nature allows white viewers to accept the status quo, as if racism were

not a culturally constructed practice that it is possible and necessary to change. Resisting this conclusion, several activists in the Los Angeles area voiced criticism of the film's defeatism, pointing to many effective interracial coalitions and activist groups in the area as counterexamples.[118] It is interesting that some of the same students who complained that *Do the Right Thing*'s ending is pessimistic conversely lauded *Crash*'s pessimism as "realistic." Haggis's film thus made them feel good for taking a hard look at "reality" without thinking very hard about how to challenge it.

Even more students read *Crash*'s narrative arc in an optimistic light, arguing that some of the characters change to "overcome their racism or put it aside, at least for a little while." On a final exam, one man assessed the film's message this way: "Racial conflict is due to ignorance. The more aware people are, the less racist they will be." As examples of "hopeful change," students in class discussion often point to Jean's begrudging acknowledgment of her Hispanic maid as her "best friend," Anthony's decision to free the Asian slaves, Cameron's brave if ill-advised stand against the cops, the Iranian shopkeeper's belief that the locksmith's young daughter was an "angel" sent to show him the error of his ways, and Officer Ryan's decision to risk his own life to rescue Christine, the black woman whom he had assaulted earlier in the film. I questioned them about whether Jean shows any evidence that she will treat her maid more fairly in the future, or whether Ryan is truly a reformed racist, but these viewers quickly accepted the conclusion that these characters were taking steps toward reformation. In a final exam essay, one female student wrote that the "ending scenes with the snow seem to be a symbol of hope for the future as several characters reconcile with their loved ones and experience a moment of self-discovery. Races are going to continue to clash together, but with each crash they will hopefully become closer and find it easier to reconcile." Because of these typical Hollywood character arcs of reformation and change, some students drew the neoliberal conclusion that the solution to racism is individual civility, color-blindness, and tolerance: "Everyone from every race has to put aside the difference of color and just live. Treat people like people." These were often the same students who sought a message of peaceful tolerance in *Do the Right Thing* or were dismayed that they did not find it there. Calling attention in her final paper to *Crash*'s symbolic leitmotif of the closing door, which is often used as a bridge between scenes, one student saw the film's solution as a plea to open doors: "Everyone is afraid to go outside the boundaries of doors that keep them in their comfort zones, so segregation and miscommunication persists. There won't be an escape from this oppression until people are willing to come out from behind closed doors." All we need to do to "end violence" is for "everyone to question their beliefs about racism." In her reading, the film suggests that the cause of racism is simply segregation and isolation, but this reveals a naïve

faith that integration or individual soul-searching will eradicate racial injustice. She and Haggis both neglect to consider that "closing doors" in self-segregation may offer minorities a necessary survival strategy in a racist society.

The only student who disliked some of *Crash*'s major premises was Tim, the same Italian American student who empathized with an African American point of view in analyzing *Do the Right Thing*. Rather than accepting the doctrine of universal racism, he deemed *Crash* "disturbing" for presenting "everyone as inherently racist." His biggest complaint was that the film offered no real resolution for the problems it depicted, resulting in acceptance of the status quo: "The film does not try to resolve these issues. Instead we get a story of interaction with very little change. Some important actions do occur—mostly for Cameron and Anthony—but the main white characters of the lawyer Rick and his wife Jean do not change." Tim was once again the only one to push back against the film, refusing to come to the same neoliberal conclusions as the other students. What he wanted to see was some meaningful anti-racist action among the white elites, where the real power lies. The impetus for change, he suggests, should not be focused largely on nonwhites. Once again, Tim's perspective was informed by having read a sizable number of African American texts in other courses.

Hoping to understand the motivations of his carjackers, Haggis clearly intended his film to "enable us to walk, however briefly, in the shoes of strangers," but this invitation to cross-racial empathy was largely declined by the white students in this Bridgewater course, who were only able to empathize with white characters and white points of view.[119] Haggis's script underscores the need for cross-racial and intersubjective understanding with the repeated injunction to "look at me," voiced by Ryan to Christine and Cameron to Anthony, characters with whom they are in conflict. The script's stage directions for the scene in which Ryan rescues Christine imply that Haggis's intention was for Ryan to experience an empathetic gaze, a self-alienating look: "Ryan looks into her face and sees her pain and humiliation, and knows he was the cause of it."[120] One student wrote in her final paper that "*Crash* conveys that maybe what we all need is empathetic communication and understanding to take place among individuals not just over racial and ethnic divides but also between people of different classes, genders, religion, or anything else." Since she was the only student to complain of Jean's lack of empathy for the Latino maid and the locksmith, she does seem to be taking up Haggis's invitation to consider a nonwhite point of view. Several plotlines in the film that focus on characters of color—most notably those concerning Graham, Daniel (the Latino locksmith) and his daughter Lara, and Cameron and Christine—encourage white audiences to "walk in the shoes" of these sympathetic nonwhite individuals. However, unlike those black viewers who responded positively to the film's representation of these minority characters, the white students in my

class rarely mentioned sympathetic nonwhite characters and instead focused all their attention upon the characters of Officer Ryan and Officer Hansen, much as they had empathized largely with Sal in *Do the Right Thing*.

Officer Hansen and Officer Ryan appear to be opposites in the early scenes—the good liberal cop and the bad racist cop, respectively—yet the film ultimately depicts both as "sympathetic racists" (to employ Dan Flory's term for Sal in *Do the Right Thing*). Ryan shifts from an unsympathetic racist to a sympathetic son and hero who rescues his former victim Christine from a car crash. Hansen's character arc moves in the opposite direction; he tries to protest against Ryan's racist actions and sympathetically helps the black character Cameron in a dangerous standoff with cops, yet toward the end of the film his unconscious racist assumptions cause him to murder Peter. One of the film's messages is voiced by Ryan, who tells Hansen of how years on the force can change you: "You think you know who you are. You have no idea." Haggis's linking of these two characters implies that there is good in every bad man and bad in every good one. Most students found this equalizing concept very appealing, but it avoids the difficulty of judgment and of determining if some actions are more blameworthy than others. As one student argued in a post-course questionnaire, "I think many people are filled with racist and anti-racist views, and it's important to note not everything is black and white." This seemingly benign statement about human contradiction and ambiguity is rendered a bit more problematic, however, by the fact that it came from the same student who argued that Radio Raheem should be blamed for his own death rather than the white cops who killed him. This viewer finds it quite easy to judge black characters through a white lens, and to absolve the white policemen from responsibility, which suggests that her own understanding of the world is in fact racially polarized despite her claim that "not everything is black and white." Since everyone is both racist and nonracist, she implies, how can you blame white people?

The character arc of Officer Ryan is perhaps the most problematic one, because it allows white viewers to enjoy the redemption of whiteness. While Flory thinks "sympathetic racist" characters should work to provoke white viewers to think critically about their own racism, instead most students were pleased to see that Ryan was really good at the core, which allows them to excuse his racism. The film's suggestion that his racist words are rooted in a "reasonable" cause—his father's "unjust" victimization at the hands of affirmative action—further solidifies their sympathy for him. As Sue J. Kim argues about the rescue scene, the film implies that "he is not fundamentally a racist because he values all human life and is willing to risk his own life to save a black woman."[121] Ryan becomes the white knight or "racial savior" to rescue the helpless black female, a plot that may appeal especially to white males.[122] Two women leading discussion of the

rescue scene believed that Ryan was "slightly [rather than totally] redeemed in Christine's eyes." Yet in their own white eyes, Ryan is seen as more sympathetic than Christine, whom they actually called "racist towards white men." In their view, a person is "racist" if she fears the individual who has actually attacked her on a previous occasion. Ryan's narrative redemption allows viewers to forget and forgive the effects of his racist views and actions, which do not appear to disqualify him from the honor of citizen hero.

While Ryan's heroism seems to invite white denial, Officer Hansen's character development presents more progressive possibilities. The revelation of his unconscious racism at the end of the film has the potential to encourage shock and self-scrutiny among white viewers, as Dan Flory believes Spike Lee's "sympathetic racist" characters do. Haggis described his film as being about "how we all hate to be judged but see no contradiction in judging others. In this film, I didn't want us to be judging others. I wanted us to judge ourselves."[123] To encourage such a process of white self-judgment, Haggis shows that Hansen mourns his actions with tears at the end of the film, and his decision to burn his car could be read not only as a desire to erase evidence but also to purify his soul. Since Hansen is the character who most invites the identification of the liberal white viewers, his racially motivated act of murder is clearly an invitation to self-reflection about the unspoken biases that they may harbor deep within. In Ahlquist and Milner's article about teaching *Crash,* they note that most of their students identify with Hansen because they believe themselves to be nonracist but recognize that they too could act out of racist unconscious biases.[124] Ahlquist and Milner believe that the film thus invites us to "overcome our own programming" as racialized people, yet my own study of student reactions reveals that this is a bit more difficult or gradual than these educators acknowledge.[125]

Unfortunately, this opportunity for racial consciousness-raising was bypassed by some of the students in my Race in Film class, whose strong identification with Hansen led them to excuse his behavior. As one student justified in a post-course questionnaire, "Everyone has some racism in them, but it doesn't mean they are horrible people. I don't consider myself racist, but everyone holds stereotypes even if they don't realize it, just like Hansen in the movie." In her eyes, racist murder is thus rendered normal rather than horrible, since Hansen isn't fully conscious of the stereotypes that activate his trigger finger. Hansen becomes the universal man ("everyone"), and this allows the white viewer to excuse his actions as simply human nature. Another woman, who wrote a final paper on the film's depiction of miscommunication as a source of racial conflict, also exhibits stronger empathy for Hansen than for the black murder victim Peter. She compares *Do the Right Thing*'s Sal and *Crash*'s Officer Hansen as characters who are "put into a situation in which bad communication causes them to react in ways that make them appear

to be racist." The use of passive constructions in this sentence defers the agency of Sal and Hansen, suggesting that they are victims of circumstance or merely "reactors" responding to the aggression of black others. The only person that she takes to task for being an agent of bad communication is the African American Peter: "Peter miscommunicates when his seemingly sarcastic remarks don't mix well with his torn clothes and appearance. The misunderstanding results in Officer Hansen shooting Peter." No mention is made of any miscommunication by Hansen, and this statement once again seems to place the blame upon the victim, judging others rather than "ourselves" as Haggis intended. Poor blacks must tread very carefully with whites, she implies, because they invite justifiable suspicion by their raggedy appearance. On the questionnaire, another student similarly defended Hansen's decision to shoot Peter—who is in fact a thief, if not a dangerous criminal—as rational and natural and "not racist": "The message was that we are all human and make assumptions and even if we're not racist there are reasons behind those assumptions." The film allowed this student to view stereotypical assumptions as based on "reasons" and thus justified.

Ahlquist's and Milner's assignment to invite students to write about which of the film's characters they "identify [with] emotionally" to gain "insight into their own racialized identities"[126] could backfire if students are not pushed to question or challenge the grounds for their identities. In a student's final exam essay for my class, at which point I could do nothing to challenge her reading, one woman wrote about the feminist empowerment of the characters of Jean and Christine, both of whom she admired. While she justifiably applauded Christine's pride, she also admired Jean's strength because she "says prejudiced things within earshot of the locksmith to show she is not fearful of him." Identifying with a white woman for asserting racist power over a Latino serviceperson hardly seems laudable; this student privileges gender over race as the only important vector of power and powerlessness. Thus an exercise concerning identification with *Crash* cannot succeed if it leaves the power of whiteness unanalyzed and unchallenged. I argue that the film is more likely to shut down a critique of whiteness than to foster it, *unless* viewers strategically read the film from a nonwhite or anti-racist point of view.

One of the best possible effects of this film is its ability to move some whites to look at themselves critically, to examine their own complicity with racism. However, this positive effect was acknowledged on the post-course questionnaire by only one student in the Bridgewater Race in Film class, who "felt the message was incredibly powerful, because it asked us to draw our own conclusions about ourselves." Ahlquist and Milner similarly applaud the film's invocation to "see ourselves" by revealing "the often unspoken prejudices and biases, which are embedded in our collective unconscious."[127] Tim Wise is less sanguine about

Crash's ability to provoke a self-alienating look: "Although the film can inspire many good conversations on the subject of personal prejudices and stereotypes—and perhaps a good dialogue facilitator could link those to the issue of power and systemic oppression—in and of itself, *Crash* is unlikely to help viewers make sense of the racial drama playing out every day in the United States, with regard to immigration, profiling, job discrimination or housing."[128] The phrase "in and of itself" in Wise's statement is crucial here. Such anti-racist reading practices as Wise demonstrates are not likely to develop from interpreting *Crash* in a vacuum; however, reading practices learned by exposure to black literature and culture can enable viewers to read the film with a more critical eye. My students' responses to *Do the Right Thing* and *Crash* in these introductory classes imply that isolated viewings of these films may not be enough "in and of themselves" to move white viewers to anti-racist understanding. Greater cross-racial empathy resulted, however, when viewers had repeated exposure to critiques of systemic racism and to fictional texts grounded in the realities of African American lived experience.

An Education In and Out of Whiteness

My growing unease at white student responses to these films about racial conflict led me to reprise at Bridgewater a course on black and ethnic writers and filmmakers that I had taught as a freshman seminar at Harvard University, entitled Encountering Whiteness: Black and Ethnic Writers and Filmmakers Return the Gaze. Much like Richard Dyer's goal to "make whiteness strange" in his groundbreaking critique of whiteness in visual media, my Harvard seminar aimed to make visible a racial category that has been falsely perceived as universal.[129] Although the construction of whiteness was the focus of investigation, we examined it through the lens of literature and film written and produced by African Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans, and white ethnics whose works invert the colonizing gaze by depicting whites as the "other" and the "stranger." The course deliberately foregrounded issues of point of view to encourage students to examine how race structures ways of seeing. The black and ethnic authors and filmmakers that we studied offer pointed critiques of white privilege and white supremacy, explore the often unexamined hypocrisy of white liberalism, and forge bonds with whites across the racial divide. Weekly units addressed such contexts as the history of lynching, cultural genocide and state imperialism against Native Americans, the coercive effects of assimilation, passing as white, white appropriations of ethnic culture, anti-immigrant nativism, white privilege, interracial relationships and mixed-race identities, and recent anti-racist initiatives to commit "treason" against whiteness. Films included in this or later versions of the

course included the Cherokee filmmaker Randy Redroad's *High Horse* and *Doe Boy,* the Asian American filmmaker Pam Tom's *Two Lies,* the Native American writer Sherman Alexie's film *The Business of Fancydancing,* the black director Melvin Van Peebles's *Watermelon Man,* Oscar Micheaux's *Within Our Gates,* Danny Hoch's film version of *Jails, Hospitals, & Hip-Hop,* Haggis's *Crash,* and a unit on miscegenation in film including the African American films *Something New* and Spike Lee's *Jungle Fever.*

Some might object that addressing whiteness in a course on ethnic culture merely reinscribes white supremacy, but my aim was the opposite: to give students access to a plethora of black and ethnic perspectives that might allow them to see race in America from a decentered and more critical vantage point.[130] While some of the white students in my introductory Race in Film courses had little exposure to African American literature or film, these freshmen seminar students were immersed in work by numerous African American writers: James Baldwin, Toni Morrison, bell hooks, Ralph Ellison, Claude McKay, Audre Lorde, Lucille Clifton, W. E. B. Du Bois, Langston Hughes, George Schuyler, Alice Walker, Rudolph Fisher, Nelson George, Andrea Lee, Gwendolyn Brooks, Sherley Anne Williams, Maya Angelou, and Rebecca Walker. They also encountered anti-racist perspectives voiced by white allies such as Richard Dyer, Peggy McIntosh, George Lipsitz, David Roediger, and Noel Ignatiev. Drawing upon an interdisciplinary model, I contextualized the literature and film far more thoroughly by assigning critical race scholarship by black, white, and ethnic historians, sociologists, and cultural critics. These readings confronted all students with perspectives and lived experience that run counter to dominant white neoliberal narratives.

The course and syllabus described above may seem quite different from "real world" reception settings, because I deliberately provided context and selected and grouped provocative texts together, which nonstudent viewers and readers of African American culture would be less likely to do on their own. I quite obviously played an active role in creating conditions that I hoped would foster empathetic reading, although I could not control whether such empathy would actually occur. Yet there was a crucial element of agency that the students also exercised: they had elected to sign up for this class among many other seminar choices, and they had access to the reading list before registering. Like book-club members, the students were actively choosing what they wanted to read and learn about. For them, seeking out my course was akin to Adam Mansbach's teenage visits to the library to understand the references to black cultural figures that he was encountering in hip-hop songs. Admittedly, this concentrated exposure to black voices amidst deep contextualization was deliberately constructed by the professor, but book clubs often spontaneously create a syllabus-like structure when they are inspired by a good book to read others in a similar vein, which

provides greater context and fodder for comparison. In the book clubs that I visited, members also occasionally presented research on historical topics that were mentioned in the books, or proposed to read a nonfiction book on a related topic for a subsequent meeting. Access to such a syllabus is no longer restricted to college students given the democratizing access of the Internet, where one can find similar course syllabi online or reader-created "suggested reading" lists on Amazon.com or blogs. The public library is also a place that encouraged my own contextual reading because of the Dewey Decimal system, which groups books by topic. In the Amazon.com reader reviews for a book assigned in my course, the anthology *Black on White: Black Writers on What It Means to Be White,* a white woman concerned about civil rights issues wrote the following: "I saw this book in the public library and felt I had to read it. It was certainly eye-opening and uncomfortable in some places. Their viewpoints were vastly different from mine, and I had to stop and really THINK about it." Although some believe that academic classrooms are totally divorced from the "real world," I contend that my students' experiences bear similarities to those of nonstudent consumers of black culture, but in a telescoped, concentrated time period. Book or film clubs or nonstudent individual readers may take a much longer time span to read or view the content of one semester of a college course, but the effects may be similar.

Amidst this richly contextualized and concentrated exposure to African American culture, the students in this freshmen seminar responded to the films and texts quite differently than did the students in the thinly contextualized introductory courses on film. When I was teaching this freshman seminar, I mainly attributed their empathetic responses to the extraordinary students themselves and to the interracial community that developed among them. Two-thirds of the class were students of color, and the white students were open-minded thinkers who were already critical of popular culture.[131] Even though they were freshmen, the white Harvard students' responses to *Crash* and to another Spike Lee film, *Jungle Fever,* were strikingly different than those of the non-empathetic students in the previous case study. In 2008 and 2009, I retooled the course at Bridgewater State University as a senior seminar and a graduate seminar. Many of the students were from much less privileged and more conservative backgrounds than those of the Harvard students. In three courses totaling forty students, thirty-seven of these Bridgewater students were white.[132] The white state-university students' nuanced and empathetic analysis of these texts convinced me that it was not the demographic composition of the class or Harvard-level intelligence that mattered most but the concentration of readings and visual texts themselves and the discussions that they provoked. Even though there were few or no minority students in those classrooms to express nonwhite sensibilities, the white state-

college students learned to see differently from the multiple black viewpoints they encountered on the page and screen.

Most recently, I assigned *Do the Right Thing* and *Crash* as the final unit of an upper-level English course on post-1950 African American literature and culture, to see if enhanced reading in black literature would affect students' responses to the films. The course curriculum also deliberately addressed white ways of seeing, although to a more limited degree than the Encountering Whiteness seminar. The African American literature course began with James Baldwin's provocative essays "On Being White . . . and Other Lies," "The Price of the Ticket," and "The White Man's Guilt," and included Black Arts poetry, Toni Morrison's *Beloved,* Ernest J. Gaines's *A Gathering of Old Men,* and Suzan-Lori Parks's play *Topdog/Underdog.* To provide additional context for Lee's film, we also read Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham Jail" as well as Malcolm X's speeches concerning self-defense and the necessity for black economic empowerment. The students' greater comprehension of Malcolm X's message reduced any knee-jerk reactions against him as "antiwhite," and one otherwise quiet Asian American female student made a big impression on her classmates in the discussion by acknowledging her identification with Malcolm's justifiable anger. Comparing Malcolm X to James Baldwin, she argued that rage was a much more "reasonable" response to racist oppression than the judicious and careful tone of Dr. King. Students had wrestled with their defensive response to Baldwin's essays earlier in the semester, when some had accused him of reverse racism. I explained the flaws in their logic and raised the idea that Baldwin was not an antiwhite racist but someone articulately exposing the system of white supremacy. I urged them not to dismiss him as an "angry black man" but to view him as a passionate and deeply ethical person who is "justifiably pissed off" about racial discrimination that hampered the life chances of his whole community. My colloquial phrasing became the students' favorite term of the semester, one they later chose to apply to Spike Lee.

To enable the students to reflect on their own subject positions during our film unit, I assigned critical articles foregrounding the responses of white viewers to both films.[133] Dan Flory's essay provided an overview of whiteness studies and drew attention to biased white responses to Sal in *Do the Right Thing,* while Tim Wise's strong critique of *Crash* exposed the neoliberal white biases of the film. Notably, one male student (the most resistant student in the course, who had seen Baldwin as "racist") asked about the racial identities of Flory and Wise and was surprised to learn that they are both white. The possibility of an anti-racist white identity challenged his preconceptions about "racial bias" in a productive way. During the discussion in the African American literature course, I also shared

my own reception experience with the class, admitting that I loved *Crash* on first viewing for exposing the lie of a postracial present, and explaining why my feelings changed after seeing some of the ways that white students interpret the text. All of these contextual readings and discussions resulted in strikingly different interpretations of these films than those voiced by students in my Race in Film course at the same institution. Responses to Spike Lee's films in these context-rich courses were largely favorable, while *Crash* received mixed reviews. But the most marked change was in the tenor of their analysis, which was now dominated by a self-critical and anti-racist form of cross-racial empathy. The lens with which they looked at and judged these texts was significantly altered, which suggests that white ways of seeing can indeed be unlearned, within as well as beyond the classroom.

Many of the students in my Encountering Whiteness seminars and African American literature course continued to praise *Crash,* but their reasons were not the typical neoliberal rationale of universal racism. In the seminar, I included *Crash* during a week where we were discussing white privilege (via readings by George Lipsitz and Peggy McIntosh) and the hypocrisies of what Naomi Wolf calls "well-meaning white people."[134] Influenced by this context, white and minority students wrote response papers treating the film as an insightful critique of the white privilege of Rick and Jean Cabot and of the ineffective white liberalism of Officer Hansen. One white Harvard student zeroed in on the representation of the white D.A. as a man who "seems to worry more about being perceived as open-minded than actually being so. He mistakes an Iraqi for an African American, apparently believing that all people who aren't white are somehow the same." She joined ranks with black and Latino students in the course who were critical of Officer Hansen for being "typical of white liberals who can and do tolerate racism as long as it's not right under their noses and they aren't at risk of being mistaken for racists." A Latina student was disappointed with Hansen because he reneged on his attempt to speak out against racism and was more concerned about "preserving his status." A black female Harvard student and devoted fan of *Crash,* who had seen it nine times, applauded Haggis for revealing how dangerous that hidden or privately expressed racism can be. Her response paper argued that "Haggis is inadvertently encouraging people to take off their public PC masks and admit their prejudices. The world is not better off with the Toms and Jeans of the world anymore than with the Sgt. Ryans. In the end it is Tom Hansen's car that adds more flames to the movie." Similarly, in an insightful final paper comparing *Do the Right Thing* and *Crash,* a white student at Bridgewater argued that Tom Hansen's character is a more effective "sympathetic racist" than Lee's Sal. She praised Haggis for drawing attention to the fact that "the blatant racists aren't so much of a problem as those who have racist tendencies buried beneath

sympathy." Unlike some of the students in the introductory film courses, these students refused an easy identification with Hansen that forgave his unconscious racism. Increased exposure to black critical voices led these students to view a white-produced film from a "black" or minority viewpoint.

Black and Latino students in these courses, much like the black audiences at test screenings, responded positively to *Crash* for drawing attention to the realities of antiblack racism. One light-skinned mixed-race Bridgewater student was deeply moved by the realistic treatment of the psychological torment of Cameron and Christine. A Latino Harvard student empathized with Cameron's powerlessness to speak against the cop's treatment of his wife: "The system has not been designed to give minorities a voice. We may not be able to respect Cameron's decision to keep silent, but we can by no means condemn him for it." Although she uses the universal "we" here, she explicitly acknowledges racial division caused by "the system" in a way that universalizing neoliberalism does not. Minority students were not only able to empathize with other minorities, but one black Harvard woman even responded sympathetically to Hansen, viewing him as a victim of the programming of the larger racist society: "Officer Hansen's tears as he dumps the body seem to spring from a painful understanding that as much as he struggles, he cannot effectively eradicate from his own mentality the racism he has been exposed to. And while this is certainly not a happy ending, it is a compelling one, for it poignantly shows that as much as we can humanly try to do our best, racial differences are factors that often undermine the good in our humanity." Her humanistic ideals do not work to ignore or excuse racism, as in the difference-denying litany of "common humanity," but rather to understand how racism hurts all of us, regardless of skin color.

As I suggested in my analysis of *Crash,* one of the most progressive possibilities of the film is that it could move white students to inspect themselves and their own complicity with racism, and this outcome was far more prevalent among the students in these black- and ethnic-studies seminars, since they had already been doing so on a daily basis. One white woman felt implicated by Haggis's plan to deliberately "test the viewer's conceptions of good and bad, and of judgment, in order to overthrow our assumptions." Another remarked more directly, "It really makes you stop and think of situations that you may have been in that are similar and analyze how you yourself reacted." Another white woman felt embarrassed by Jean, because "her attitudes somehow reflected back on me." Seeing so many characters who failed to interact respectfully with others moved a biracial (black/white) woman at Harvard to "open [her] mind to explore the racial collisions [she] has had in the past." She took heart from the black character Anthony's final empathetic decision to free the Asian slaves, to "act for others rather than just himself," and this biracial woman wrote a risk-taking final paper examining her

own racism against Asians in the hopes that "such personal shifts are possible for [herself] as well."

Although about 50 percent of the students found positive anti-racist messages in *Crash,* the other half produced astute criticisms of the film's neoliberal hegemonic ideology, to which many of the Race in Film students had been blind. Most reserved their strongest words of condemnation for the white-redemption plotlines concerning Jean and Officer Ryan. A black woman and a white Jewish man in the Harvard class seriously doubted that the racist Jean could ever really be a friend to her Latino maid. The Jewish man decried how the resolution of Jean's storyline suggests that she is "tolerant" of her maid: "That is not enough. Tolerance ought not to be the main lesson taught, rather the danger of ever present institutionalized white privilege that allows her to make such statements." This student as well as two other white males complained that Ryan's "heroic" rescue of Christine deprives the black woman of agency and establishes the white male in a position of supremacy once again; they doubted that any redemption even takes place: "We are supposed to be overcome by his courageousness when there is no indication that she is all of a sudden perceived as human in his eyes." At Bridgewater, one white male graduate student who calls himself a "recovering racist" was also disturbed by the tidiness of the redemption episode: "Even if you change, the consequences of your actions still carry weight. There should not be a tidy ending to an incident of racism."

A good number of students criticized *Crash*'s message of "universal racism," arguing that it feeds into reactionary beliefs. Mocking the film's suggestion that "we're all racists," the Brazilian Jewish student complained that the film "exempt[s] institutional racism from criticism" and allows its viewers to remain "hopelessly unaware of the tyranny imposed on minorities by the white majority for centuries in the United States." Many students in my Bridgewater African American literature class were strongly influenced by reading Tim Wise's distinction between prejudice and systemic racism: "Wise was right that the white American public have forgotten that the embedded white privilege is part of the systematic process of racism as a whole." Corroborating Wise's critique of the film's "perpetuation of white fear and rationalization of white racism," one Bridgewater student admitted that the friends and family members with whom she watched the film had their stereotypes of black criminality and beliefs in reverse racism confirmed: "I can recall at least three instances when someone I was watching it with said 'See! Black people are racist too!'" Another got many agreeing nods from her classmates when she revealed, "I've seen *Crash* in many courses here and in high school, but we never looked at it this way. Now I understand so much better how the film was manipulating me into certain views that I don't want to hold on to." Tim Wise's article was instrumental in changing their point of view,

but it is important to note that his articles are accessible to non-academic readers and widely available on the Web. I first came across his essay on *Crash* through a casual Web search regarding the film, a fact that underscores the importance of anti-racist scholars making their work publicly accessible to a wider audience.

It was not only Tim Wise who helped the students to view *Crash* differently, but Spike Lee's films as well. One white woman read aloud her response paper comparing *Do the Right Thing* and *Crash,* and she received enthusiastic agreement from her classmates:

> Lee's film shows the unfair advantage that capitalism provides for whites, by having no black-owned businesses in the neighborhood. *Crash* lets whites believe that everyone is racist and equally discriminated against, which is untrue. *Do the Right Thing* shows blacks are also guilty of prejudice, but it also shows that they have a reason to be upset about economic inequality and police brutality against them. It is the white racists in Lee's film that actually have the power. Lee's film got me to think from the perspective of an urban black person in America and gets right to the point—racism and white privilege fuel the unequal structure, and it's the system that has got to change, not just individual people.

Her astute comparison reflects a larger shift in the responses of these context-rich classes. Whereas the Bentley students and introductory film classes at Bridgewater had lauded *Crash* in neoliberal terms and often failed to empathize with Lee's black characters, the inverse was true of the students in the context-rich ethnic studies courses, where more than 50 percent were critical of *Crash,* and the majority praised *Do the Right Thing* and *Jungle Fever* as well. Many of these students championed Lee's exposure of institutional racism "rather than *Crash*'s emphasis on just the effects of individuals with racist ideas." Drawing upon George Lipsitz's scholarship on white privilege, one Chinese American student praised the realism of *Jungle Fever* in its treatment of employment discrimination: "Discriminatory practices against blacks and other minorities were and still are rampant in employee hiring, as Lipsitz notes. The majority of CEOs in America are white males."

Rather than the earlier defensive reaction to Lee as a "reverse racist," the students in the Harvard seminar on whiteness celebrated Lee's critique of white power. Responding to *Jungle Fever,* one white Harvard woman wrote: "Although Lee focuses on the universality of racism, he chooses to make the constant threatening force a white man. He points out the oppressive and policing role of white men over all other groups, as well as their own. While at first it appears to be no one group responsible for these interracial interactions, Lee is implicitly commenting on the white man's culpability and historical role as oppressor." Unlike other white students who are comforted by Haggis's "everyone is racist" message, she sympathizes with Lee's point, demonstrated in both *Jungle Fever* and in *Do*

the Right Thing, that whites (and most often white males) are the ones holding the reins of a racist power structure.

For the students in my class on African American literature, additional study of the work of Malcolm X helped to build their comprehension and respect for Malcolm X and Spike Lee's message. As opposed to the Bentley students who favored the nonviolent stance of Martin Luther King Jr., one Bridgewater woman understood quite well that Malcolm's words were central to Lee's ideology. Reading Sal as a symbol of white power, she argued that "Sal's sudden turn for the worst towards the end of the film before destroying the radio comes as a surprise, and ultimately causes the community to crumble. The black people's retaliation is what Malcolm X would consider 'intelligence' in terms of self-defense, rather than violence." A deeper appreciation of the context spurring the arguments of Malcolm X and James Baldwin helped the students in the course to view Spike Lee as one of a distinguished line of black protest writers who are "justifiably pissed off" rather than "antiwhite racists."

Unlike the Bentley students, a Bridgewater woman (Samantha) in the Encountering Whiteness seminar expressed a remarkable degree of empathy for the young black men in *Do the Right Thing*. Outraged by critics who view Radio Raheem and Buggin' Out as "obnoxious and outspoken" and Mookie as "irresponsible," she argued in her final paper, "Isn't this the way that people always rationalize racism? When a news report is heard of a race-driven attack, whites don't normally feel any sort of deep remorse unless it is an act on another white person." Agreeing with Dan Flory's argument that many white viewers often simply don't understand why the black characters act as they do or "how they got to where they are at," Samantha fully empathized with the black characters' emotions, reasoning, and actions:

> When they tear apart and burn down Sal's Pizzeria, they understand that the injustice that was done that day will not be atoned for. They know that Sal will not be found responsible for Raheem's death, and that it is quite possible the cops who choked him will not be found at fault, either. The deep-seated knowledge that change is far from where they stand angers them, and to be able to destroy the restaurant gives them some sort of temporary peace. The frustration that Buggin' Out feels with the Wall of Fame is justified. For a community of almost one-hundred-percent black people, to have a wall of people that very nearly tells them that they are not good enough to have someone on such a wall of importance, the full force of the frustration is unimaginable to most whites, even if they can recognize it is there.

Although Samantha pointed out that many whites "failed in their comprehension" of this film, her own empathetic analysis proves that white students are capable of

grasping Lee's larger message with more reading and viewing, which gave them access to anti-racist habits of thought.

While it is debatable whether the African American writers and filmmakers or the anti-racist white writers had a stronger impact on the students' shift in perspective, I believe that the symbiotic combination was instructive, because it gave students access to black ways of seeing *and* to the echoing ideas of white allies who question white ways of seeing. The dominant voices in the seminars and African American literature courses were writers like James Baldwin, Toni Morrison, Langston Hughes, bell hooks, Malcolm X, and Ralph Ellison, who have been analyzing whiteness from a black point of view before "whiteness studies" even had a name. Their works offer transformative reading experiences because they explicitly analyze the white imaginary and its blindness to the realities of systemic racism, and thus prod or even shock a white reader into seeing the world from a nonwhite point of view. Whiteness-studies scholarship, which has been largely written by white progressives, was a useful addition to both courses that reinforced, rather than stood in the place of, the analysis of black writers and scholars themselves. Reading the work of white allies like Tim Wise or David Roediger—whose own attitudes about race in America were transformed by their encounters with black culture and people—also gave white students an aspirational model for their own future and a lesson in the transformative potential of empathy, of striving to see from the point of view of the other rather than simply the self. One student echoed the sentiments of many classmates on the post-course evaluation: "I had no idea I was one of the white viewers Dan Flory describes until I read the article. This course was an eye-opener that made me re-evaluate everything I thought about race. Maybe I'm at times racist even if I don't intentionally do it."

It must be acknowledged that occasionally even good students in those seminars continued to fall back upon white, neoliberal, and non-empathetic ways of seeing, but these instances were far less frequent. Not everyone was instantly converted by these reading experiences, but they had a demonstrable impact upon the majority of the students by the end of the semester. Viewing and reading black culture empathetically also enabled students to be more critical viewers of white-produced films like *Crash* and the dominant discourses that pervade the American cultural landscape. White people need an education in the ways of whiteness before they can make a choice to refuse or work against white privilege and white supremacy. Such an education can be found not only inside but also outside of the academic classroom—in black literature and visual culture.

The development of a simultaneously empathetic and system-critical lens is even more urgent as post-race discourses continue to gain political and social dominance in response to the presidency of Barack Obama, since whites are

tempted to believe that the problem of racism has been solved with the election of a black head of state. I remain hopeful that white engagement with African American literature and culture can affect how white people view themselves, others, and the larger social structure. One student wrote with gratitude in an evaluation of my African American literature course: "The 'lessons' I learned in this class are not the kind that I will be likely to forget. I used to think racism was history. Thanks for making me understand that race demands constant scrutiny in the present." Another white student remarked upon how she *sees* the world around her differently after taking the Encountering Whiteness seminar: "I catch myself noticing racist or racially biased things that I would never have noticed before—commercials, news reports, TV, and politics. I'll see something that I would probably have not thought twice about before this class, but now I'll sit there and be like 'Did that really just happen?!' I was actually thinking the other day, I hope that I don't lose that, I hope that I keep noticing. And not just noticing, but hopefully speaking up too." We need to be fully aware of the blindness to power and to institutional racism that often prevent white people from engaging empathetically with African American and other nonwhite cultures, yet such roadblocks are not insurmountable. These classroom case studies reveal that white people's responses were open to change once they were repeatedly exposed to African American insights and an oppositional lens that allowed them to view white power and their own values critically.

CONCLUSION

Black Cultural Encounters as a Catalyst for Divestment in White Privilege

> You are no longer white. If you have read these pages, if you have sucked in these words, sucked in these words like a bee sucks in clear nectar and turns it into golden-brown honey, if you have sucked in these words, they have blackened your mind. You are no more white than Queen Elizabeth is black.
>
> —Alice Randall, *Pushkin and the Queen of Spades*

The protagonist of Alice Randall's novel *Pushkin and the Queen of Spades* is a black woman named Windsor, a Russian literature professor and Harvard graduate who spends her life trying to resist stereotypes of blackness. Much to her dismay, her son Pushkin seems to have become a walking stereotype, a professional football player in love with a white lap dancer, a Russian émigré. Literature means little to him; he breaks his mother's heart by using a first edition of Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* as a coaster. Unlike her son, Windsor respects the life-changing power of books. She credits her discovery of Alexander Pushkin, the biracial Russian novelist with African ancestry, as the single most important event in her life, one that saved her from becoming a stereotype herself, an unwed black single mother. Frustrated with her son Pushkin's life choices, Windsor is most resistant to his choice of a wife, Tanya, a white woman whom she doubts could ever really understand what it means to be black in America.

Tanya, however, is a reader. Immersed in the literature of the Harlem Renaissance, she selects Countee Cullen's "To a Brown Boy," a poem about black racial pride and beauty, to read to her black groom during the wedding ceremony. In doing so, Tanya opens up Windsor's mind and heart to understand this poem in a profoundly different way, as a testament to the ability of love—particularly the kind of identificatory love that involves respect and empathy—to transcend

race. Windsor ultimately recognizes Tanya as an ally, a kindred spirit who uses literature as a cross-cultural bridge to enlarge her worldview, sense of self, and capacity to understand others. By sharing her own autobiography with Tanya, Windsor believes that her words will have the power to "blacken [Tanya's] mind."[1] Similarly, Windsor argues that her own passionate encounter with Russian literature has made her Russian in a meaningful way: "[W]hen I sipped the syllables of Pushkin, I drank the blood of Mother Russia."[2] Randall's novel ends with a powerfully anti-essentialist conclusion: "[I]t is not a drop of blood that makes you black but the stories you know."[3] The stories that define the collective consciousness of African American people are not limited to literature or the printed word but encompass song, performance, and visual narratives. Randall's character Windsor, for instance, locates the "souls of black folk" not only in great literature but also in Motown tunes and the hip-hop lyrics of Tupac Shakur.

In *Beyond the White Negro,* I have presented case studies of whites encountering the stories told by African American people through fiction, music, and film, to investigate Windsor's hope that the consumption of narratives can result in a figurative blackening of the white mind, an internal experience of cross-racial sincerity and solidarity. I began with an assumption, supported by social science research, that "a narrative presentation causes stronger effects on our beliefs about the emotions and thoughts of others" than nonnarrative presentation of the same content.[4] Narratives about people invite identification, empathy, and perspective-taking, all processes that can enhance greater cross-racial understanding. In my examination of white audience responses to African American stories within multiple media, I have concluded that the most valuable experiences of cross-racial empathy are those that involve self-critique and a willingness to see the operation of white privilege and institutional racism from a nonwhite perspective. As Rita Felski argues in her manifesto on the "uses of literature," "It is only by internalizing the expectations of these [fictional] others that we come to acquire . . . [the ability] to look askance at the very norms and values that formed us."[5] This book has examined a wide variety of white responses to narratives of black experience—whites with little capacity for cross-racial empathy who minimize racism and dismiss the lived realities of African Americans, whites whose sympathy is distorted by white ways of seeing, and those whose empathetic responses involve the risk of self-critique and the responsibility to resist racist inequity. These divergent responses put into question the utopian or naïve assumption of multicultural educators that cross-racial empathy is a direct and uncomplicated result of consuming narratives by people of color. Yet my study also offers significant evidence that reading, watching, listening to, and discussing African American culture have the potential to shape and alter the racial ideologies of white audiences.

One of the questions motivating my research was this: What role does cultural consumption play in the process of developing an anti-racist consciousness? In *Empathy and the Novel,* Keen "questions the contemporary truism that novel reading cultivates empathy that produces good citizens for the world" and concludes that "books can't make changes by themselves."[6] What fiction reading cannot do alone, she argues, may be accomplished by a teacher or discussion leader who cultivates narrative empathy as a tool in the pursuit of social justice.[7] Keen's point about the importance of discussion, which she calls "enhanced reading,"[8] is underscored by my chapters on book-club discussions and conversations about film in the college classroom. Yet I would counter that just because books and other forms of narrative can't do it alone is not a valid reason to discount their power and importance. We should not undervalue the importance of African American narratives as *catalysts* for discussion, for empathy, for beginning or deepening friendships with black people, and for critical interrogation of American society that might indeed have some effects in the real world. In some cases, encounters with African American texts may awaken a desire for social justice and profoundly redirect a white person's life trajectory and future political investments, as the story of Adam Mansbach's life-altering engagement with hip-hop and jazz demonstrates. The contrasting case studies of non-empathetic versus empathetic students of *Do the Right Thing* strongly suggest that deeper immersion in black and anti-racist discourse does make a difference in white people's understanding of how race plays a role in the larger world they inhabit. Within the Boston book clubs I visited, progressive whites read and reread African American literature as a sustaining force to renew their commitment to social justice and to gain a greater understanding of black perspectives as they shaped themselves into white allies. In the early 1990s, Hazel Carby feared that the fad of multiculturalism would replace or even undermine radical efforts to achieve racial equality. She despaired that "black cultural texts have simply become fictional substitutes for the lack of any sustained social or political relationships with black people in a society that has retained many of its historical practices of apartheid in schooling and housing."[9] Although her concerns are certainly valid, she does not allow for the possibility that whites who read black texts in an empathetic way can build meaningful ties with black people and participate in cross-racial coalitions that may have lasting consequences. The racially integrated book clubs in my study of Boston readers, for example, demonstrated the value of literature as grounds for the development of cross-racial friendship and the shaping of shared political goals. The experience of perspective-sharing enabled by black cultural encounters can encourage cross-racial social relationships to thrive and deepen.

My research for this book and my own life experience have convinced me of the symbiotic relationship between empathetic cultural consumption and

the development of interracial friendship groups. In his book *Racism without Racists,* which addresses the problems of color-blind ideology, the sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva presents the results of a study of "racial progressives," whom he defines as people who support affirmative action and interracial marriage and who are convinced that racial discrimination is real. Estimating such progressives at 10 to 15 percent of the white populace, Bonilla-Silva found that the largest group of white progressives are young working-class or lower-middle-class white women, possibly because their experiences of class struggle or gender discrimination led them to empathize with minorities. He makes note of the fact that "other elements that affected their degree of racial progressiveness were having meaningful associates or friendships with people of color" and living in a racially mixed neighborhood rather than an "all-white habitus."[10] Bonilla-Silva concludes his book with the fervent belief in coalition movements and the need to nurture "a large cohort of antiracist whites to begin challenging whites' color-blind nonsense from within."[11]

The formation of my own anti-racist political consciousness echoes many of Bonilla-Silva's suppositions about racial progressives, but it also points to the additional importance of a destabilizing encounter with African American texts. Ethnography as a research practice has often suffered from a lack of self-reflexive attention to the subjectivity of the researcher, so I offer here a detailed analysis of my early racial formation as white and my later development into a racial progressive as a concluding example to illustrate the arguments of this book. I grew up in southeastern Massachusetts in the 1970s and 1980s, in a community composed largely of white Catholics (French Canadian, Irish, Portuguese, and Italian). My extended French Canadian family is working-class, descended from immigrants who migrated from Quebec to work in the textile mills. My parents married soon after high school and found work in the clerical, retail, and supermarket sectors. They made a big leap to the lower middle class by buying a modest home in a suburb with well-respected schools and eventually sent both their daughters to college. Because they achieved the American dream without the benefit of college educations, they fervently believe in the ideal of an egalitarian meritocracy, where anyone can succeed with hard work and fiscal discipline. This belief later led them to become active Republicans involved in local and state politics. The fact that they were given a generous helping hand by the credit union, whose loan officer looked the other way as they illegally borrowed from one bank to submit a down payment on the mortgage loan to another, did not seem to them a blatant example of white privilege; their own lack of class privilege blinded them to its operation. Bigoted commentary about various types of ethnic others was not uncommon at our family gatherings. In one instance, I vividly remember adult relatives laughing at a *National Lampoon* chart of the global racial hierarchy, in

which Africans were predictably at the bottom of the page. Despite the prevalence of racist discourse in my environment, one seeming contradiction was that my Dad's favorite comedian was Richard Pryor and his favorite music was black "funk" and soul. I woke up on Sunday mornings to the music of Tower of Power, Stevie Wonder, Earth Wind and Fire, and the Stylistics. His cultural consumption of black music, unfortunately, had little effect on his racial attitudes, a story familiar to critics of white hip-hop fans. But perhaps I was the one who was really listening.

The suburb we moved to when I started kindergarten was a haven for lower-middle-class Catholic whites. Amidst a population of twenty thousand, there was one black family, one South Asian Indian family, several Filipinos, and a few dozen Jewish families. The townspeople actively opposed the building of lower-income housing in fear that property values would be eroded by "undesirable elements," or working-class people of color. My only experience of ethnic difference came from two friendships I forged with a Jewish girl and an adopted Korean girl, but the latter had almost no exposure to Korean culture. Despite my voracious reading as a child and teen, I cannot recall reading a single book written by a nonwhite person, and multicultural education did not reach my high school until well after I had graduated in 1986. In history class, we studied the Holocaust as something horrific that happened way over there in Europe, but our textbooks and teachers made little mention of the history of slavery or discrimination against Jews and other minorities in the United States. I knew nothing about the cultural genocide against native peoples that took place literally in our own backyard; the building contractors for my suburban neighborhood unearthed Wampanoag arrowheads and other artifacts when digging up the foundations for our subdivision. The history of white power, and indeed my own whiteness, was entirely invisible to me.

As Bonilla-Silva's study would predict, getting out of this all-white habitus, as I headed off to college at Harvard University, had a marked effect on my transformation into a racial progressive. Although some may view Harvard as the epitome of the white elite establishment, my experience was that of entering a multicultural global environment for the first time. A few people of color that I met my first semester welcomed me into their multiracial social circles and I found a home there, rather than falling into the more common path of self-segregation that scholars like Beverly Tatum have documented.[12] My friends and roommates over four years included African Americans, Puerto Ricans, Korean, Chinese, and Vietnamese Americans, Jews, a black Jamaican, a South Asian Indian, and racially mixed people. For the first time, I was the minority who had to be taught how to meringue and salsa, who mispronounced Hebrew at a Passover Seder, who couldn't stomach spicy foods like kimchee, and who felt uncool at an Afro-Rhythms event. In these early years of my adult life, my multicultural tourism

was mostly limited to food, music, dance, and holiday celebrations, those forms of culture that are more painlessly and comfortably enjoyed by the white mainstream. Far more important than this casual kind of cultural consumption was the building of emotional relationships and empathy with people who had quite different life experiences than my own. While my friends rarely talked about personal or family struggles against discrimination, I heard much about the trials of interracial dating and the everyday tragedy of girls trying to mold themselves according to white norms of beauty. My experience thus far confirms Bonilla-Silva's emphasis on the importance of meaningful friendships across ethnic and racial boundaries and living in a racially mixed habitus. Yet at this point my anti-racist consciousness was only incipient, more of a vague feeling than an informed praxis. My friends and I were involved in many forms of feminist activism but talked surprisingly little about racial-justice concerns. It is certainly plausible that after this adolescent experience of mixing, I may have done what Leslie Fiedler argues that many youthful "imaginary Negroes" do when entering adulthood, "settle down into being what we really are: white once more."[13]

I agree with Bonilla-Silva that meaningful cross-racial relationships are important, or even essential, to the development of an anti-racist consciousness. However, what Bonilla-Silva's study leaves out of the story is the role of reading, listening to, or viewing narratives authored by people of color with a critical point of view and oppositional politics. While my diverse friendship base may have laid the seeds for my politicization, I consider my first reading of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* as a twenty-year-old college student to be the most significant catalytic event in the shaping of my racial consciousness. It was the first book written by an African American that I had ever read. To call *Beloved* my all-time favorite book does not do justice to its impact upon me. I walked around in a sort of moral shock for days. When I found out that Morrison had already been publishing fiction for *twenty* years, I felt a white-hot anger at all the librarians and teachers and book reviewers who had never put her name on a "must-read" list, deeming the searing truths she had to tell irrelevant to my young white existence. After the experience of shell shock, I did what another bookish kid, Adam Mansbach, did: I headed straight for the library to begin an entirely new course of reading and thinking about race in America, to find out what else I was ignorant of. My coursework in British and French literature and history took a back seat as I tore through Morrison's *Sula,* Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God,* and Ellison's *Invisible Man.* A few weeks later, a black male friend took me to see a new film playing at the Harvard Square cinema: Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing.* Once again I was jolted out of my previously shallow understanding of the African American urban underclass, since all the black kids I knew at college were more "buppy" than ghetto. Spike Lee's film led me to *The Autobiography of Malcolm X.* The year

after my college graduation, I read nothing but ethnic and African American literature to make up for lost time.

When I went to graduate school in English at the University of Virginia, entering a largely white habitus once again, it was my reading and viewing of African American and ethnic stories, and the connections that this shared knowledge enabled me to make with students of color, that nurtured and sustained my deepening progressive ideology. The first literature course I taught as a graduate student was about African American women writers, and I was scared to death that the black students in the class would dismiss me as a fraud or an interloper. They didn't, and for that I am deeply grateful. In my life experience, it was empathy sustained through reading and viewing black-authored literature and film that had the most dramatic impact upon my future scholarship, pedagogy, progressive political commitments, and mentoring relationships with students of color. Although I have only been a student in the classroom of one black teacher in my lifetime (Deborah McDowell at the University of Virginia), the more accurate truth is that my black teachers are far too numerous to count.

Although my autobiography focuses more on the power of literature and film texts, chapter 1 of this book highlighted white consumers of hip-hop music who became practitioners of hip-hop culture. For Hoch and Mansbach, their cultural immersion in hip-hop also led to their participation in various forms of progressive activism. In Hoch's case, living in a multiracial urban environment with a racially diverse friendship base was concurrent with his consumption of hip-hop. Hoch's activism has included volunteering to help inmates in prison therapy, drawing attention to institutional racism in his theater and film work, and founding the Hip-Hop Theater Festival to give voice to other progressive hip hop artists. The HHTF also serves urban youth through its education and arts cultivation outreach initiatives.[14] For Mansbach, his love of early underground hip-hop led him to intense reading of African American literature and also the study of jazz. The oppositional perspectives and cultural knowledge he gained enabled his acceptance into black communities, where he established crucial cross-racial friendships and collaborative partners. If he had not undertaken a journey that began with cultural encounter, he might never have been in a position to attract black mentors or form the relationships that transformed him. Indeed, he might never have wanted to question the privileges and biases of his white habitus in the first place. Mansbach's hip-hop-inspired political activism has taken a variety of forms—protest against the Rodney King verdict, resistance to racism at his Hebrew School, and a more recent political column for *NewsOne* concerning race in the 2008 presidential election. Hoch and Mansbach see their fiction and theater as forms of activism in themselves. While most critics of hip-hop are skeptical of its ability to engender anti-racist consciousness on

the part of white youth, these white allies should make us pause before accepting such pessimistic and totalizing generalizations. Even if they are a small minority among white hip-hop fans or indeed among white people at large, we need more artists and writers like them, who can challenge white "color-blind nonsense from within."[15]

In his essay on wiggers, David Roediger makes the point that culture and cultural crossover can't "do all the work of social and political transformation" by itself, and I heartily agree.[16] Suzanne Keen suggests that we need educators and discussion facilitators to turn these empathetic cultural experiences into public-sphere action with more potential to provoke change. Progressive people who care deeply about the power of books and cultural texts may seek to create opportunities to use cultural consumption as a catalyst for activism, inside and outside the academy. Hip-hop activists can use social-networking sites to expose white fans to more progressive hip-hop artists and to provoke critical conversations about the ideology of commercialized rap lyrics. Public humanities initiatives such as One Book One Community can continue to foster public dialogue about the issues raised by multicultural literature and film. Online or library guides for book or film clubs can draw attention to relevant activism or public service opportunities, and teachers can build upon readerly empathy by encouraging student readers to get involved in social-justice efforts in their local communities. While I don't see my primary goal as an English professor to be that of creating future activists, I teach students to analyze cultural texts and the implicit arguments and cultural values they espouse. My courses expose students to African American and ethnic narratives that offer various and often oppositional ways of thinking about America, providing an alternative lens to look at the values and practices of their society and to read themselves and their own role within that larger structure. In the classroom, I have found texts like *The Known World, Caucasia, Beloved, Angry Black White Boy, Do the Right Thing,* and *Jails, Hospitals, & Hip-Hop* to be enormously useful, because they expose the operation of power in American society, draw attention to its human cost, and explore the possibility of white as well as black resistance to oppression. Although I have no magical power as an educator to ensure that cross-racial empathy occurs, I aim to increase its likelihood by providing contextual frameworks that invite students to understand systemic racism and white privilege. I fervently hope that even a few of my students will experience their own moment of moral shock and self-implicating empathy as I did while reading *Beloved*.

My research on cross-racial empathy suggests the importance of teaching ethnic literature in all levels of our educational system, and the recent backlash in Arizona underscores why this is ever more urgently necessary. The Arizona legislature's recent law banning ethnic studies in public schools on the grounds that

such courses "promote resentment" and encourage divisiveness is a symptom of the larger national problem of white blindness and minimization of racism.[17] Whites often dismiss as illegitimate or unpatriotic any critique of American society that draws attention to the way that institutional racism and white-supremacist ideology created that divisiveness in the first place. Whose feelings of resentment are the originators of this law actually concerned about? Arizona law HB2281 appears to be motivated by anxiety about the resentment or anger of people of color because it threatens the status quo. Banning such courses, however, will prevent all students from gaining a greater understanding of the real causes of such resentment. Or is the bill really motivated by the resentment of whites who bristle against the idea that white students might be asked to face the uncomfortable realities of racism and white privilege? The argument for banning ethnic studies rests on the fallacious idea that we can eliminate resentment if we simply ignore the voices of people of color. Furthermore, the bill undermines two crucial elements of a democracy and an educational system: to allow for the possibility of dissent and to uncover difficult truths. Reading, viewing, listening to, and otherwise valuing the dissenting, inspiring, and truth-telling voices of black and ethnic-minority storytellers is vital in a nation where even our first black president, Barack Obama—who is often held up as a sign that we have achieved a post-race society—can not freely speak truth about the existence of racism for fear of being labeled divisive, or even a "racist" himself. The paradigm of the White Negro may no longer be adequate to describe the cross-racial affiliation of racially sincere white allies in the twenty-first century, but there are still far too few of us. In this post-9/11 climate of anti-immigrant backlash and xenophobia, racial progressives need to marshal all the resources we have, especially the emotional power of stories that reveal how much our nation has fallen short of its inspiring promise of liberty and equality for all.

Notes

Introduction

1. The French poet Paul Verlaine first coined the term "White Negro" to refer to Arthur Rimbaud. See James Campbell, *This Is the Beat Generation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 1.

2. Michael Sragow, "The Return of the White Negro," *Salon,* March 30, 2000, accessed September 30, 2013, www.salon.com/2000/03/30/toback/.

3. See Armond White, "Genius—Not! Eminem Melts in Your Hands," in *White Noise: The Eminem Collection,* ed. Hilton Als and Darryl A. Turner (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2003), 179–90; Carl Hancock Rux, "Eminem: The New White Negro," in *Everything but the Burden: What White People Are Taking from Black Culture,* ed. Greg Tate (New York: Broadway, 2003), 15–38; and Charles Aaron, "Chocolate on the Inside," *Spin,* May 1999, 104.

4. Norman Mailer, "The White Negro: Superficial Reflections on the Hipster," in *Advertisements for Myself* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1959), 341 (originally published in *Dissent* 4 [Fall 1957]: 276–93).

5. For a history of the term "wigger," see David Roediger, "Elvis, Wiggers, and Crossing over to Nonwhiteness," in *Colored White* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2003), 212–40.

6. See Michael North, *The Dialect of Modernism: Race, Language, and Twentieth-Century Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Genders, Races, and Religious Cultures in Modern American Poetry, 1908–1934* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Jeffrey Melnick, *A Right to Sing the Blues: African Americans, Jews, and American Popular Song* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999); and Michael Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

7. For a discussion of the ideal characteristics of white allies, see Paul Kivel, *Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work for Social Justice* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1996).

8. Greg Tate, "Nigs R Us, or How Blackfolk Became Fetish Objects," in *Everything but the Burden: What White People Are Taking from Black Culture,* ed. Greg Tate (New York: Broadway, 2003), 1–14.

9. Ibid., 14.

10. Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 236; Noel Ignatiev, "Interview with Ignatiev," in *Race Traitor,* ed. Noel Ignatiev and John Garvey (New York: Routledge, 1996), 289.

11. Eric Lott, "White Like Me: Racial Cross-Dressing and the Construction of American Whiteness," in *The Cultures of U.S. Imperialism,* ed. Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993), 482; Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

12. See Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988).

13. A few exceptions are Jacqueline Bobo, *Black Women as Cultural Readers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995); and Ramaswami Harindranath, "Ethnicity and Cultural Difference: Some Thematic and Political Issues of Global Audience Research," *Participations* 2.2 (December 2005), accessed November 5, 2013, http://www.participations.org/volume%202/issue%202/2_02_harindranath.htm.

14. For an overgeneralization about white spectatorship, see bell hooks, "Neo-colonial Fantasies of Conquest: *Hoop Dreams,*" in *Reel to Real: Race, Sex, and Class at the Movies* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 77–82; and bell hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators," in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 115–31.

15. Susan Gubar, *Racechanges: White Skin, Black Face in American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 36.

16. Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise,* 18.

17. Henry Giroux, "White Noise: Racial Politics and the Pedagogy of Whiteness," in *Channel Surfing: Race Talk and the Deconstruction of Today's Youth* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 91.

18. Ibid., 134.

19. Elizabeth V. Spelman, *Fruits of Sorrow: Framing Our Attention to Suffering* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 65.

20. Ibid, 7.

21. Suzanne Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 4. See also Murray Smith, *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion, and the Cinema* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 95; and Berys Gaut, "Identification and Emotion in Narrative Film," in *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition, and Emotions,* ed. Carl Plantinga and Greg M. Smith (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 200–16.

22. C. Daniel Batson prefers empathy ("perspective-taking") over sympathy, which he fears "has become tinged with a paternalistic, moralistic cast." See C. Daniel Batson, *The Altruism Question: Toward a Social-Psychological Answer* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1991), 87.

23. See Keen, *Empathy and the Novel,* 5.

24. Martha Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 302.

25. Bell hooks, "Eating the Other," in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 21–39.

26. Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego,* in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* vol. 18, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1955), 105. See also Karl Morrison, *I Am You: The Hermeneutics of Empathy in Western Literature, Theology, and Art* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988).

27. Other critics of empathy include Richard Posner, "Against Ethical Criticism," *Philosophy and Literature* 21.1 (1997): 1–27; Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise*; and Robyn Wiegman, *American Anatomies: Theorizing Race and Gender* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1995), 200.

28. Doris Sommer, "Resistant Texts and Incompetent Readers," *Poetics Today* 15.4 (1994): 543.

29. Gubar, *Racechanges,* 245.

30. Lauren Berlant, "Introduction: Compassion (and Withholding)," in *Compassion: The Culture and Politics of an Emotion,* ed. Lauren Berlant (New York: Routledge, 2004), 4.

31. Richard Delgado discusses what he calls "false empathy" in *The Coming Race War? And Other Apocalyptic Tales of America after Affirmative Action and Welfare* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 15.

32. Ibid., 31–36.

33. Rajini Srikanth, *Constructing the Enemy: Empathy/Antipathy in U.S. Literature and Law* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012), 37.

34. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought,* 426–31.

35. Rita Felski, *Uses of Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 25.

36. Benjamin, *Bonds of Love,* 47.

37. Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 265. See also Kaja Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World* (New York: Routledge, 1996), for a discussion of identification with marginalized positions.

38. C. Daniel Batson et al., "Empathy, Attitudes, and Action: Can Feeling for a Member of a Stigmatized Group Motivate One to Help the Group?" *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 28.12 (2002): 1656. For similar views of empathy as anti-egoistic, see John Deigh, *The Sources of Moral Agency: Essays in Moral Psychology and Freudian Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 175; and Carl Plantinga, "The Scene of Empathy and the Human Face on Film," in *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition, and Emotion,* ed. Carl Plantinga and Greg M. Smith (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 247.

39. See Walter Stephan and Krystina Finlay, "The Role of Empathy in Improving Intergroup Relations," *Journal of Social Issues* 55.4 (1999): 738–39; and Lynne Henderson, "Legality and Empathy," *Michigan Law Review* 85 (June 1987): 1607.

40. Don Kuiken et al., "Locating Self-Modifying Feelings within Literary Reading," *Discourse Processes* 38.2 (2004): 269; Felski, *Uses of Literature,* 35; Silverman, *Threshold of the Visible World,* 85.

41. Janine Jones, "The Impairment of Empathy in Goodwill Whites for African-Americans," in *What White Looks Like: African-American Philosophers on the Whiteness Question,* ed. George Yancy (New York: Routledge, 2004), 70.

42. Judith Butler, "Giving an Account of Oneself," *Diacritics* 31.4 (Winter 2001): 23.

43. Anna Deavere Smith, Introduction to *Fires in the Mirror* (New York: Anchor, 1993), xxvi.

44. Qtd. in Nan Goldberg, "She, the People (Interview with Anna Deavere Smith)," *Salon,* November 1, 2000, accessed October 1, 2013, http://www.salon.com/2000/11/01/smith_15/.

45. Smith, Introduction, xxxix.

46. Anna Deavere Smith, *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 2003), 171.

47. Anne Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 189.

48. Qtd. in Dorinne Kondo, "Revisions of Race: Contemporary Race Theory and the Cultural Politics of Racial Crossover in Documentary Theater," *Theatre Journal* 52.1 (2000): 96.

49. See Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought,* 426–31. See Keen's *Empathy and the Novel* for a sharp critique of Nussbaum.

50. Sommer, "Resistant Texts," 529.

51. Lauren Berlant, "Poor Eliza," *American Literature* 70.3 (1998): 641, 640.

52. Lauren Berlant, "The Subject of True Feeling: Pain, Privacy, and Politics," in *Cultural Pluralism, Identity Politics, and the Law,* ed. Austin Stuart and Thomas Kearns (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 53.

53. Berlant, "Introduction," 9. In an essay collection edited by Berlant herself, Kathleen Woodward finds Berlant's treatment of sentimental feeling to be "severe, even unforgiving." See Kathleen Woodward, "Calculating Compassion," in *Compassion: The Culture and Politics of an Emotion,* ed. Lauren Berlant (New York: Routledge, 2004), 71.

54. The psychologist Gail Reed notes that empathy may be both active and passive. See Gail Reed, "The Antithetical Meaning of the Term 'Empathy' in Psychoanalytic Discourse," in *Empathy,* vol. 2, ed. Joseph Lichtenberg, Melvin Bornstein, and Donald Silver (Hillsdale, N.J.: Analytic Press, 1984), 7–24.

55. Lauren Berlant, "Subject of True Feeling," 83.

56. See Jeff Goodwin, James Jasper, and Francesca Polletta, "Introduction: Why Emotions Matter," in *Passionate Politics: Emotions and Social Movements* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 10 and 16; and James Jasper's discussion of "moral shock" in "The Emotions of Protest: Affective and Reactive Emotions in and around Social Movements," *Sociological Forum* 13 (1998): 409.

57. The political theorist Chantal Mouffe has similarly argued that the left should pay more attention to the power of affect to sustain progressive movements. See Chantal Mouffe, "Politics and Passion," lecture at the University of Virginia, February 23, 1996.

58. On the relationship between empathy and improved attitudes toward an out-group, see Batson, *Altruism Question*; and Krystina Finlay and Walter Stephan, "Improving Intergroup Relations: The Effects of Empathy on Racial Attitudes," *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 30.8 (2000): 1720–37. Studies that document the connection between

empathy and pro-social action include Mark Davis, *Empathy: A Social Psychological Approach* (Madison, Wisc.: Brown and Benchmark, 1994); and Patricia Oswald, "The Effects of Cognitive and Affective Perspective Taking on Empathetic Concern and Altruistic Helping," *Journal of Social Psychology* 136.5 (1996): 613–23.

59. See David Lisak and Carol Ivan, "Deficits in Intimacy and Empathy in Sexually Aggressive Men," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 10 (1995): 296–308; Charlene Letourneu, "Empathy and Stress: How They Affect Paternal Aggression," *Journal of Social Work* 26 (1981): 383–89; Paul A. Miller and Nancy Eisenberg, "The Relationship of Empathy to Aggressive and Externalizing Anti-social Behavior," *Psychological Bulletin* 103 (1988): 324–44; and Mark Johnson, Christiane Brems, and Pat Alford-Keating, "Personality Correlates of Homophobia," *Journal of Homosexuality* 34 (1997): 57–69.

60. Mabel Berezin, "Emotions and Political Identity: Mobilizing Affect for the Polity," 93, and Michael P. Young, "A Revolution of the Soul: Transformative Experiences and Immediate Abolition," 105, in *Passionate Politics: Emotions and Social Movements,* ed. Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper, and Francesca Polletta (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

61. See John Lofland, *Social Movement Organizations* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1996).

62. For example, two studies found that students who read novels by or about immigrants recorded no demonstrable change in empathy for immigrant groups. See John Kehoe and Charles Ungerleider, "The Effects of Role Exchange Questioning on Empathic Perceptiveness," *Alberta Journal of Educational Research* 25.1 (1979): 48–52; and Jemeljian Hakemulder, "Foregrounding and Its Effect on Readers' Perceptions," *Discourse Processes* 38.2 (2004): 193–218.

63. Keen, *Empathy and the Novel,* 87–88. Psychologists note that avid readers usually carry the personality trait of "absorption," an openness to experience and a disposition to seek insight into the self via aesthetic experiences. See Kuiken et al., "Locating Self-Modifying Feelings within Literary Reading," 273; and T. Cameron Wild, Don Kuiken, and Don Schopflocher, "The Role of Absorption in Experiential Involvement," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 69 (1995): 569–79.

64. Keen, *Empathy and the Novel,* 72.

65. To analyze these impediments to cross-racial empathy, I draw upon theories of color-blindness and white neoliberalism from Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006); Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters*; and Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003).

66. Keen, *Empathy and the Novel,* 91. Elizabeth Long makes the same point about the function of book clubs in *Book Clubs: Women and the Uses of Reading in Everyday Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), and Casey Klofstad argues for the importance of discussion forums in drawing people to political participation, in *Civic Talk: Peers, Politics, and the Future of Democracy* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010).

67. Jemeljian Hakemulder notes that "a narrative presentation causes stronger effects on our beliefs about the emotions and thoughts of others" than nonnarrative presentation of

the same content. See Jemeljian Hakemulder, *The Moral Laboratory: Experiments Examining the Effects of Reading Literature on Social Perception and Moral Self-Concept* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, 2000), 56. To the contrary, in an experiment documented in "Empathy, Attitudes, and Action," Batson notes that participants were slightly less empathetic when they were told that the interviews they had listened to were fictional rather than real (1658).

68. Keen, *Empathy and the Novel,* 102.

69. Tricia Rose, *The Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk about When We Talk about Hip Hop—And Why It Matters* (New York: Perseus Books, 2008), 261.

70. Cornel West, Preface to *Restoring Hope: Conversations on the Future of Black America,* ed. Cornel West and Kelvin Shawn Sealey (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), xii.

71. Such a self-reflexive discussion often forms an appendix to a larger study, such as in Pamela Perry's *Shades of White: White Kids and Racial Identities in High School* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), or is published as a "spinoff" article, such as Amy Best, "Doing Race in the Context of Feminist Interviewing: Constructing Whiteness through Talk," *Qualitative Inquiry* 9.6 (December 2003): 895–914.

72. Pat Caplan, "Learning Gender: Fieldwork in a Tanzanian Coastal Village, 1965–1985," in *Gendered Fields: Women, Men, and Ethnography,* ed. Diane Bell, Pat Caplan, and Wazir Jahan Karim (London: Routledge, 1993), 180.

73. See James Clifford and George E. Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986). The debate was further influenced by the feminist theorist Donna Haraway, who questioned the concept of scientific objectivity. See Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14.3 (1988): 575–99.

74. Gerald McWorter argued that black social scientists are the only ones who can fully comprehend black experience. See Gerald McWorter, "The Ideology of Black Social Science," *Black Scholar* 1 (1969): 28–35.

75. See Frances Mascia-Lees, Patricia Sharpe, and Coleen Ballerino Cohen, "The Postmodern Turn in Anthropology: Cautions from a Feminist Perspective," *Signs* 15.1 (1989): 7–33.

76. For example, Robert K. Merton points out that the insider doctrine falsely reduces people to their most visibly manifested identities. See Robert K. Merton, "Insiders and Outsiders: A Chapter in the Sociology of Knowledge," *American Journal of Sociology* 78.1 (1972): 27; and Alford A. Young, "Experiences in Interviewing about Race: The Inside and the Outside of It," in *Researching Race and Racism,* ed. Martin Bulmer and John Solomos (New York: Routledge, 2004), 187–202.

77. See Kirin Narayan, "How Native is a Native Anthropologist?" *American Anthropologist* 95 (1993): 678; and Nancy Naples, "A Feminist Revisiting of the Insider/Outsider Debate: The 'Outside Phenomenon' in Rural Iowa," *Qualitative Sociology* 19 (1996): 83–106.

78. Merton, "Insiders and Outsiders," 33.

79. Young, "Experiences in Interviewing about Race," 191, 188.

80. Martyn Hammersley, *What's Wrong with Ethnography?* (London: Routledge, 1992), 145.

81. Miri Song and David Parker, "Commonality, Difference, and the Dynamics of Disclosure in In-Depth Interviewing," *Sociology* 29.2 (May 1995): 251.

82. Naples, "Feminist Revisiting," 83. Kirin Narayan and Alford Young agree.

83. Michael Jeffries, *Thug Life: Race, Gender, and the Meaning of Hip-Hop* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 148.

84. Naples, "Feminist Revisiting," 85.

85. See Jane Ribbens, "Interviewing—An 'Unnatural Situation'?" *Women's Studies International Forum* 12.6 (1989): 579–92; and Hammersley, *What's Wrong with Ethnography?* 147.

86. The research design of this project was approved by the Institutional Review Boards for research with human subjects at both Harvard and Bridgewater State University.

87. Narayan, "How Native is a Native Anthropologist?" 676.

88. See Shulamit Reinharz, "Who Am I? The Need for a Variety of Selves in the Field," in *Reflexivity and Voice* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1997), 3–20; and Song and Parker, "Commonality, Difference, and the Dynamics of Disclosure."

89. Ethnographers use the term "lurker" to refer to those who read online posts without participation in the discussion. See Robert V. Kozinets, "The Field behind the Screen: Using Netnography for Marketing Research in Online Communities," *Journal of Marketing Research* 39 (February 2002): 61–72.

90. Kimberly Chabot Davis, *Postmodern Texts and Emotional Audiences* (West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue University Press, 2007).

91. Danny Hoch initially agreed to answer my interview questions via email, but his exhausting schedule of performances on Broadway prevented him from doing so.

92. John Hartigan Jr., *Race in the Twenty-first Century: Ethnographic Approaches* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 183.

93. See Young, "Experiences in Interviewing about Race."

94. See Hammersley, *What's Wrong with Ethnography?* 147, where he discusses the power of research subjects.

95. See Julia Brannen, "Research Note: The Study of Sensitive Subjects," *Sociological Review* 36.3 (August 1988): 552–63.

96. Reinharz, "Who Am I?" 3; and Ribbens, "Interviewing," 584.

97. Song and Parker, "Commonality, Difference, and the Dynamics of Disclosure," 252; Hartigan, *Race in the Twenty-first Century,* 89.

98. John L. Jackson Jr., *Real Black: Adventures in Racial Sincerity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 27, 18.

99. See Wendy Holloway, *Subjectivity and Method in Psychology* (London: Sage, 1989), for a discussion of the defenses that blacks and women put up against researchers' objectification of them.

100. Song and Parker, "Commonality, Difference, and the Dynamics of Disclosure," 251.

101. Hammersley defends this trend in education scholarship in *What's Wrong with Ethnography?* 144.

102. Many articles document the resistance that people of color face when they teach in predominantly white institutions. See Frank Tuitt, Michele Hanna, Lisa M. Martinez, Maria del Carmen Salazar, and Rachel Griffin, "Teaching in the Line of Fire: Faculty of Color in the Academy," *Thought and Action: The NEA Higher Education Journal* 25 (Fall

2009): 65–74; Juanita McGowan, "Multicultural Teaching: African-American Faculty Classroom Teaching Experiences in Predominantly White Colleges and Universities," *Multicultural Education* 8.2 (2000): 19–22; and Christine A. Stanley, "Coloring the Academic Landscape: Faculty of Color Breaking the Silence in Predominantly White Colleges and Universities," *American Educational Research Journal* 43.4 (2006): 701–36.

103. Perry, *Shades of White,* 192.

104. See W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Souls of White Folk," in *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1921), 29–52; Langston Hughes, *The Ways of White Folks* (1933; reprint, New York: Vintage, 2011); James Baldwin, "On Being White . . . and Other Lies" and "White Man's Guilt," in *Black on White: Black Writers on What It Means to Be White,* ed. David Roediger (New York: Schocken Books, 1999); and Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (New York: Vintage, 1993).

Chapter 1. Wiggers or White Allies?

1. See Nelson George, *The Death of Rhythm and Blues* (New York: Random House, 1988); Melnick, *Right to Sing the Blues*; Mark Anthony Neal, *Songs in the Key of Black Life: A Rhythm and Blues Nation* (New York: Routledge, 2003); and Mike Alleyne, "White Reggae: Cultural Dilution in the Record Industry," *Popular Music and Society* 24.1 (2000): 15–30.

2. Armond White, "The Resistance: Ten Years of Popular Culture that Shook the World," in *Beyond Borders: A Cultural Reader,* ed. Randall Bass and Joy Young (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003), 548.

3. Josh Ozersky, "The White Negro Revisited," *Tikkun* 15.5 (September-October 2000): 63.

4. Rose, *Hip Hop Wars,* 232. For more optimistic, anecdotally driven analyses of white hip-hop fans, see Baraki Kitwana, *Why White Kids Love Hip Hop: Wiggers, Wannabes, and the New Reality of Race in America* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2005); and Jason Tanz, *Other People's Property: A Shadow History of Hip-Hop in White America* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2007).

5. See Vron Ware and Les Back, *Out of Whiteness: Color, Politics, and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 230. Ware and Back argue that critics must pay attention to local contexts before passing judgment on individual acts of racial crossover.

6. See Jeff Chang, ed., *Total Chaos: The Art and Aesthetics of Hip Hop* (New York: Basic Civitas, 2006), ix, for a broad definition of hip-hop as an "arts movement" that includes rap music, literature, poetry, theater, dance, visual arts, film, graphic design, and photography. The term "lit hop" is Mansbach's own coinage; see Mansbach, "On Lit Hop," in *Total Chaos,* 92–101.

7. Tricia Rose made the same point about Eminem in a lecture given to the Brown University Alumni Association, Boston, Park Plaza Hotel, in 2010. In "Eminem: The New White Negro," Rux similarly admits that Eminem "worships [African Americans] and belongs to them and, by virtue of socialization, is one of them" (27).

8. Roediger, *Colored White,* 229.

9. Jackson, *Real Black,* 13, 21.

10. Ibid., 60, 85, 15.

11. Ibid., 227.

12. See Gubar, *Racechanges,* 36.

13. Touré, "32 Questions," *Village Voice,* March 30, 1999, 71, accessed October 3, 2013, http://www.villagevoice.com/1999–03–23/music/32-questions/full/.

14. Rux, "Eminem," 28; and Charles Aaron, "What the White Boy Means When He Says Yo," in *And It Don't Stop: The Best American Hip Hop Journalism of the Last Twenty-five Years,* ed. Raquel Cepeda (New York: Faber and Faber, 1998), 211–37.

15. Qtd. in David Enders, "Eight Mile Road: Detroit's Physical and Metaphorical Border," Associated Press, Domestic News, November 5, 2001, Lexis Nexis, accessed December 8, 2002.

16. Eminem, "If I Had," *The Slim Shady LP* CD (Shady Records, 1999).

17. Qtd. in Lynette Holloway, "The Angry Appeal of Eminem," *New York Times,* October 28, 2002, C1, accessed November 4, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2002/10/28/business/the-angry-appeal-of-eminem-is-cutting-across-racial-lines.html.

18. David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1991).

19. Neil Strauss, "The Hip-Hop Nation: Whose Is It?; A Land of Rhythm and Beats for All," *New York Times,* August 22, 1999, sec. 2:1+, accessed October 3, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/1999/08/22/arts/music-the-hip-hop-nation-whose-is-it-a-land-with-rhythm-and-beats-for-all.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm.

20. Ozersky "White Negro Revisited," 62.

21. Ibid.

22. Qtd. in Zadie Smith, "The Zen of Eminem," *Vibe,* January 28, 2005, accessed November 5, 2013, http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Cover+Story%3A+The+Zen+of+Eminem-a016114179 40.

23. Eminem, "Without Me," *The Eminem Show* CD (Shady Records, 2002).

24. Lott, "White Like Me," 484. For other defenses of Elvis, see Vernon Chadwick, ed., *In Search of Elvis: Music, Race, Art, Religion* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1997); and Michael T. Bertrand, *Race, Rock, and Elvis* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000). In *Colored White,* David Roediger offers an insightful analysis of Elvis's movement over time from an affiliation with blackness to a complacent acceptance of white privilege.

25. Qtd. in Christopher Blank, "The Artist Used Black and White; Many Still See Red," *Memphis Commercial Appeal,* August 18, 2002, A1. Public Enemy had previously condemned Elvis in their song "Fight the Power."

26. Ibid.

27. Salim Washington, "Responses to Crossover Dreams," in *Race Traitor,* ed. Noel Ignatiev and John Garvey (New York: Routledge, 1996), 167.

28. Qtd. in Donna Britt, "Eminem's *8 Mile* Adds Distance to Rap's Reach," *Washington Post,* November 8, 2002, B1.

29. Paul Garon, "White Blues," in *Race Traitor,* ed. Noel Ignatiev and John Garvey (New York: Routledge, 1996), 168.

30. Lott, "White Like Me," 484, 479.

31. Eminem, "Just Don't Give a Fuck," *The Slim Shady LP* CD (Shady Records, 1999).

32. See Tricia Rose's *Hip Hop Wars* for a trenchant critique of hip-hop's misogyny.

33. Eminem, "Yellow Brick Road," *Encore* CD (Shady Records, 2004).

34. Ta-Nehisi Coates, "Caught on Tape: Eminem's Racist Rant Says Little that Hasn't Been Said by Black Rappers before Him," *Village Voice,* November 21, 2003, accessed October 3, 2013, http://www.villagevoice.com/2003–11–25/music/caught-on-tape/full/.

35. "Life Story: Eminem—In His Own Words," *Life Story Magazine* (August 2003): 23.

36. Noel Ignatiev, "When Does the Unreasonable Act Make Sense?" in *Race Traitor* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 36.

37. Eminem, "The Way I Am," *The Marshall Mathers LP* CD (Shady Records, 2000).

38. Eminem, *Angry Blonde* (New York: Regan Books, 2000), 64.

39. Eminem, "White America," *The Eminem Show* CD (Shady Records, 2002).

40. Eminem, "I'm Back," *The Slim Shady LP* CD (Shady Records, 1999).

41. "Life Story," 35.

42. Ibid., 44.

43. Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters,* 14.

44. Jeffries, *Thug Life,* 47; Garon, "White Blues," 173.

45. "Life Story," 62.

46. Tim Wise, *Speaking Treason Fluently: Anti-Racist Reflections from an Angry White Male* (New York: Soft Skull Press, 2008), 36.

47. Giroux, "White Noise," 103.

48. Ozersky, "White Negro Revisited," 62.

49. White, "The Resistance," 543; Hoch qtd. in Aida Mashaka Croal, "Danny Hoch Wants to Change the Word," *Africana.com,* October 12, 2001, accessed November 28, 2002.

50. For a view of Eminem as an apolitical "angry narcissist," see Stephen Miller, *Conversation: A History of a Declining Art* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2007), 263, 258.

51. Eminem, "Mosh," *Encore* CD (Shady Records, 2004).

52. "Life Story," 26.

53. Adam Mansbach, "*Angry Black White Boy* interview," accessed July 19, 2012, http://adammansbach.com/abwbinterview.html.

54. William Jelani Cobb, "White Negro, Please!" *The Progressive,* January 2003, 33.

55. Jackson, *Real Black,* 176.

56. Danny Hoch, *Jails, Hospitals, & Hip-Hop and Some People* (New York: Villard Books, 1998), xi. Also see Hoch's interview with Kate Taylor, "Assault on the Gentrifiers, and the Audience," *New York Times,* November 14, 2008, accessed July 21, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/16/theater/16tayl.html?_r=2&oref=slogin&.

57. Danny Hoch, "Straining to Live Black," *New York Times,* October 10, 1999.

58. Hoch, *Jails,* xvi.

59. Qtd. in Paul Bravmann, "Whiteboy Deluxe: Danny Hoch's Cultural Revolution," *The Stranger,* September 2, 1999, accessed October 6, 2013, http://www.thestranger.com/seattle/whiteboy-deluxe/Content?oid=1934.

60. Qtd. in Somini Sengupta, "A Multicultural Chameleon: Actor's Experience Spawns Polyglot Cast of Characters," *New York Times,* October 9, 1999.

61. Hoch, "Straining to Live Black."

62. Danny Hoch, "Toward a Hip-Hop Aesthetic," in *Total Chaos: The Art and Aesthetics of Hip Hop,* ed. Jeff Chang (New York: Basic Civitas, 2006), 350.

63. Qtd. in Sengupta, "Multicultural Chameleon."

64. Ibid.

65. Laurie Stone, "Vox Populi," *The Nation,* May 18, 1998, 33.

66. Via the festival, Hoch helped to promote the work of the African American monologue performer Sarah Jones, who won a 2006 special Tony award for her show *Bridge and Tunnel.*

67. The print edition of *Jails, Hospitals, & Hip-Hop and Some People* begins with this dedication: "for my mother . . . who taught me how to really listen."

68. Jackson, *Real Black,* 15.

69. Nicole Hodges notes that Hoch's performance of *Jails, Hospitals, & Hip-Hop* in Los Angeles was responded to positively by the multiracial audience, who "see him as a hip-hopper who speaks their language." See Nicole Hodges, "Sampling Blackness: Performing African Americanness in Hip-Hop Theater and Performance" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Southern California, 2009), 106.

70. See Caron Atlas, "*Taking Over* and Taking Back: Theater as a Forum on Gentrification," *Community Arts Network: Reading Room,* February 2010, accessed July 24, 2012, http://wayback.archive-it.org/2077/20100906195159/http://www.communityarts.net/readingroom/archivefiles/2010/02/taking_over_and.php.

71. See Karen Weinstein, "*Taking Over,*" culturevulture.net, January 2009, accessed July 21, 2012, http://65.110.93.204/Theater/takingover_1–09.htm; and Chloe Veltman, "Lies Like Truth: *Taking Over,*" January 17, 2008, accessed July 21, 2012, http://blog.chloeveltman.com/2008/01/taking-over.html. Hoch also reads from the angry letters he has received from whites at the end of performances of *Taking Over.*

72. Hoch, *Jails,* xvii.

73. Noel Ignatiev and John Garvey, eds., *Race Traitor* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 10.

74. Hoch, *Jails,* xvi.

75. Ibid., 133.

76. Ibid., 136.

77. Ibid., 3.

78. Qtd. in Richard Goldstein, "Left Back City," *Village Voice,* April 14, 1998, 57.

79. Hoch, "Toward a Hip-Hop Aesthetic," 361.

80. Allen and Hoch appear to have reached a more amicable relationship recently. Hoch has served as a member of the Hip-Hop Association Advisory Board, of which Harry Allen is a Founding Advisor.

81. Qtd. in Hodges, "Sampling Blackness," 133.

82. Qtd. in Kate Taylor, "Assault on the Gentrifiers, and the Audience."

83. Qtd. in David Freedlander, "Gentrification Blues," *Theater Communications Group,* February 2009, accessed July 10, 2012, http://www.tcg.org/publications/at/feb09/hoch.cfm.

84. Hoch, *Jails,* 11.

85. Ibid., 11–12.

86. Ibid., 19, 20, 21.

87. Ibid., 94, 95.

88. Ibid., 98.

89. Stone, "Vox Populi," 34. See Jeffries, *Thug Life,* for an analysis of commercial hip-hop narratives that offer deep emotional complexity, "challeng[ing] previous theories of coolness" (16).

90. Hoch, *Jails,* 69, 70.

91. Jeffries, *Thug Life,* 149.

92. Danny Hoch, "Mr. Hoch Goes to Hollywood: Why *Whiteboyz* Wasn't at a Theater Near You," *The Nation,* April 3, 2000, 28.

93. Giroux, "White Noise," 90.

94. Ibid., 93.

95. Hoch, *Jails,* 104.

96. Ibid., 107–8.

97. Ibid., 27.

98. Ibid., 29.

99. Ibid., 50.

100. Ibid., 49.

101. Qtd. in Sengupta, "Multicultural Chameleon."

102. Hoch, *Jails,* 20–21.

103. Bravmann, "Whiteboy Deluxe."

104. Hoch, *Jails,* 3.

105. Ibid., 4–5.

106. Ibid., 6–7.

107. I disagree with Nicole Hodges's argument that Hoch's prologue treats black hip-hop fans as unintelligent consumers duped by commercialism and thus paints Hoch as the wise sage who knows hip-hop better than they do. See Hodges, "Sampling Blackness," 19.

108. Ignatiev and Garvey, *Race Traitor,* 3.

109. Hoch, *Jails,* 12–13.

110. Ibid., 54.

111. Ibid., 72.

112. Ibid., xv.

113. Hoch, "Mr. Hoch Goes to Hollywood."

114. Hoch, *Jails,* 38.

115. Hoch, "Mr. Hoch Goes to Hollywood."

116. Hoch, *Jails,* 39.

117. Ware and Back, *Out of Whiteness,* 2.

118. Giroux, "White Noise," 134.

119. Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters,* 6, 7.

120. At least Ignatiev and Garvey admit that it is "devilishly difficult" to abandon one's race due to the "assumptions of others" (*Race Traitor* 37). For more on this debate, see Walter Benn Michaels, "Autobiography of an Ex-White Man," *Transition* 73 (1997): 122–43.

121. Hoch, *Jails,* xvii.

122. Shannon Jackson, "White Noises: On Performing White, on Writing Performance," *TDR: The Drama Review* 42.1 (1998): 52.

123. Hoch, *Jails,* 4.

124. Ibid., xv.

125. Qtd. in Boris Kachka, "Native Tongues: Danny Hoch," *New York,* November 3, 2008, accessed July 10, 2012, http://nymag.com/arts/theater/features/52419/.

126. Hoch, "Mr. Hoch Goes to Hollywood." Hoch is not merely paying lip service to the act of "giving back" to the community. He is a founding board member of the Active Element Foundation, which raises money for activist organizations such as Refuse and Resist, involved in the fight to free Mumia Abu-Jamal.

127. Qtd. in Croal, "Danny Hoch Wants to Change the Word."

128. Stone, "Vox Populi," 34.

129. Goldstein, "Left Back City," 57.

130. *Whiteboyz,* dir. Marc Levin, videocassette (1999; Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2000).

131. Phil Rubio, "Crossover Dreams: The 'Exceptional White' in Popular Culture," in *Race Traitor,* ed. Noel Ignatiev and John Garvey (New York: Routledge, 1996), 151.

132. Gubar, *Racechanges,* 248.

133. See Hoch, "Straining to Live Black."

134. Adam Mansbach, "And the 'Hood Pass,'" *Boston Globe,* February 13, 2010, accessed July 20, 2012, http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/editorial_opinion/oped/articles/2010/02/13/and_the_hood_pass.

135. Qtd. in Nina Willdorf, "Adam Mansbach '98 Makes Waves with Hip Hop Novel," *Columbia College Today* (July 2002), accessed July 20, 2012, http://www.college.columbia.edu/cct_archive/jul02/jul02_feature_mansbach.html.

136. Mansbach, "On Lit Hop," 101.

137. The METCO Program, funded by the state of Massachusetts, is a "voluntary program intended to expand educational opportunities, increase diversity, and reduce racial isolation" by enrolling urban students of color in successful suburban schools. See http://www.doe.mass.edu/metco/.

138. Adam Mansbach, "Toward a More Perfect Union? (Parts One and Two)," *Jewcy,* July 23–24, 2009, accessed January 10, 2010, http://www.jewcy.com/author/adam_mansbach.

139. Personal interview with Mansbach, Newton, Mass., July 4, 2012.

140. Ibid.

141. Mansbach, "Toward a More Perfect Union?"

142. Rose, *Hip Hop Wars,* 232. Rose laments that this risk of facing "a larger, predominantly black social reality is completely unnecessary now" (233) for white hip-hop fans, but Mansbach and Hoch are exceptions that put this rule into question.

143. Mansbach, "Toward a More Perfect Union."

144. Jeffries notes that both black and white male fans are drawn by the wordplay of rap. See *Thug Life,* 197.

145. Personal interview with Mansbach.

146. Ibid.

147. Ibid.

148. Ibid.

149. X-Clan led the rally on the Brooklyn Bridge after the racist murder of Yusef Hawkins.

150. Mansbach, "Toward a More Perfect Union." Mansbach references this Hebrew school incident from his past in one of Macon's slam poems in *Angry Black White Boy* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2005), 174.

151. Willdorf, "Adam Mansbach '98 Makes Waves."

152. Janeé Bolden, "Race Matters: An Interview with Adam Mansbach," *Cut-up.com,* issue 12, April 21, 2005, accessed January 10, 2010.

153. Mansbach has written many reviews of hip-hop culture for the *Boston Globe, San Francisco Chronicle, San Francisco Bay Guardian, Vibe,* and the De Capo series *The Best Music Writing 2004*. He served as an artistic consultant for Columbia's Center for Jazz Studies and was a founding editor of the pioneering 1990s hip-hop journal *Elementary*.

154. See Adam Mansbach, "Post-Race-ism," *NewsOne.com,* November 2008, accessed January 10, 2010, http://www.adammansbach.com/other/postracism.html; Adam Mansbach, "The Audacity of Post-Racism," in *The Speech: Race and Barack Obama's "A More Perfect Union,"* ed. Tracy Sharpley-Whiting (New York: Bloomsbury, 2009), 69–84, accessed March 5, 2011, http://adammansbach.com/other/the-audacity-of-post-racism.pdf; and Adam Mansbach, "The End of Racism," *NewsOne.com,* November 7, 2008, accessed January 10, 2010, http://newsone.com/33472/mansbach-the-end-of-racism/.

155. The front and back cover include endorsements from the black novelist Percival Everett and the white hip-hop writer William Upski Wimsatt, who dubs Mansbach the "white Richard Wright."

156. Mansbach, "On Lit Hop," 93.

157. Ibid., 94.

158. Ibid., 93.

159. Mansbach, *Angry Black White Boy,* 103.

160. Mansbach, "On Lit Hop," 96.

161. An additional irony of the passage is that Superman was created by Jews, and the transformation of Clark Kent to Superman echoes the narratives of Jewish assimilation and passing. See Blair Kramer, "Superman," *Jewish Virtual Library,* n.d., accessed March 5, 2011, http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/biography/superman.html; and Simcha Weinstein, "Superman: From Cleveland to Krypton; the Man of Steel's Jewish Roots," *MyJewishLearning.com,* n.d., accessed March 5, 2011, http://www.myjewishlearning.com/culture/2/Literature/Jewish_American_Literature/Into_the_Literary_Mainstream/Comic_Books/Superman.shtml.

162. Mansbach, "On Lit Hop," 96.

163. Ibid., 98.

164. Ibid.

165. Ibid., 97.

166. Mansbach, *Angry Black White Boy,* 103–4.

167. Qtd. in Bolden, "Race Matters."

168. Mansbach, *Angry Black White Boy,* 193.

169. Ibid., 69, 70.

170. Ibid., 72.

171. Ibid., 76.

172. Ibid., 50, 95.

173. Ibid., 49.

174. Ibid., 24, 98, 25.

175. Noel Ignatiev, "How to Be a Race Traitor: Six Ways to Fight Being White," in *Critical White Studies: Looking behind the Mirror,* ed. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), 614.

176. Personal interview with Mansbach.

177. Mansbach, *Angry Black White Boy,* 98.

178. Ibid., 104.

179. Personal interview with Mansbach.

180. Mansbach, *Angry Black White Boy,* 18.

181. Jackson, "White Noises," 51.

182. Although Moses Fleetwood Walker was a real historical figure, the "autobiography" included in the novel is Mansbach's own creation.

183. Mansbach, *Angry Black White Boy,* 204–5.

184. Ibid., 109.

185. Ibid., 50.

186. Ibid., 249.

187. Ibid., 264–65.

188. Ibid., 242.

189. Ibid., 221.

190. Ibid.

191. As Roediger argues, "commodity antiracism may remain so superficial that young people purchase both" racist and anti-racist commodities simultaneously. See Roediger, *Colored White,* 232.

192. Mansbach, *Angry Black White Boy,* 216.

193. Ibid., 1.

194. See R. S. Levine, J. E. Foster, R. E. Fullilove, et al., "Black-White Inequalities in Mortality and Life Expectancy, 1933–1999: Implications for Healthy People 2010," Public Health Reports 116.5 (September/October 2001): 474–83, accessed March 5, 2011, http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1497364/.

195. Mansbach, *Angry Black White Boy,* 275.

196. Ibid., 279.

197. Ibid., 334, 335.

198. Ibid., 335.

199. Ibid., 269.

200. Gubar, *Racechanges,* 36.

201. Adam Mansbach, "The Case for White History Month," *Boston Globe,* March 8, 2005, A13.

202. Mansbach, "On Lit Hop," 92.

203. Mansbach, "Post-Race-ism."

204. Eric Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006).

205. See Lori Harrison-Kahan, "Scholars and Knights: W. E. B. Du Bois, J. E. Spingarn, and the NAACP," *Jewish Social Studies* 18.1 (2012): 3.

206. Eric Goldstein, *Price of Whiteness,* 1. See also Lori Harrison-Kahan, *The White Negress: Literature, Minstrelsy, and the Black-Jewish Imaginary* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2010); and Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998).

207. Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, *Troubling the Waters: Black-Jewish Relations in the American Century* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), 41–42. The 1915 lynching of the Jewish factory owner Leo Frank and the anti-Semitism of the KKK further strengthened the Black-Jewish alliance. See Jeffrey Melnick, *Black-Jewish Relations on Trial: Leo Frank and Jim Conley in the New South* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000).

208. Ethan Goffman, *Imagining Each Other: Blacks and Jews in Contemporary American Literature* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 14.

209. See Paul Berman, "Introduction: The Other and the Almost the Same," in *Blacks and Jews: Alliances and Arguments* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1994), 13.

210. See ibid., 12; Greenberg, *Troubling the Waters,* 4, 11, and 46; and Hasia Diner, *In the Almost Promised Land: American Jews and Blacks, 1915–1935* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 237.

211. Malcolm X, for example, argued that the NAACP ought to have an African American rather than a Jewish president. See "Malcolm X Talks with Kenneth B. Clark," in *The Negro Protest: James Baldwin, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King Talk with Kenneth B. Clark* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), 31.

212. Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise,* 34.

213. Melnick, *A Right to Sing the Blues,* 35.

214. Ibid., 14.

215. Gayle Wald, *Crossing the Line: Racial Passing in Twentieth-Century U.S. Literature and Culture* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2000); Michael Billig, *Rock 'n' Roll Jews* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2001); Michael Alexander, *Jazz Age Jews* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001).

216. See Melnick, *A Right to Sing the Blues*; and Greenberg, *Troubling the Waters,* 29.

217. Karen Brodkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says about Race in America* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1998). Questioning the equation of Jew and "white," Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz's *The Color of Jews: Racial Politics and Radical Diasporism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007) discusses Jews as a multiethnic and multiracial diaspora.

218. James Baldwin, "Negroes Are Anti-Semitic Because They're Anti-White," in *Blacks and Jews: Alliances and Arguments,* ed. Paul Berman (New York: Delacorte Press, 1994), 37.

219. Greenberg, *Troubling the Waters,* 47.

220. For example, Toni Morrison's controversial dedication of her novel *Beloved* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1987) to the "sixty million and more" Africans who died in the Middle Passage implies that these numbers trump the six million Jewish victims of the Holocaust.

221. Baldwin, "Negroes Are Anti-Semitic," 34. For a view similar to Baldwin's, see Harold Cruse, *Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* (New York: William Morrow, 1967). African Americans have often sided with the Palestinians in their conflict with Israel. See Berman, "Introduction," 20.

222. Berman, "Introduction," 18.

223. Greenberg, *Troubling the Waters,* 250.

224. Goldstein, *Price of Whiteness.* For more on the "ethnic revival" movement, see Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006).

225. Goldstein, *Price of Whiteness,* 235–36.

226. Jonathan Freedman, "Do American and Ethnic American Studies Have a Jewish Problem; or, When Is an Ethnic not an Ethnic, and What Should We Do about It?" *MELUS* 37.2 (Summer 2012): 24.

227. Hoch, *Jails,* 124.

228. Goldstein, "Left Back City," 57.

229. Hoch, *Jails,* 127, 125.

230. Ibid., 127.

231. Ibid.

232. See Joe Eskenazi, "Jewish Chameleon Back on Berkeley Stage," *Jweekly.com,* January 19, 2008, accessed August 1, 2012, http://www.jweekly.com/article/full/34166/jewish-chameleon-back-on-berkeley-stage/.

233. Ibid.

234. Qtd. in Sengupta, "A Multicultural Chameleon."

235. Melnick, *Right to Sing the Blues,* 14.

236. Hoch, "Straining to Live Black."

237. Qtd. in Isaac Souweine, "A Jewish Griot," *New Voices: National Jewish Student Magazine,* February 21, 2002, accessed July 10, 2012, http://newvoices.org/2002/02/21/0144/.

238. Kevin Pang, "'Subversion' Explores Where Black, Jewish Humor Intersect," *Chicago Tribune,* November 9, 2009, accessed July 10, 2012, http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2009–11–09/entertainment/0911080162_1_humor-jewish-mel-watkins.

239. Qtd. in Richard Goldstein, "Left Back City," 57.

240. Qtd. in Souweine, "Jewish Griot."

241. See Hoch, "Mr. Hoch Goes to Hollywood."

242. Hoch, *Jails,* 38.

243. *Jails, Hospitals, & Hip-Hop: The Film,* dir. Danny Hoch, DVD (Kicked Down Productions, 2001).

244. Hoch, *Jails,* 39.

245. Hoch, "Mr. Hoch Goes to Hollywood."

246. Hoch's accusations gained even more validity when news spread in 2006 of a scandal in which another *Seinfeld* alum, Michael Richards, hurled racist epithets at African American members of his audience.

247. Qtd. in Buzz Poole, "A Conversation with Adam Mansbach," *The Millions,* March 21, 2008, accessed July 21, 2012, http://www.themillions.com/2008/03/conversation-with-adam-mansbach.html.

248. Personal interview with Mansbach.

249. Mansbach notes that Macon "retreated briefly into his own Judaism, *Jewish-not-white,* with its analogous history of victimization and enslavement, but he couldn't make it fit, couldn't make himself feel Jewish, didn't know what being Jewish felt like." See *Angry Black White Boy,* 17.

250. See Cruse, *Crisis of the Negro Intellectual.*

251. Adam Mansbach, *The End of the Jews* (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2008), 39.

252. Ibid., 85.

253. Ibid., 20.

254. Ibid., 182.

255. Ibid., 33.

256. Ibid., 20.

257. The character of Albert Van Dorn was based on John Coltrane's drummer Elvin Jones, whom Mansbach toured with as a roadie when he was a teen.

258. Mansbach, *End of the Jews,* 301.

259. Ibid., 246.

260. Ibid., 103.

261. Ibid., 201–2.

262. Ibid., 72.

263. Ibid., 187.

264. Ibid., 257.

265. Ibid., 175, 187.

266. Ibid., 188.

267. Mansbach, "*Angry Black White Boy* Interview."

268. Mansbach, *End of the Jews,* 193.

269. Ibid., 163.

270. Mansbach noted in his interview with me that the Israeli press wrote some of the most positive reviews of *The End of the Jews* that he has received.

271. Personal interview with Mansbach.

272. Ibid.

273. Mansbach, "What Is Jewish Culture?" *Jewish Culture Foundation of Holland,* July 23, 2009, accessed July 20, 2012, www.adammansbach.com.

274. Mansbach, *Go the F**k to Sleep* (Brooklyn: Akashic Books, 2011). The use of the word "fuck" was publicly associated with the Jewish comedian Lenny Bruce after his famous obscenity trial in 1964.

275. Mansbach, "What Is Jewish Culture?"

276. Henry Louis Gates Jr., "Authenticity, or the Lesson of Little Tree," *New York Times Book Review,* November 24, 1991, 1.

277. Ibid., 1, 30.

278. Ibid., 29.

279. Garon, "White Blues," 175.

Chapter 2. Oprah, Book Clubs, and the Promise and Limitations of Empathy

1. Among the few books addressing cross-racial appropriation in literature are Doris Sommer, *Proceed with Caution: When Engaged by Minority Writing in the Americas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999); Michael North, *The Dialect of Mod-*

ernism: Race, Language, and Twentieth-Century Literature (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); and Rachel Blau Duplessis, *Genders, Races, and Religious Cultures in Modern American Poetry, 1908 to 1934* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

2. On the "One Book, One City" initiative, see http://www.read.gov/resources/authorlist.php.

3. Percival Everett, *Erasure* (New York: Hyperion, 2001).

4. In my experience as a white person who frequently reads black-topic texts in public, my reading habits more often engender quizzical looks or quasi-racist comments rather than general social approbation. Yet when people find out that I write about hip-hop culture, they invariably call me "cool."

5. I refer to the contemporary fiction book club that ended in 2002, not the subsequent "classic literature" book club that has featured largely white male authors.

6. Archived discussions for each novel were once available at http://boards.oprah.com. *The Bluest Eye* engendered 345 postings, *Cane River* 799, and *Sula* 207, while a few received only a handful of posts.

7. Eighteen of the book clubs were monoracial—sixteen white and two black—and three were racially mixed, typically with one person of color.

8. The only clubs that did not choose their own titles were three library groups whose books were selected by a librarian facilitator.

9. Keen, *Empathy and the Novel,* 117.

10. For a critique of the *Oprah Winfrey Show*'s neoliberal "depoliticized" politics, see Janice Peck, *The Age of Oprah: Cultural Icon for the Neoliberal Era* (Boulder, Colo.: Paradigm, 2008). See Kathryn Lofton, *Oprah: The Gospel of an Icon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), for a reading of Oprah as a preacher of spiritual enlightenment.

11. Lofton, *Oprah*, 164. Janice Peck argues that Oprah reduces literature to a "therapeutic toolbox." See Peck, *Age of Oprah,* 186. For a more positive view of Oprah's emphasis on self-improvement through reading, see Cecilia Konchar Farr, *Reading Oprah: How Oprah's Book Club Changed the Way America Reads* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005).

12. "Oprah's BC goes to Louisiana," *Oprah Winfrey Show,* October 12, 1997, transcript by Burrelle's Information Services, 22.

13. Ibid., 12–13.

14. Jennifer Harris and Elwood Watson, "Introduction: Oprah Winfrey as Subject and Spectacle," in *The Oprah Phenomenon,* ed. Jennifer Harris and Elwood Watson (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 13.

15. See Lofton, *Oprah*, 176–77. Scholars who note the elision of debate on OBC shows include Kathleen Rooney, *Reading with Oprah: The Book Club That Changed America* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2005), 154; and Mark Hall, "Oprah's Book Selections: Teleliterature for *The Oprah Winfrey Show,*" in *The Oprah Affect: Critical Essays on Oprah's Book Club,* ed. Cecilia Konchar Farr and Jaime Harker (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 89–118.

16. As in most online forums, there is a standard moderator who eliminates advertisements and suppresses obscene posts or hate speech.

17. Sherra Schick, "Post[ed] Structuralism? Oprah's Message Boards, Soul Stories, and the Everyday Lives of Women," in *Stories of Oprah: The Oprahfication of American Culture,* ed. Trystan T. Cotton and Kimberly Springer (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2010), 61, 62.

18. Hall, "Oprah's Book Selections," 106.

19. Sixteen of the book groups were white, two African American, and three were racially mixed, including at least one person of color.

20. One exception on OBC was the show about Morrison's novel *Paradise,* which took place in a Princeton classroom. See Michael Perry, "Resisting Paradise: Toni Morrison, Oprah Winfrey, and the Middlebrow Audience," in *The Oprah Affect: Critical Essays on Oprah's Book Club,* ed. Cecilia Konchar Farr and Jaime Harker (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 119–39.

21. James Clifford, Introduction to *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography,* ed. James Clifford and George Marcus (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 7.

22. On Oprah's endorsement of color-blindness, see Janice Peck, "Talk about Racism: Framing a Popular Discourse of Race on *Oprah Winfrey,*" *Cultural Critique* 27 (1994): 94.

23. After the initial contact, about ten clubs withdrew from the study because members of their group expressed unease about discussing racial issues in front of a stranger. Access to the responses of these reluctant readers might have provided a fuller picture.

24. See Peck, *Age of Oprah,* 146, for a discussion of Oprah's emphasis on "mind cure" as a psychological "solution" to poverty.

25. Rona Kaufman, "'That, My Dear, Is Called Reading': Oprah's Book Club and the Construction of a Readership," in *Reading Sites: Social Difference and Reader Response,* ed. Patrocinio Schweickart and Elizabeth A. Flynn (New York: Modern Language Association, 2004), 239. For analysis of middlebrow culture, see Janice Radway, *A Feeling for Books: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Literary Taste, and Middle-Class Desire* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

26. Kaufman, "'That, My Dear, Is Called Reading,'" 245. Farr notes that Oprah does encourage reflective reading that recognizes the writers' craft (*Reading Oprah* 43–54).

27. Long, *Book Clubs,* 205.

28. Rooney, *Reading with Oprah,* 29, 161.

29. "Book Club—Toni Morrison," *Oprah Winfrey Show,* March 6, 1998, transcript by Burrelle's Information Services.

30. For an example of a review hostile to sentimental fiction, see Stanley Crouch, "Aunt Medea," rev. of *Beloved,* by Toni Morrison, *New Republic* 197.16 (October 19, 1987): 38–43.

31. See "Jonathan Franzen Uncorrected," PowellsBooks.blog, October 10, 2006, accessed October 7, 2013, http://www.powells.com/blog/interviews/jonathan-franzen-uncorrected-by-dave/. See also his interview with Terry Gross, "Novelist Jonathan Franzen," *Fresh Air,* NPR, October 15, 2001.

32. Susan Wise Bauer, "Oprah's Misery Index," *Christianity Today,* December 7, 1998, 70–74; and Cynthia Crossen, "Read Them and Weep," *Wall Street Journal,* July 13, 2001.

33. Emily Prager, "Oprah's Opera," *Village Voice,* March 10, 1987, 45. Also see Farr, *Reading Oprah,* for a similar defense of "reading with feeling" on OBC.

34. See Elizabeth McHenry, *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002), 313–14.

35. See also Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984); Radway, *Feeling for Books*; and Ann Ruggles Gere, *Intimate Practices: Literacy and Cultural Work in U.S. Women's Clubs, 1880–1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

36. One exception is the philosopher Maria Pia Lara's *Moral Textures: Feminist Narratives in the Public Sphere* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

37. McHenry, *Forgotten Readers,* 9.

38. Long, *Book Clubs,* 72, 112.

39. McHenry, *Forgotten Readers,* 3, 19.

40. Wendy Kaminer, *I'm Dysfunctional, You're Dysfunctional: The Recovery Movement and Other Self-Help Fashions* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1992). In contrast, Jennifer Rexroat argues that Oprah "promotes the empowerment of women in a de facto feminist fashion." See Rexroat, "'I'm Everywoman': Oprah Winfrey and Feminist Identification," in *Stories of Oprah: The Oprahfication of American Culture,* ed. Trystan T. Cotton and Kimberly Springer (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2010), 30.

41. Paula Carpignano, Robin Anderson, Stanley Aronowitz, and William diFazio, "Chatter in the Age of Electronic Reproduction: Talk Television and the 'Public Mind,'" in *The Phantom Public Sphere,* ed. Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 116.

42. Simon Stow, "The Way We Read Now: Oprah Winfrey, Intellectuals, and Democracy," in *The Oprah Affect: Critical Essays on Oprah's Book Club,* ed. Cecilia Konchar Farr and Jaime Harker (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 277–93. Farr also reads OBC as a "broad affirmation of democratic values" in *Reading Oprah,* 94.

43. Roberta Hammett and Audrey Dentith, "Some Lessons before Dying: Gender, Morality, and the Missing Critical Discourse in Oprah's Book Club," in *The Oprah Phenomenon,* ed. Jennifer Harris and Elwood Watson (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 215.

44. Peck, "Talk about Racism," 107.

45. Peck, *Age of Oprah,* 11.

46. Edith Frampton, "From the Novel to Oprah: Toni Morrison, Body Politics, and Oprah's Book Club," in *Stories of Oprah: The Oprahfication of American Culture,* ed. Trystan T. Cotton and Kimberly Springer (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2010), 148.

47. "Oprah's Book Club [discussion of *The Bluest Eye*]," *Oprah Winfrey Show,* May 26, 2000, transcript by Burrelle's Information Services, 9.

48. Jane Shattuc, "The Oprahfication of America: Talk Shows and the Public Sphere," in *Television, History, and American Culture: Feminist Critical Essays,* ed. Mary Beth Haralovich and Lauren Rabinovitz (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1999), 174, 177.

49. Young, "Revolution of the Soul," 105.

50. Lofton, *Oprah,* 188.

51. Malin Pereira, "Oprah's Book Club and the American Dream," in *The Oprah Phenomenon,* ed. Jennifer Harris and Elwood Watson (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 192.

52. The small number of non-empathizers might be explained by research suggesting that avid readers often have more empathic personalities that draw them to reading fiction in the first place. See Wild et al., "The Role of Absorption in Experiential Involvement"; and Don Kuiken et al., "Locating Self-Modifying Feelings within Literary Reading."

53. Ernest J. Gaines, *A Lesson before Dying* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 256.

54. "Oprah's Book Club Goes to Louisiana," 13–14.

55. Ibid., 11.

56. Ibid.

57. See Smith, *Engaging Characters,* 95; and Gaut, "Identification and Emotion in Narrative Film."

58. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought,* 432.

59. Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters,* 142, 143.

60. See Lofton, *Oprah,* 177.

61. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought,* 319.

62. Spelman, *Fruits of Sorrow,* 9.

63. See Karen Sanchez-Eppler, *Touching Liberty: Abolition, Feminism, and the Politics of the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

64. See Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*; and Srikanth, *Constructing the Enemy,* 29.

65. Ron Scapp, "Rorty: Voice and the Politics of Empathy," qtd. in bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 13.

66. "Oprah's Book Club [discussion of *The Bluest Eye*]," 1.

67. Toni Morrison, Afterword to *The Bluest Eye* (New York: Vintage, 2007), 210.

68. "Behind the Scenes at Oprah's Dinner Party," *Oprah Winfrey Show,* December 3, 1996, transcript by Burrelle's Information Services, 4.

69. Spelman, *Fruits of Sorrow,* 172.

70. "Behind the Scenes at Oprah's Dinner Party," 6.

71. Long, *Book Clubs,* 186.

72. Martin Hoffman, *Empathy and Moral Development: Implications for Caring and Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 56.

73. Rooney, *Reading with Oprah,* 29. Lofton also chides Oprah for encouraging "the solipsism of the reader" (*Oprah,* 189).

74. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought,* 328.

75. Benjamin, *Bonds of Love,* 48.

76. Felski, *Uses of Literature,* 46.

77. Pearl M. Rosenberg, "Underground Discourses: Exploring Whiteness in Teacher Education," in *Off White: Readings on Race, Power, and Society,* ed. Michelle Fine, Lois Weis, Linda Powell Pruitt, and April Burns (New York: Routledge, 1997), 83.

78. Spelman, *Fruits of Sorrow,* 10.

79. John Hartigan Jr., *Odd Tribes: Toward a Cultural Analysis of White People* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005), 14.

80. See Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists,* 132–46.

81. Julius Lester, "The Lives People Live," in *Blacks and Jews: Alliances and Arguments,* ed. Paul Berman (New York: Delacorte Press, 1994), 168.

82. Paule Marshall, *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (New York: Feminist Press, 1996), 224.

83. Ibid., 11.

84. Ibid., 281.

85. Ibid., 289.

86. Ibid., 290.

87. Murray Friedman, *What Went Wrong? The Creation and Collapse of the Black-Jewish Alliance* (New York: Free Press, 1995), 34.

88. Scott S. Greenberger and Tracy Jan, "King's Dream Unites Disparate Voices," *Boston Globe,* January 18, 2005, B1+.

89. Srikanth, *Constructing the Enemy,* 29.

90. These letters were once available at http://oprah.oxygen.com/obc/pastbooks/toni_morrison/obc_letters_20000526c.html.

91. Lofton, *Oprah,* 189. Timothy Aubry shares my conclusions about the importance of a "fertile clash between sameness and otherness" as readers look through another pair of eyes. See Timothy Aubry, "Beware the Furrow of the Middlebrow: Searching for *Paradise* on *The Oprah Winfrey Show,*" in *The Oprah Affect: Critical Essays on Oprah's Book Club,* ed. Cecilia Konchar Farr and Jaime Harker (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 173.

92. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought,* 319.

93. Spelman, *Fruits of Sorrow,* 111.

94. "*Beloved* Dinner with Oprah," *Oprah Winfrey Show,* October 30, 1998, transcript by Burrelle's Information Services, 7.

95. Ibid., 7–8.

96. Ibid., 8.

97. Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta, "Introduction," *Passionate Politics* 10.

98. Spelman, *Fruits of Sorrow,* 111. Nussbaum disagrees, viewing shame as an impediment to compassion in *Upheavals of Thought* (345–48).

99. All references in this paragraph to "*Beloved* Dinner with Oprah," 12.

100. Silverman, *Threshold of the Visible World,* 5, 85.

101. For example, one elderly white man said about the novel *Erasure*: "Everett and his character are clearly angry. He's so successful, what does he want? If he was white, you'd say he was a crank, but you don't dare say that."

102. Alice Randall, *Pushkin and the Queen of Spades* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004), 102.

103. Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondence," in *Critical White Studies: Looking behind the Mirror,* ed. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), 291–99.

104. Michael Rogin's *Blackface, White Noise,* for example, levels this charge against Jewish activists involved in the civil rights movement.

105. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought,* 383. See also Spelman, *Fruits of Sorrow,* 60.

106. "*Cane River,*" *Oprah Winfrey Show,* September 24, 2001, transcript by Burrelle's Information Services, 7.

107. Janice Peck, *Age of Oprah,* 166.

108. "*Beloved* Dinner with Oprah," 15.

109. Ibid., 12.

110. Ibid.

111. Ibid., 13.

112. Franny Nudelman, "Beyond the Talking Cure: Listening to Female Testimony on *The Oprah Winfrey Show,*" in *Inventing the Psychological: Toward a Cultural History of Emotional Life in America,* ed. Joel Pfister and Nancy Schnog (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1997), 311.

113. Theodore D. Kemper, "A Structural Approach to Social Movement Emotions," in *Passionate Politics: Emotions and Social Movements,* ed. Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper, and Francesca Polletta (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 70.

114. Lawrence Blum, "The Poles, the Jews, and the Holocaust: Reflections on an AME trip to Auschwitz," *Journal of Moral Education* 332 (June 2004): 144.

115. Young, "Revolution of the Soul," 105, 112.

116. Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta, "Introduction," 23.

117. "*Beloved* Dinner with Oprah," 13.

118. Long, *Book Clubs,* 24.

119. Ann's daughter Clara Silverstein wrote a memoir about these experiences, *White Girl: A Story of School Desegregation* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004).

120. Peck, *Age of Oprah,* 183.

121. Lawrence Grossberg, *We Gotta Get Out of This Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 86.

122. Cathy Davidson and Jessamyn Hatcher, ed., *No More Separate Spheres! A Next Wave American Studies Reader* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002).

123. Grossberg, *We Gotta Get Out of This Place,* 82.

124. "How'd They Do That?" *Oprah Winfrey Show,* November 18, 1996, transcript by Burrelle's Information Services, 18.

Chapter 3. Reading Race and Place

1. See Tate, "Nigs R Us"; Nelson George, *Buppies, B-Boys, Baps, and Bohos: Notes on Post-Soul Black Culture* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992); and Trey Ellis, "The New Black Aesthetic," *Callaloo* 12.1 (1989): 233–43.

2. Bertram Ashe, "Theorizing the Post-Soul Aesthetic: An Introduction," *African American Review* 41.4 (2007): 609–25.

3. Elizabeth Abel, "Black Writing, White Reading: Race and the Politics of Feminist Interpretation," *Critical Inquiry* 19.3 (Spring 1993): 477.

4. Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 129.

5. See Abel, "Black Writing, White Reading," for an analysis of Toni Morrison's "Recitatif," a post-soul short story that makes "reading race" its subject.

6. For a discussion of the relationship between genre, narrative techniques, and empathy, see Keen, *Empathy and the Novel,* 85, 92–99.

7. See Donald Jacobs, ed., *Courage and Conscience: Black and White Abolitionists in Boston* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).

8. On the history of race relations in Boston, see Ronald Formisano, *Boston against Busing: Race, Class, and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Jack Tager, *Boston Riots: Three Centuries of Social Violence* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2001); and Alan Lupo, *Liberty's Chosen Home: The Politics of Violence in Boston* (Boston: Little Brown, 1977).

9. Two years after these interviews were completed, Massachusetts elected its first black governor, Deval Patrick, in 2006.

10. Brian MacQuarrie, "Ethnic Division outside Boston: Minorities, Whites in Separate Worlds," *Boston Globe,* December 14, 2004, B1.

11. While some of the book clubs drew all of their members from the same income range and neighborhood, others had greater diversity among their members. Furthermore, some of the black and biracial readers in these book clubs lived in largely white suburbs.

12. For data on the number of Jews in Boston communities, see Steinhardt Social Research Institute, "The 2005 Boston Community Survey: Preliminary Findings," p. 11, Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Boston, November 2006, accessed March 5, 2011, http://www.cjp.org/local_includes/downloads/16072.pdf.

13. Hooks, "Neo-colonial Fantasies of Conquest," 78.

14. Abel, "Black Writing, White Reading," 498.

15. "Alice Randall: Author of *Wind Done Gone* Converses with Robert Birnbaum," Identitytheory.com, July 14, 2004, accessed December 8, 2008, http://www.identitytheory.com/alice-randall/.

16. For an analysis of postmodern neo-slavery fiction, see Ashraf Rushdy, *Neo-Slave Narratives: Studies in the Social Logic of a Literary Form* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); and Ashraf Rushdy, *Remembering Generations: Race and Family in Contemporary African American Fiction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

17. For an example of these flash-forwards, see Edward P. Jones, *The Known World* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 68.

18. Alice's woven and sculpted "Creation" is a "map of the life of the County of Manchester, Virginia. . . . There are no people on this map, just all the houses and barns and roads and cemeteries and wells in our Manchester. It is what God sees when he looks down." Ibid., 384.

19. Keen, *Empathy and the Novel,* 98.

20. Jones, *Known World,* 106.

21. Qtd. in Lawrence P. Jackson, "An Interview with Edward P. Jones," *African American Review* 34.1 (2000): 101.

22. Ibid., 101–2. See Orlando Patterson's editorials, "Racism Is Not the Issue," *New York Times,* November 16, 1997, and "The Race Trap," *New York Times,* July, 11, 1997. "Morning in America" was the catchword of a television advertisement for Reagan's 1984 presidential campaign. The optimistic ad suggested that people can "look forward with confidence to the future" because of Reagan's economic policies.

23. For an exploration of the effects of poverty and crime on inner-city black neighborhoods, see Jones's earlier short story collection, *Lost in the City* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), set in twentieth-century Washington, D.C.

24. Jones, *Known World,* 9.

25. Ibid., 134.

26. Ibid., 173.

27. Ibid., 189–90.

28. Ibid., 291.

29. The book was on the top-ten best-seller list (number nine) in fiction sales on AALBC.com for only a single month, January of 2004, three months before the Pulitzer was announced. Even a glowing review of the novel on the Web site failed to induce significant sales, at least via this site's bookstore.

30. Qtd. in Bill Vourvoulias, "Talking with Danzy Senna/Invisible Woman," *Newsday,* March 29, 1998. B11+.

31. See Hoffman, *Empathy and Moral Development,* 259. He argues that empathy inducement might be stronger within genres such as the bildungsroman.

32. Danzy Senna, "The Mulatto Millennium," in *Half and Half: Writers on Growing Up Biracial and Bicultural,* ed. Claudien Chiawei O'Hearn (New York: Pantheon, 1998), 12, 13. See *The New Face of America: How Immigrants Are Shaping the World's First Multicultural Society, Time* special issue, November 18, 1993, which presents multiraciality as the new hope of assimilation but also contains an article calling for the end of Affirmative Action. See Nakashima, "Voices from the Movement: Approaches to Multiraciality," in *The Multiracial Experience: Racial Borders as the New Frontier,* ed. Maria P. P. Root (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1996), 79–97.

33. Senna's father is the son of a "black Louisiana woman and a Mexican prizefighter," while her mother came from a Boston Brahmin family. See Farai Chideya, *The Color of Our Future: Race in the Twenty-first Century* (New York: William Morrow, 1999), 47; and Senna's memoir, *Where Did You Sleep Last Night? A Personal History* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2009).

34. Chideya, *Color of Our Future,* 47.

35. Senna, "Mulatto Millenium," 21.

36. Ibid., 27. See also David Hollinger, *Post-Ethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1996); and Naomi Zack, "Life after Race," in *American Mixed Race: The Culture of Microdiversity,* ed. Naomi Zack (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1995), 297–307. Advocating "racelessness," Zack questions the liberatory potential of race-based political movements.

37. For a treatment of mixed-race identities as liberatory, see Paula Gunn Allen, *Off the Reservation: Reflections on Boundary-Busting, Border-Crossing Loose Canons* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998).

38. Senna made these remarks during a public lecture at Bentley College in April 2004, after reading her unpublished essay "Snow in Alabama."

39. Danzy Senna, *Caucasia* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1998), 80.

40. Ibid., 53.

41. Ibid., 233, 194.

42. Qtd. in Vourvoulias, "Talking with Danzy Senna."

43. Senna, *Caucasia,* 408.

44. Ibid., 137.

45. Ibid., 289.

46. Some may view Senna's attention to such violent schisms as just another iteration of the "tragic mulatto" discourse that presents miscegenation as a curse. See Werner Sollors, *Neither Black nor White yet Both: Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997). Yet it is significant that Birdie finds belonging in the black community and distances herself from Samantha's "doomed, tragic shade of black." See *Caucasia,* 321.

47. Senna, *Caucasia,* 7.

48. Ibid., 137.

49. Ibid., 62, 63. Other African Americans in the text also perform blackness. Birdie's father Deck switches into his "jive turkey act" after he "discover[s] Black Pride" and tries to "purge himself of his 'honkified' past" (10).

50. Ibid., 8. Senna echoes this point in her essay "The Mulatto Millenium": "There was danger in this muddy middle stance. A danger of . . . being swallowed whole by the great white whale" (18).

51. As Senna remarked in an interview: "*Invisible Man* was about black skin making your man-ness invisible. I've flipped Ellison's idea, because I think whiteness is invisibility." See Vourvoulias, "Talking with Danzy Senna." The erasure of passing is accentuated by the fact that Birdie passes as a nonpracticing, assimilated Jew. For an analysis of Birdie's assumed Jewish identity, see Lori Harrison-Kahan, "Passing for White, Passing for Jewish: Mixed Race Identity in Danzy Senna and Rebecca Walker," *MELUS* 30.1 (Spring 2005): 19–48.

52. Senna, *Caucasia,* 220.

53. Ibid., 155.

54. Ibid., 387.

55. Ibid., 385.

56. Ibid., 355.

57. Ibid., 355, 406.

58. Ibid., 391.

59. Ibid., 393.

60. Wald, *Crossing the Line,* 189.

61. Ibid., 413.

62. Orlando Patterson, "Race Over," *New Republic,* January 10, 2000, 6. In contrast to Patterson's "post-race" optimism, see the cautionary arguments of Avtar Brah, ed., *Hybridity and Its Discontents: Politics, Science, Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2000); and Jan R. Weisman, "An 'Other' Way of Life: The Empowerment of Alterity in the Interracial Individual," in *The Multiracial Experience: Racial Borders as the New Frontier,* ed. Maria P. P. Root (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1996), 152–64.

63. Denzy Senna, "Snow in Alabama," lecture at Bentley College, in the author's possession, p. 14.

64. Ibid.

65. Hiram Perez sees a similar motivation among the white parents who spearheaded the movement for a multiracial category on the U.S. Census. He claims that these parents seek to "extend their privilege of whiteness" to their nonwhite children. See Hiram Perez, "How to Rehabilitate a Mulatto: The Iconography of Tiger Woods," in *East Main Street: Asian American Popular Culture,* ed. Shilpa Davé, LeiLani Nishime, and Tasha G. Oren (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 222.

66. Senna, "Snow in Alabama," 15.

67. Senna, *Caucasia,* 391.

68. Nakashima, "Voices from the Movement," 94.

69. See Neil Gotanda, "A Critique of 'Our Constitution Is Color-Blind,'" in *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement,* ed. Kimberlé Crenshaw, Neil Gotanda, Gary Peller, and Kendall Thomas (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 35–38; and John A. Powell, "The Colorblind Multiracial Dilemma: Racial Categories Reconsidered," *University of San Francisco Law Review* 31 (Summer 1997): 789–806.

70. Hiram Perez argues that the media's deployment of Tiger Woods as "America's son" is a problematic erasure of minority disenfranchisement masquerading as color-blindness. See Perez, "How to Rehabilitate a Mulatto," 223.

71. For a similar analysis of Hollywood's treatment of African Americans as saviors of white people, see Krin Gabbard, *Black Magic: White Hollywood and African American Culture* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2004).

72. See Project Implicit, accessed October 10, 2013, http://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/.

Chapter 4. Deconstructing White Ways of Seeing

1. Works on film and empathy include Carl Plantinga and Greg M. Smith, ed., *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition, and Emotions* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); and Torben Grodal, *Moving Pictures: A New Theory of Film Genres, Feelings, and Cognition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

2. Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 34; Alex Neill, "Empathy and (Film) Fiction," in *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies,* ed. David Bordwell and Noël Carroll (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 175–94.

3. Brenda J. Allen, "Skin Deep: Using Video to Teach Race and Critical Thinking," in *Reversing the Lens: Ethnicity, Race, Gender, and Sexuality through Film,* ed. Jun Xing and Lane Ryo Hirabayashi (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2003), 149.

4. See Brett Stockdill, Lisa Sun-Hee Park, and David N. Pellow, "Beyond the Hollywood Hype: Unmasking State Oppression against People of Color," in *Reversing the Lens: Ethnicity, Race, Gender, and Sexuality through Film,* ed. Jun Xing and Lane Ryo Hirabayashi (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2003), 215; and Jun Xing, "Media Empowerment, Smashing Stereotypes, and Developing Empathy," in *Reversing the Lens: Ethnicity, Race, Gender, and Sexuality through Film,* ed. Jun Xing and Lane Ryo Hirabayashi (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2003), 15.

5. This term is borrowed from John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin, 1977).

6. When I was teaching at Harvard University, I set up an African American film series with the intention of interviewing viewers or taping the discussion, but not enough people showed up to make such a study viable.

7. Paul S. Cowen, "A Social-Cognitive Approach to Ethnicity in Films," in *Unspeakable Images, Ethnicity, and the American Cinema,* ed. Lester Friedman (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 353.

8. Hooks, "Oppositional Gaze," 130.

9. Smith, Introduction, xxviii; Batson, *Altruism Question.* Ed Tan also talks about empathetic identification as a form of "witnessing," which emphasizes the visual. See Ed Tan, "Film-Induced Affect as a Witness Emotion," *Poetics* 23 (1995): 17.

10. Arnold Farr, "Whiteness Visible: Enlightenment Racism and the Structure of Racialized Consciousness," in *What White Looks Like: African American Philosophers on the Whiteness Question,* ed. George Yancy (New York: Routledge, 2004), 144.

11. Silverman, *Threshhold of the Visible World,* 85.

12. Butler, *Bodies that Matter,* 118.

13. Sommer, *Proceed with Caution,* 3.

14. Spike Lee and Lisa Jones, *Do the Right Thing: A Spike Lee Joint* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 109.

15. Qtd. in Elvis Mitchell, "Spike Lee: The *Playboy* Interview," in *Spike Lee Interviews,* ed. Cynthia Fuchs (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), 52.

16. Jennifer Radtke similarly argues that Lee's film is aesthetically and politically embedded in a "black scene." See Jennifer Radtke, "*Do the Right Thing* in Black and White: Spike Lee's Bicultural Method," *Midwest Quarterly* 41.2 (Winter 2000): 210.

17. Darnell M. Hunt, *Screening the Los Angeles Riots: Race, Seeing, and Resistance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 153.

18. In contrast, Wahneema Lubiano judges the film to be too enmeshed in capitalist ideology to be truly oppositional. See Wahneema Lubiano, "But Compared to What? Reading Realism, Representation, and Essentialism in *School Daze, Do the Right Thing,* and the Spike Lee Discourse," in *The Spike Lee Reader,* ed. Paula J. Massood (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008).

19. See "Behind the Scenes," *Do the Right Thing,* dir. Spike Lee, DVD (1989; 40 Acres and a Mule Filmworks, Twentieth Anniversary ed., 2009).

20. Lubiano, "But Compared to What?" 47.

21. Marlaine Glicksman, "Spike Lee's Bed-Stuy BBQ," in *Spike Lee Interviews,* ed. Cynthia Fuchs (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), 23.

22. Houston A. Baker, "Spike Lee and the Commerce of Culture," in *Black American Cinema,* ed. Manthia Diawara (New York: Routledge, 1993), 170.

23. Ibid., 173.

24. Lee has criticized Donald Trump's racism in Glicksman, "Spike Lee's Bed-Stuy BBQ," 18.

25. A more openly hostile form of exploitation frames the interactions between the Korean grocery owners and their black customers.

26. Radtke convincingly interprets Sal as a man who reinforces white supremacy by relying upon it. See Radtke, "*Do the Right Thing* in Black and White," 225.

27. Dan Flory, "Spike Lee and the 'Sympathetic Racist,'" *Journal of Art and Aesthetic Criticism* 64.1 (2006): 67–79.

28. Ibid., 74.

29. Baker, "Spike Lee and the Commerce of Culture," 172.

30. While earlier drafts of the screenplay stated that Sal was unable to get insurance in a risky neighborhood, Spike Lee revised this detail to strengthen his portrait of the white establishment protecting white interests. Spike Lee, "*Do the Right Thing* Screenplay: Second Draft, March 1, 1988," accessed November 11, 2013, http://www.awesomefilm.com/script/dotherightthing.txt. See "Behind the Scenes" on the Twentieth Anniversary DVD for a read-through of an earlier version of the script.

31. Spike Lee and Kaleem Aftab, *Spike Lee: That's My Story and I'm Sticking to It* (New York: Norton, 2005), 97.

32. Ed Guerrero, *Do the Right Thing* (London: British Film Institute, 2001), 27.

33. Another white mob with baseball bats killed Yusef Hawkins, this time in the Italian neighborhood of Bensonhurst. Michael Stewart was a young graffiti artist who fell into a coma induced by a police choke hold like that used on Radio Raheem. Another victim was Eleanor Bumpers, an elderly woman shot and killed by police when she resisted her eviction. Graffiti on the outside wall of Sal's Pizzeria asserts that "Tawana Told the Truth," an allusion to the case of Tawana Brawley, whose claim that white police raped her was met with public skepticism.

34. Qtd. in Glicksman, "Spike Lee's Bed-Stuy BBQ," 17–18.

35. Ibid., 20.

36. Lee's critique within the film thus anticipates the media's hysterical fears that his film would incite rioting against white-owned property. See Klein, "Spiked?" *New York,* June 26, 1989, 14–15.

37. For evidence of racial inequality in the post–civil rights era, see George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006); Melvin Oliver and Thomas Shapiro, *Black Wealth, White Wealth: A New Perspective on Racial Inequality* (1995; reprint, New York: Routledge, 2006); and Jean Stefanic and Richard Delgado, *No Mercy: How Conservative Think Tanks and Foundations Changed America's Social Agenda* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996).

38. Qtd. in Elvis Mitchell, "Spike Lee," 61, 62.

39. In Hunt's study, the black responders saw the L.A. Riots as "symptomatic of racial and economic injustice in the United States." Hunt, *Screening the Los Angeles Riots,* 153.

40. Expressing little empathy for black people's despair and frustration, the reviewer Terrence Rafferty argues "that trashing a business is a woefully imprecise image of fighting the power." See Terrence Rafferty, "Open and Shut," *New Yorker,* July 24, 1989, 80–81.

41. Hunt, *Screening the Los Angeles Riots,* 99, 128.

42. For a reading of *Do the Right Thing* as public art, see W. J. T. Mitchell, "The Violence of Public Art: *Do the Right Thing,*" *Critical Inquiry* 16 (1990): 880–99.

43. Qtd. in Glicksman, "Spike Lee's Bed-Stuy BBQ," 21.

44. Ibid., 21.

45. Lee and Jones, *Do the Right Thing,* 64. One study of the Watts riots, for example, argued that these events "contributed over the years to progressive (if not revolutionary) changes in [black] consciousness." See Gerald Horne, *Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1995), 335.

46. See James C. McKelly, "The Double Truth, Ruth: *Do the Right Thing* and the Culture of Ambiguity," *African American Review* 32.2 (1996): 215–27.

47. Qtd. in Elvis Mitchell, "Spike Lee," 64.

48. See Lee, "*Do the Right Thing* Screenplay."

49. See James Cone, *Martin and Malcolm in America: A Dream or a Nightmare* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1992), for a similar analysis of the ideological similarities between the two leaders.

50. Qtd. in Gary Crowdus and Dan Georgakas, "Our Film Is Only a Starting Point: An Interview with Spike Lee," in *Spike Lee Interviews,* ed. Cynthia Fuchs (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), 75.

51. Song and Parker, "Commonality, Difference, and the Dynamics of Disclosure," 252.

52. Forty percent of the Bridgewater students are first-generation college students. As of 2010, 13 percent are students of color, yet even fewer minority students major in English. The large percentage of female students is due to the institution's history as a teacher-training college.

53. Baker praises the film as a critique of domestic colonialism, and Lubiano excoriates the film for being too sexist and invested in capitalism. Both critics assert an oppositional ideology with which many of the students did not agree.

54. See Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists,* on the fact that most Americans see racism as a past event.

55. Stockdill, Park, and Pellow, "Beyond the Hollywood Hype," 215.

56. Keen, *Empathy and the Novel,* 75.

57. The students' views of the Wall of Fame as "trivial" recall Bonilla-Silva's argument in *Racism without Racists* that color-blind tactics often minimize racism.

58. Flory, "Spike Lee and the Sympathetic Racist," 70.

59. Ibid., 68.

60. Ibid.

61. Qtd. in Glicksman, "Spike Lee's Bed-Stuy BBQ," 18.

62. Lee and Aftab, *Spike Lee*, 111.

63. Ibid.

64. Flory, "Spike Lee and the Sympathetic Racist," 71.

65. Hunt, *Screening the Los Angeles Riots,* 116, 48, 122, and 47.

66. Richard Dyer, *White: Essays on Race and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 38–39.

67. It could be possible that this Indian student's preference for nonviolence stems from a culturally specific investment in the Indian leader Mahatma Gandhi's ideology of nonviolence.

68. Qtd. in Elvis Mitchell, "Spike Lee," 39.

69. See William Lyne, "No Accident: From Black Power to Black Box Office," *African American Review* 34.1 (Spring 2000): 39–60.

70. *Crash,* dir. Paul Haggis, DVD (Lions Gate, 2005).

71. "Crash," *Hollywood Reporter,* September 15, 2004.

72. *Crash* earned $53.4 million in U.S. box-office dollars but only cost six million dollars to produce. See Nicole Sperling, "Enviable 'Crash' Position: Lions Gate Gamble Pays Off Big," *Hollywood Reporter,* June 3, 2005, 59.

73. Steve Lopez, "Getting a Crash Course on Race," *Los Angeles Times,* March 12, 2006, B1.

74. See David Denby, "Angry People," *New Yorker,* May 2, 2005, accessed November 17, 2013, http://nyontime.blogspot.com/2006/02/angry-people-by-david-denby-crash.html; and David Denby, "He's Gotta Have It," *New York,* June 26, 1989, 53–54.

75. See Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation,* 147, 152; and Duggan, *Twilight of Equality.*

76. Duggan, *Twilight of Equality,* 13–16.

77. Ibid., 14.

78. Susan Searls Giroux and Henry A. Giroux, "Don't Worry, We Are All Racists! *Crash* and the Politics of Privatisation," *Third Text* 21.6 (November 2007): 747.

79. Ibid., 746.

80. "About the Production," press release documents, *Crash* file, Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Los Angeles.

81. Qtd. in Cara Mia DiMassa, "Differing Views of Race in L.A. Collide in *Crash,*" *Los Angeles Times,* March 2, 2006, A23.

82. Press release documents, *Crash* file, Herrick Library.

83. Giroux and Giroux, "Don't Worry, We Are All Racists!" 756.

84. Shulman qtd. in *Variety,* December 16, 2005, in *Crash* file, Herrick Library.

85. Philip French, "Hollywood's Latest Taboo," *The Observer,* August 14, 2005, accessed July 2, 2013, http://www.theguardian.com/film/2005/aug/14/.

86. It is telling that Haggis did not go to an Asian American neighborhood to observe audience responses to his film's stereotypical treatment of Asians. For a sample of Asian American responses to the film, see Jeff Chang and Sylvia Chan, "Can White Hollywood Get Race Right?" *AlterNet*, July 19, 2005, accessed October 12, 2013, http://www.alternet.org/story/23597/can_white_hollywood_get_race_right.

87. Qtd. in Anne Thompson, "Haggis' New Career: Million Dollar Writer," *Hollywood Reporter,* September 16–18, 2005, 78.

88. On the film's use of stereotypes, see Giroux and Giroux, "Don't Worry, We Are All Racists!" 750; and Tim Wise, "More of a Thud, Really: Racism, *Crash,* and the Perpetuation of White Denial," in *Speaking Treason Fluently,* 80–92.

89. Press release documents, *Crash* file, Herrick Library.

90. "All-Star Cast Tackles Fear and Prejudice in *Crash,*" *Jet,* May 16, 2005, 59.

91. Chris Lee, "Cultural Crash at the Water Cooler," *Los Angeles Times,* May 30, 2005. See Sperling, "Enviable 'Crash' Position," on the marketing of the film to black viewers.

92. Lee, "Cultural Crash at the Water Cooler."

93. Esther Iverem, "Review of *Crash,*" *Seeing Black,* May 6, 2005, accessed November 9, 2013, http://www.seeingblack.com/2005/x060305/starwars_movies.shtml.

94. Qtd. in F. X. Feeney, "Million Dollar Boomer: Paul Haggis and the Long Road to Directing," *L.A. Weekly,* May 6, 2005, 76.

95. Press release documents, *Crash* file, Herrick Library.

96. See Hsuan L. Hsu, "Racial Privacy, the L.A. Ensemble Film, and Paul Haggis's *Crash,*" *Film Criticism* 31.1–2 (2006): 132–56; Philip S. S. Howard and George J. Sefa Dei, ed., *Crash Politics and Antiracism: Interrogations of Liberal Race Discourse* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008).

97. Giroux and Giroux, "Don't Worry, We Are All Racists!" 746.

98. Ibid., 747.

99. Hsu, "Racial Privacy," 147, 149.

100. Wise, "More of a Thud, Really."

101. Sue J. Kim, "Anger, Cognition, Ideology: What *Crash* Can Show Us about Emotion," *Image and Narrative* 11.2 (2010): 12.

102. Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters,* 185–86.

103. Joe R. Feagin argues that very few Hollywood films "raise questions about the institutional character of racism in American society." See Joe R. Feagin, "Foreword: A Nation of Sheep," in *Screen Saviors: Hollywood Fictions of Whiteness,* ed. Hernán Vera and Andrew Gordon (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), x.

104. Roberta Ahlquist and Marie Milner, "The Lessons We Learn from *Crash,*" in *Undoing Whiteness in the Classroom: Critical Educultural Teaching Approaches for Social Justice Activism,* ed. Virginia Lea and Erma Jean Sims (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 110.

105. Ibid., 109, 112.

106. For an excellent reading of the film's Middle Eastern characters, see Jasmin Zine, "Contact Zones: A *Crash* Collision with Racial Politics and the Neo-Orientalist Imaginary," in *Crash Politics and Antiracism: Interrogations of Liberal Race Discourse,* ed. Philip S. S. Howard and George J. Sefa Dei (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 181–200.

107. Wise, "More of a Thud, Really." For more detail on this issue, see Fred L. Pincus, *Reverse Discrimination: Dismantling the Myth* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 2003).

108. Hsu makes a similar point when he notes the film's "prevalence of bourgeois minority characters," which "occludes [the reality of] race and labor stratification." Hsu, "Racial Privacy," 146.

109. Ahlquist and Milner, "Lessons We Learn from *Crash,*" 109.

110. Giroux and Giroux, "Don't Worry, We Are All Racists!" 751.

111. See Hsu, "Racial Privacy," 147.

112. Ibid., 133.

113. Conveniently, the only other insurance agent in the film is Asian American, and he also denies a claim to the Iranian shopkeeper Farhad, whose store is destroyed by racists who believed him to be Muslim.

114. Wise, "More of a Thud, Really." See Giroux and Giroux, "Don't Worry, We Are All Racists!"; and Kim, "Anger, Cognition, Ideology," 10, who read this scene in a similar way.

115. Wise, "More of a Thud, Really."

116. Giroux and Giroux, "Don't Worry, We Are All Racists!" 756.

117. Wise, "More of a Thud, Really."

118. See DiMassa, "Differing Views of Race in L.A. Collide in *Crash,*" A23.

119. For Haggis's quotation, see press release documents, *Crash* file, Herrick Library.

120. Paul Haggis and Bobby Moresco, "*Crash* screenplay, draft with final revisions," March 18, 2004, accessed June 5, 2010, www.awesomefilm.com/script/Crash.pdf.

121. Kim, "Anger, Cognition, Ideology," 12.

122. Giroux and Giroux, "Don't Worry, We Are All Racists!" 752. Hsu also makes a similar point in "Racial Privacy" (133).

123. Press release documents, *Crash* file, Herrick Library.

124. Ahlquist and Milner, "Lessons We Learn From *Crash,*" 111.

125. Ibid., 112.

126. Ibid.

127. Ibid., 117, 116.

128. Wise, "More of a Thud, Really."

129. Dyer, *White,* 4.

130. My aim was to consider whiteness as a racialized category alongside and in relation to other racialized cultures in the United States. As Gregory Jay argues, "Whiteness Studies is no substitute for area studies, ethnic studies, or postcolonial studies, but a necessary complement to them," provided that we "continue decentering whiteness even as we focus on it." See Gregory Jay with Sandra Elaine Jones, "Whiteness Studies and the Multicultural Literature Classroom," *MELUS* 30.2 (Summer 2005): 102.

131. The Harvard seminar included one Chinese American student, three Latinos (one of whom identified as white), four black women, one Brazilian white Jew, and three white women (one of whom claimed some Native ancestry).

132. Three exceptions included a Cape Verdean graduate student, a student with one Latino parent, and a Muslim exchange student from Jordan.

133. In this class of twenty-five students, twenty-three were white. One woman was Asian American, one woman was mixed-race (African American and white), and one man had a Puerto Rican parent, although he never mentioned his Latino background in class.

134. Naomi Wolf, "The Racism of Well-Meaning White People," in *Skin Deep: Black Women and White Women Write about Race,* ed. Marita Golden and Susan Richards (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 39–59.

Conclusion

1. Randall, *Pushkin and the Queen of Spades,* 271.

2. Ibid., 273.

3. Ibid., 272.

4. Hakemulder, *Moral Laboratory,* 56, 107.

5. Felski, *Uses of Literature,* 32.

6. Keen, *Empathy and the Novel,* xv, xiv.

7. Ibid., 147.

8. Ibid., 91.

9. Hazel Carby, "The Multicultural Wars," in *Black Popular Culture,* ed. Gina Dent (Seattle: Bay Press, 1992), 192.

10. Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists,* 133, 147.

11. Ibid., 229.

12. Beverly Tatum, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* (New York: Basic Books, 1997).

13. Leslie Fiedler, *Waiting for the End* (New York: Stein and Day, 1964), 134.

14. Tricia Rose includes the Hip Hop Theater Festival and Hoch in a list of progressive artists and organizations. See Rose, *Hip Hop Wars,* 253.

15. Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists,* 229.

16. Roediger, "Elvis, Wiggers, and Crossing over to Nonwhiteness," 240.

17. Nicole Santa Cruz, "Arizona Bill Targeting Ethnic Studies Signed into Law," *Los Angeles Times,* May 12, 2010, accessed November 12, 2013, http://articles.latimes.com/2010/may/12/nation/la-na-ethnic-studies-20100512.

Index

Abel, Elizabeth, 116
Abu-Jamal, Mumia, 38
affirmative action: *Bakke* Supreme Court decision, 67; conservative backlash against, 122, 131, 141, 182–83; in *Crash*, 150, 182–83, 187; support for, 131, 160, 204
Ahlquist, Roberta, 181–82, 188–89
AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome), 38, 39, 45, 46, 106
Aiello, Danny, 168
Alexie, Sherman, 106, 147, 191
Allen, Harry, 41, 42, 52, 221n80
Angelou, Maya, 79, 191
Angry Black White Boy (Mansbach), 28, 52–53, 55–65, 73, 75, 208
anti-essentialism, 17, 131; of Hoch, Danny, 36–37, 40, 41, 47; of Jones, Edward P., 122, 125–27, 129; of post-soul fiction, 112–23, 147; of Randall, Alice, 202; of Senna, Danzy, 132, 137–41
anti-racism: commodification of, 53, 62; and pedagogy, 162–63, 191, 193, 194, 199; and "political correctness," 146; seeds of, 3, 5, 16, 26, 101, 104–10, 148, 151–52, 203–9; strategies of, 35, 48–49, 52, 55, 63–64, 78. See also *Race Traitor* journal; Southern Poverty Law Center
anti-Semitism, 65–67, 72–77, 98, 205, 226n207. *See also* Holocaust
appropriation, cultural, 1–5, 69, 71, 79–80, 190; of blues music, 31; of hip-hop, 1–2, 27, 31, 34, 40, 58, 79; of jazz, 1–2, 66, 74–75, 79, 175. *See also* blackface minstrelsy
Arizona ban of ethnic studies, 208–9
Ashe, Bertram, 112
Autobiography of Malcolm X, The (Haley and Malcolm X), 106

Baker, Houston A., 157, 159, 165, 167, 174, 241n53
Baldwin, James, 26, 55, 67, 191, 193, 198, 199; *The Fire Next Time*, 106
Baraka, Amiri (Leroi Jones), 55, 75
Batson, C. Daniel, 6, 9, 152, 212n22, 216n68
Beastie, Boys, The, 27
Beatty, Paul, 55, 58
Beloved (Morrison), 193, 206, 208, 226n220; as book club selection, 85, 106; film adaptation of, 80–81, 101–2, 104, 105, 181; as neo-slavery fiction, 117, 119; on *Oprah Winfrey Show*, 101–2, 104, 105
Benjamin, Jessica, 9, 95
Berlant, Lauren, 8, 11, 12, 103, 105, 108, 214n53
Berlin, Irving, 66
bildungsroman, 113, 134, 236n31
Black and White, 1
Black Entertainment Television (BET), 30
blackface minstrelsy; advertisement for, 4; history of, 1, 3–4, 66; and Jews, 5, 71–72; on television, 46, 49
black-Jewish relations, 5, 10, 28, 56, 65–78, 96–99
black nationalism, 92; anti-Semitism of, 66–67, 75; and Black Panthers, 55; Cleaver, Eldridge, 55, 72, 106, 145; Farrakhan, Louis, 67, 77; in hip-hop music, 31, 41; Muhammad, Elijah, 60; Nation of Islam, 67; post-soul critique of, 112; X, Malcolm, 51, 55, 60, 61, 106, 160–62, 170–71, 193, 198, 199, 206, 226n211

Black on White (Roediger), 192
Black Panthers. *See under* black nationalism
Bluest Eye, The (Morrison), 81, 83, 88, 93–96, 100, 109
Blum, Lawrence, 104
Bobo, Jacqueline, 116
Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo, 96, 204–6
book clubs, 203, 208; African American Literature Book Club (aalbc.com), 125; age of members, 90–91, 96, 97, 99, 106–8, 129; in Boston, 2, 13, 15–16, 21–24, 81–85, 89–93, 96–148; compared to college classroom, 174, 191–92; experiential vs. analytic reading in, 85–87, 113, 114, 134, 142; influenced by locality, 110–11, 113–16, 132, 138–39, 142–48; racial composition of, 21–24, 114–33, 138–48, 173, 203; public sphere impact of, 82–84, 87–89, 103–10, 142–48. *See also* Oprah's Book Club
Boston: abolitionism in, 114; book clubs in, 2, 15–16, 21–24, 81–85, 89–93, 96–148; demographics of, 114–15, 143; history of racism in, 16, 106, 114, 134–35, 143–44, 235n8; present-day race relations in, 24, 83, 88, 108, 113–15, 122, 131–34, 138, 142–48
Brazil, 136, 137, 142
Brodkin, Karen, 67
Brown, Claude, 55
Brown Girl, Brownstones (Marshall), 96–97, 107
Bush, George, 159–60, 176
Bush, George W., 35, 83, 106, 108, 114, 129, 177, 182
Butler, Judith, 10, 112

Cane River (Tademy), 89, 103, 105, 229n6
Cantor, Eddie, 66
Caplan, Pat, 17, 19
Carby, Hazel, 203
Carter, Stephen L., 79; *The Emperor of Ocean Park* (Carter), 79, 106
Caucasia (Senna), 15–16, 85, 110, 116, 208; reader responses to, 90, 92, 98, 100, 102, 114, 132–48; textual analysis of, 111–14, 134–38
civil-rights movement, 64, 103, 109, 112, 122, 176; Jewish involvement in, 5, 57, 65–69, 72, 77, 233n104; legislation of, 122; police suppression of, 104, 153, 160. *See also* King, Martin Luther, Jr.; X, Malcolm
Clarke, Breena, 79, 81
Cleage, Pearl, 79, 81
Cleaver, Eldridge, 55; *Soul on Ice*, 55, 72, 106, 145
Clifford, James, 17, 84
Clinton, William Jefferson, 40, 42, 176
Cobb, William, 36
color-blindness, 68, 129, 138, 146; celebrations of, 23, 35, 92, 140–41; in *Crash*, 183–85; critiques of, 34–35, 54, 92, 140, 142, 204, 209; definitions of, 92, 141, 215n65, 241n57; of Eminem, 34–36; and neoliberalism, 25, 123, 177–78, 185, 215n65; racist tendencies of, 13, 14, 15, 22, 25, 34–36, 85, 92–97, 141–42, 180, 183–85; of Winfrey, Oprah, 84, 92–93, 95, 110, 230n22
Color of Water, The (McBride), 106, 140
Color Purple, The (Walker), 79
compassion: critiques of, 6, 11; defenses of, 8–9, 11, 87, 101, 103; definitions of, 6, 92
Connerly, Ward, 176
Coval, Kevin, 77
Cowen, Paul S., 150
Crash, 2, 16, 24, 176; compared to *Do the Right Thing*, 176, 188–89, 194, 197; criticisms of, 180, 185–86, 193, 196–97; marketing of, 179; neoliberalism in, 16, 176–86, 193–97; nonwhite viewer responses to, 179, 185, 192, 194–96; press reviews of, 176, 178–79; production history of, 177–78; textual analysis of, 176–78, 180–84, 186–88; white viewer responses to, 150–51, 175–77, 181, 183–90, 194, 196–97, 199
Cullen, Countee, 201

Danticat, Edwidge, 79, 81
Delgado, Richard, 8
Denby, David, 176
desegregation, school; in Boston, 105–6, 114, 134, 144, 148; in Virginia, 106–7, 234n119
Dickens, Charles, 117
Dickerson, Ernest, 153–54
Do the Right Thing, 2, 13, 24; compared to *Crash*, 176, 188–89, 194, 197; critique of, 180; press reviews of, 176, 240n36; nonwhite viewer responses to, 164, 168–69, 173; production history of, 155, 161–62, 168, 240n30; textual analysis of, 153–62; white viewer responses to, 150–51, 162–76, 185, 194, 197–99, 203
Dr. Dre, 30, 31, 32, 33
Du Bois, W. E. B., 26, 191; *The Souls of Black Folk,* 201
Dyer, Richard, 169–70, 190, 191

Ebonics, 135, 178
economic inequality, 16, 48, 67, 129, 181, 240n39; in *Do the Right Thing*, 150, 154–62, 165–69, 173, 180, 197; and Eminem's work, 30–31; gentrification and, 40, 144; neoliberalism and, 176–77; and X, Malcolm, 193
8 Mile, 28, 30, 36
Ellis, Trey, 112

Ellison, Ralph, 191, 199, 237n51; *Invisible Man*, 57, 61, 206
Eminem (Marshall Mathers), 1, 56, 62; compared to Danny Hoch, 38–39, 42, 47, 50; criticisms of, 15, 29–30, 32–36, 38, 220n50; defenses of, 28–34, 78, 218n7; in *8 Mile*, 28, 30; misogyny of, 32–33, 36
empathy: analogizing forms of, 92–99, 134; causes of, 12, 13–14; compared to sympathy, 6; critiques of, 3, 7–11, 94, 104, 153; and cross-racial friendship, 37, 53–55, 115, 121–22, 138, 143–45, 173, 204–7; defenses of, 3, 4, 7–12, 104, 108; definitions of, 6–8, 26; failures of, 8, 12, 13, 16–17, 22, 89–91, 128–29, 141, 149–52, 162, 165–73, 188–89; media's impact on, 14, 149; as perspective-taking, 6–7, 9, 91, 99–103, 109–10, 121–22, 145–46, 148, 151–52, 173–74, 186, 195, 197–99, 202; self-critical forms of, 5, 9–11, 26, 46–47, 50, 53, 69, 76–77, 99–103, 129–30, 145–47, 152–53, 189–90, 194–96, 199–200, 202; and textual form, 14, 113–14, 116–17, 119–20, 134, 147, 234n6, 236n31
Emperor of Ocean Park, The (Carter), 79, 106
End of the Jews, The (Mansbach), 28, 55, 65, 72–77
Erasure (Everett), 80, 91–92
ethnography: of book clubs, 12–14, 79–111, 113–22, 125–34, 138–48; of film reception, 149–53, 162–77, 181, 183–200; of hip-hop fans, 18, 28, 34, 44, 53–56, 65, 76, 218n4, 223n144; and insider/outsider debates, 17–19, 22, 24–26; methodology of, 17, 20–26, 82–85, 163; of researcher's subjectivity, 17, 19–26, 204–7
Everett, Percival, 81; *Erasure*, 80, 91–92
Everything but the Burden (Tate), 3, 79, 80

Farrakhan, Louis, 67, 77. *See also* black nationalism
Faulkner, William, 119
Felski, Rita, 9, 95, 202
feminism, 9, 88, 93–95, 116, 134, 189, 206; of Winfrey, Oprah, 82, 94, 231n40
Fiedler, Leslie, 206
50 Cent, 32, 33
Fires in the Mirror (Smith), 10
Flory, Dan, 158, 167–68, 187, 188, 193, 198, 199
Frankenberg, Ruth, 3, 34, 49, 92, 180
Fresh, Doug E., 37
Freud, Sigmund, 7, 9

Gaines, Ernest, J., 79, 80, 81, 86; *A Gathering of Old Men*, 100, 193; *A Lesson before Dying*, 81, 82, 90–91, 100
Garon, Paul, 32, 34
Garvey, John, 8, 28, 33, 222n120. See also *Race Traitor* journal
Gates, Henry Louis, Jr., 77–78
Gathering of Old Men, A (Gaines), 100, 193
gentrification: in Boston, 132, 144; in *Do the Right Thing*, 156, 173; in *Taking Over*, 39, 40, 50, 69
George, Nelson, 112, 191
Gershwin, George, 27, 66
Giroux, Henry A., 5, 35, 45, 49, 180, 182, 184
Giroux, Susan Searls, 180, 182, 184
Goldstein, Eric, 65, 68
Goodwin, Jeff, 105
Gore, Tipper, 33
Grossberg, Lawrence, 108, 109
Gubar, Susan, 5, 7, 30, 52, 64, 68, 78
guilt, white. *See* white guilt

Hall, Mark, 83
Haggis, Paul: *Crash*, 16, 24, 150, 175–199; neoliberalism of, 179–86, 197; statements about race, 177–79, 186, 188
Hammersley, Martyn, 18
Hansberry, Lorraine, 156
Harrison-Kahan, Lori, 67
Hartigan, John, 23
hip-hop culture, 2, 15, 29, 74, 76; breakdancing, 37, 56; commodification of, 44, 47, 57, 79–80; DJ practices, 56; emcees, 28–36, 54; fashion, 1, 79; graffiti, 37, 57, 65, 70, 73, 74, 76; hypermasculinity of, 32, 43–44, 81; literature, 15, 21, 28, 29, 52, 55–65, 72–77; misogyny of, 32–33, 57; rap music, 1, 2, 14, 15, 27, 29–37, 43–44, 48, 53–57, 70, 80, 154, 158, 208; theater, 15, 21, 28, 36–52, 68–69, 71–72
Hip Hop Theater Festival (HHTF), 15, 28, 38, 40, 207, 245n14
Hoch, Danny, 21, 35–52, 152; activism of, 15, 38, 40, 191, 223n126; biography of, 28, 37–38, 50, 67–70, 207; compared to Adam Mansbach, 39, 53, 57, 58, 65–78; *Jails, Hospitals, & Hip-Hop*, 28, 30, 38–39, 41–50, 71–72, 191, 221n69; Jewish affiliation of, 15, 37, 49, 65, 67–72; *Some People*, 28, 38–41, 44–45, 48, 65, 68–69; *Taking Over*, 28, 39, 40, 42, 50, 65, 69, 221n71; *Whiteboyz*, 46–47, 48, 50–52
Hodges, Nicole, 41, 221n69, 222n107
Hoffman, Martin, 94
Holocaust, 104, 120, 205; and American Jews, 66–67; compared to slavery, 67, 75–76, 99, 226n220
hooks, bell, 7, 116, 152, 191, 199

Hsu, Hsuan L., 180, 182
Hughes, Langston, 26, 175, 191, 199
Hunt, Darnell M., 154, 160, 169
Hurston, Zora Neale, 67; *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 106, 206

Ignatiev, Noel, 3, 29, 191, 222n120; "How to Be a Race Traitor," 59; Jewish affiliation of, 78; "race traitor" concept defined, 8, 36, 49, 59–60. See also *Race Traitor* journal
Illusion of Race, The, 139
Invisible Man (Ellison), 57, 61, 206

Jackson, John L., Jr., 24, 29, 31, 37, 40, 41, 70
Jackson, Michael, 35
Jackson, Shannon, 49–50, 60
Jacobson, Matthew Frye, 68
Jails, Hospitals, & Hip-Hop (Hoch), 28, 30, 38–39; audience response to, 221n69; film version of, 48, 71, 191; textual analysis of, 41–50, 71–72
Jasper, James M., 105
jazz music: and Mansbach, Adam, 28, 54, 55, 60, 73–75, 78, 203, 207, 224n153; and poetry, 175; white appropriation of, 1, 27, 66, 70, 79
Jeffries, Michael, 18–19, 34, 44
Jewish Americans, 205, 224n161, 235n12; in book clubs, 22, 93, 96–99, 103, 108, 115, 120, 129; as critical whiteness scholars, 68, 78; as hip-hop artists, 15, 21, 28, 37, 53, 65–78; Holocaust's effect on, 66–67. *See also* anti-Semitism; black-Jewish relations; Hoch, Danny; Mansbach, Adam
Johnson, Charles, 117; *Middle Passage*, 117
Jolson, Al, 66, 71
Jones, Edward P.: *The Known World*, 15, 79, 90, 108, 110–32, 134, 147, 208; *Lost in the City*, 236n23; political attitudes of, 122–23; 129–30. See also *Known World, The*
Jones, Elvin, 55, 228n257
Jones, Janine, 10
Joplin, Janis, 27
Joyce, James, 119
Jungle Fever, 191; student responses to, 192, 197

Kaminer, Wendy, 88
Kaufman, Rona, 85–86
Keen, Suzanne, 14, 82, 103; on empathy and narrative form, 12, 120; on "enhanced reading," 13, 203, 208; on failure of empathy, 166; on Oprah's Book Club, 82
Kid Rock, 31
Kim, Sue J., 180, 187
King, Martin Luther, Jr., 99, compared to Malcolm X, 161–62, 170–71, 193; and Lee, Spike, 160, 161–62, 170–71, 193, 198; "Letter from Birmingham Jail," 193
King, Rodney, 53, 55, 59, 154, 207
Kite Runner, The (Hosseini), 85
KKK (Ku Klux Klan), 64, 66, 226n207
Known World, The (Jones), 15, 79, 208; black reader responses to, 111, 117, 119–22, 125–27; textual analysis of, 111–14, 117–19, 122–25; white reader responses to, 90, 108, 110–11, 114–22, 125–32, 134, 147
Koch, Ed, 159–60
KRS-One, 53

Lahiri, Jhumpa, 106
Larsen, Nella, 81; *Passing*, 97–98, 106, 121
Lee, Spike, 2, 13, 16, 55; *Do the Right Thing*, 2, 13, 16, 24, 55, 150–76, 188, 193–94, 197–99, 206; *Jungle Fever,* 190, 192, 197; statements on race, 155, 157, 159–62, 168, 171. See also *Do the Right Thing*
Leno, Jay, 43, 44
Lesson before Dying, A (Gaines), 81, 82, 90–91, 100
Lester, Julius, 96
Let Me Down Easy (Smith), 10
Lipsitz, George, 68, 191, 194, 197
Lofton, Kathryn, 89, 100
Long, Elizabeth, 86, 87, 94, 105
Los Angeles Riots. *See under* race riots
Lott, Eric, 3–4, 32
Lubiano, Wahneema, 157, 165, 180, 239n18, 241n51
lynching, 63, 65, 164, 190, 226n207
Lyne, William, 174

Mailer, Norman, 1, 27, 29, 30, 32, 43, 80; "The White Negro," 1, 60
Mama Day (Naylor), 79, 98, 99, 103
Mansbach, Adam, 20–21, 29–30, 152, 191, 203; activism of, 15, 55–56, 207; *Angry Black White Boy*, 28, 52–53, 55–65, 73, 75, 208; biography of, 28, 53–56, 65, 72–73, 75–77, 206–7; "The Case for White History Month," 145; compared to Danny Hoch, 39, 53, 57, 58, 65–78; criticism of *8 Mile*, 36; *The End of the Jews*, 28, 55, 65, 72–77; *Go the F**k to Sleep*, 77; Jewish affiliation of, 15, 65, 72–73, 77; *Rage Is Back*, 76
Marcus, George E., 17
Marshall, Paule, 80, 81, 106; *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, 96–97, 107

Mathers, Marshall. *See* Eminem
McBride, James, 79, 140; *The Color of Water*, 106, 140
McHenry, Elizabeth, 87–88
McIntosh, Peggy, 102, 191, 194
McKay, Claude, 191
Melnick, Jeffrey, 66, 68, 70, 78
Merton, Robert, 18, 216n76
Mezzrow, Mezz, 27, 66
Micheaux, Oscar, 164
middlebrow, 14, 81, 85, 86, 91
Middle Passage (Johnson), 117
Milner, Marie, 181–82, 188–89
minstrelsy. *See* blackface minstrelsy
mixed race identity, 190, 195, 201, 236n37, 238n65; in *Caucasia*, 90, 98, 100, 112–13, 132–42, 145; of Latinos, 43
Morrison, Toni, 2, 26, 55, 79, 80, 86, 109, 191, 199; *Beloved*, 81, 85, 101–2, 104, 105, 106, 117, 119, 181, 193, 206, 208, 226n220; *The Bluest Eye,* 81, 83, 88, 93–96, 100, 109; *Paradise,* 81, 230n20; *Song of Solomon*, 81, 94–95, 109; *Sula*, 81, 206
Muhammad, Elijah, 60
Murdoch, Iris, 149

NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), 65, 179, 211n226
Naples, Nancy, 18
Narayan, Kirin, 19
Nation of Islam, 67
Native Son (Wright), 92, 99–100, 106, 107
Naylor, Gloria, 81; *Mama Day*, 79, 98, 99, 103
neoliberalism: and colorblindness, 25, 123, 177–78, 185, 215n65; in *Crash*, 16, 176–86, 193–97; critiques of, 13, 14, 25, 88, 174, 176–78, 180, 186, 196–97; definitions of, 167, 176–77, 180; of Winfrey, Oprah, 82, 84, 88, 89, 229n10. *See also* post-race ideology
No More Separate Spheres! (Davidson), 109
Notorious BIG, 32
Nussbaum, Martha, 6, 8–9, 11, 87, 88, 91, 101

Obama, Barack, 56, 106, 199, 209
"One Book, One City," 79, 208
Oprah's Book Club, 2, 13, 15, 20, 21, 79–96, 100–5, 108–11; critiques, of, 86, 88–89, 92, 108; defenses of, 87–89. *See also* Winfrey, Oprah
Ozersky, Josh, 27, 31, 35

Paradise (Morrison), 81, 230n20
Parker, David, 18, 23, 24
Passing (Larsen), 97–98, 106, 121
passing, racial, 97–98, 108, 112, 132, 136, 138, 190, 237n51
Patterson, Orlando, 123, 137–38
Peck, Janice, 88, 108
pedagogy, 13, 24–26, 150–51, 163, 191; anti-racist, 162–63, 191, 193, 194, 199
Perry, Pamela, 26
Philadelphia Fire (Wideman), 85
Polletta, Francesca, 105
postmodernism, 56, 108; and African American literature, 85, 112, 235n16; of *Do the Right Thing*, 161; of *The Known World*, 113, 117, 119
Postmodern Texts and Emotional Audiences (Davis), 20
post-race ideology, 13, 64, 113, 137–38, 140, 147, 237n62; critiques of, 37, 123, 135, 141–42, 177–78; in response to Obama's presidency, 56, 199–200, 209. *See also* neoliberalism
post-soul fiction, 15, 47, 58, 111–48
Presley, Elvis, 27, 30, 31–32, 219n24, 219n25
Project Implicit, 145
Public Enemy, 31–32, 53, 55, 154, 219n25
public sphere: fiction reading and, 16, 81–82, 84, 87–89, 103–10, 142–48; talk shows and, 82–83, 88–89
Pushkin and the Queen of Spades (Randall), 85, 102, 201–2

race riots, 142; in *Angry Black White Boy*, 53, 61–63; Crown Heights Riot, 10; in *Do the Right Thing*, 16, 151, 159–61, 166–67, 169–71, 173, 176; Los Angeles Riots (1992), 10, 59, 154, 160, 169, 240n39; Watts Riot (1965), 240n45
Race Traitor journal, 28, 32, 33, 40, 47, 49, 50, 52, 53. *See also* Garvey, John; Ignatiev, Noel
racism, anti-Asian, 182, 183, 196
racism, anti-Latino, 38, 48, 49, 70, 71–72, 177
racism, anti-Muslim, 45, 177, 181–82, 243n113
racism, institutional, 9, 196–98; employment discrimination, 65, 143, 190, 197; of government, 35, 106, 159–60, 176–77, 182, 190, 208–9; housing discrimination, 65, 67, 179, 190; mass incarceration of blacks, 37, 38, 47, 48; of the media, 48–9, 180–81, 200; police brutality, 39, 47, 48, 53, 54, 59, 70, 104, 153, 159–60, 166, 170, 178–79, 181, 240n33; racial profiling, 42–43, 59, 137, 142–43, 178–79, 190; white ignorance of, 165–67, 171–73, 180, 184. *See also* economic inequality; lynching; segregation, racial; slavery
racism, reverse. *See* "reverse racism"
Raisin in the Sun, A (Hansberry), 156–57

Randall, Alice, 81; comments on *The Known World*, 116, 117, 122, 125–26, 130; *Pushkin and the Queen of Spades*, 85, 102, 201–2
Reagan, Ronald, 38, 123, 159–60, 176, 235n22
Reed, Ishmael, 56, 57
"reverse racism": critiques of, 45, 171, 180, 182–83, 193, 196–97; and Eminem, 34; and Spike Lee, 150, 171; as white denial, 60, 72, 139, 171, 180, 182–83
River, Cross My Heart (Clarke), 81, 103
Robinson, Jackie, 61
Roediger, David, 28, 31, 49, 62, 191, 199, 208
Rogin, Michael, 5, 66, 68, 72, 78
Rooney, Kathleen, 86, 94
Roots, 126
Rose, Tricia, 27, 54, 57
Rubio, Phil, 52

Schuyler, George, 57, 191
Secret Life of Bees, The (Kidd), 145
segregation, racial, 40, 77, 185–86; in Boston, 83, 112, 114–15, 122, 131, 137–38, 142–45; in Detroit, 102; of housing, 65, 114–15, 138, 142, 144, 177; in Los Angeles, 50, 177; in New England, 132, 135; of schools, 96, 105, 114, 144, 234n119; and "self-segregation" of minorities, 186, 205
Seinfeld, 49, 71–72, 227n246
Seinfeld, Jerry, 49, 50, 71–72
Senna, Danzy, 15, 79, 81, 236n33, 237n51; biography of, 132, 134, 236n33; *Caucasia*, 15–16, 85, 90, 92, 98, 100, 102, 110–14, 116, 132–48, 208; "The Mulatto Millenium," 134–35, 142, 237n50
Shakur, Tupac, 31–32, 44, 202
Sharpton, Al, 67, 77, 130, 179
Shattuc, Jane, 89
Silverman, Kaja, 9, 152
Simpson, O. J., 32, 42
slavery, 93, 157, 185, 205; and abolitionism, 105, 114; of Asians, 182; compared to Holocaust, 67, 75–76, 99, 226n220; Middle Passage, 67, 76, 220n226; national apology for, 104; neo-slavery fiction, 15, 90, 99, 103, 108, 110–14, 116–17, 119–32, 235n16; slave narratives, 87, 109, 123, 124, 126; white responses to, 101–2, 110, 114, 117, 120–22, 125–31
Smith, Anna Deavere, 10–11, 41–42, 52, 152
Some People (Hoch), 28, 38–41, 44–45, 48, 65, 68–69
Sommer, Doris, 7, 11, 153
Song, Miri, 18, 23, 24
Song of Solomon (Morrison), 81, 94–95, 109
Soul on Ice (Cleaver), 55, 72, 106, 145
Southern Poverty Law Center, 106
Spelman, Elizabeth, 6, 93, 94, 95, 101
Srikanth, Rajini, 8, 100
Stow, Simon, 88
Stowe, Harriet Beecher, 120
Sula (Morrison), 81, 206
Superman, 56–57
sympathy: compared to empathy, 4; critiques of, 3, 4, 7–8, 11, 94, 104, 108, 153; defenses of, 12; definitions of, 6

Tademy, Lalita, 79, 81
Taking Over (Hoch), 28, 39, 40, 42, 50, 65, 69, 221n71
Tan, Amy, 106
Tate, Greg, 3, 14–15, 79, 80, 92, 112
Tatum, Beverly, 205
Touré, 56
Trump, Donald, 158, 239n24
Tubman, Harriet, 126, 127
Tucker, Sophie, 27
Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992 (Smith), 10
Tyson, Mike 32

Uncle Tom's Cabin (Stowe), 120

Vanilla Ice, 27

Wald, Gayle, 66, 137
Walker, Alice, 79, 191
Watkins, Mel, 70
West, Cornel, 16–17, 55
West, Dorothy, 106
White, Armond, 27, 35
White Boy Shuffle, The (Beatty), 58
Whiteboyz, 46–47, 48, 50–52
white guilt: in *Angry Black White Boy*, 58, 62–63; as catalyst for anti-racism, 12, 101–2; in *Crash*, 176; of Eminem, 33; of Haggis, Paul, 178; of Hoch, Danny, 50, 69; about slavery, 101–2, 117, 125–26, 128; "The White Man's Guilt" (Baldwin), 193
White Negro, 27, 30; coinage of term, 211n1; criticisms of, 27, 28, 30, 43–44, 52, 66, 70; defenses of, 28, 66–67; and hip-hop, 15, 27–33, 43–44, 47, 52, 60, 81; inadequacy as a trope, 3, 5, 28, 78, 209; and jazz, 66, 69–70; and Mailer, Norman, 1–2, 27–29, 60; and masculinity, 1, 69–70, 81. *See also* wigger

whiteness studies, 7, 16, 145–46, 244n130; African American contributions to, 26, 193, 199; criticisms of, 45, 60, 78; definition of, 3; influential white scholars of, 3–5, 8, 31, 33, 49, 59–60, 68, 78, 116, 169–70, 180, 191, 193–94, 199, 204–5
white privilege: and class difference, 96, 204; and Jews, 65–77; resistance to, 8, 15, 24, 28, 36–39, 51–53, 59–64, 68–78, 140, 145–47, 194–97; scholarship on, 190, 194; white acknowledgment of, 4, 9–10, 34, 47, 49–51, 62–63, 99–103, 153, 194–97; white ignorance of, 23, 25, 61, 138, 164, 184, 209
Wideman, John Edgar, 85
Wiegman, Robyn, 68, 78
wigger, 52, 62; critiques of, 27, 33, 208; defined, 1, 3, 211n5; examples of, 15, 39, 46. *See also* White Negro
Winfrey, Oprah, 2, 13, 15, 79–96, 100–2, 103–5, 108–11; colorblindness of, 84, 92–93, 95, 230n22; feminism of, 82, 87, 94, 95, 231n40; neoliberalism of, 82, 84, 88, 89, 229n10; *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, 2, 20, 21, 80, 82, 90, 103, 104, 110, 229n10. *See also* Oprah's Book Club
Wise, Tim, 35, 68; on *Crash,* 180, 182–84, 189–90, 193, 196–97, 199
Within Our Gates, 164, 191
Wolf, Naomi, 194
Wonder, Stevie, 135, 205
Woods, Tiger, 140, 238n70
Wright, Richard, 81; *Native Son*, 92, 99–100, 106, 107

X, Malcolm, 51, 106, 199, 226n211; *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 161, 206; compared to Martin Luther King Jr., 161–62, 170–71, 193; and Lee, Spike, 160–62, 170–71, 198; and Mansbach, Adam, 55, 60, 61; white responses to, 170–71, 193, 198
X-Clan, 53, 55, 223n149

Young, Alford A., 18
Young, Michael, 105

KIMBERLY CHABOT DAVIS is an associate professor of English at Bridgewater State University. She is the author of *Postmodern Texts and Emotional Audiences.*

The University of Illinois Press
is a founding member of the
Association of American University Presses.

Composed in 10.5/13 Adobe Minion Pro
by Lisa Connery
at the University of Illinois Press
Manufactured by Sheridan Books, Inc.

University of Illinois Press
1325 South Oak Street
Champaign, IL 61820-6903
www.press.uillinois.edu