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**Negotiating the masculine: Configurations of race and gender in  
American culture**

**Wiegman, Robyn, Ph.D.**  
**University of Washington, 1988**

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Negotiating the Masculine:  
Configurations of Race and Gender in American Culture

by

ROBYN WIEGMAN

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

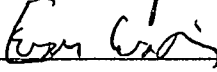
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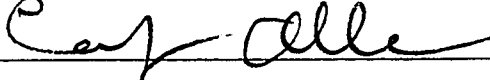
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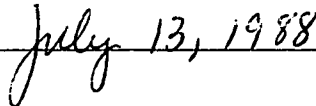




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Abstract

NEGOTIATING THE MASCULINE:  
CONFIGURATIONS OF RACE AND GENDER IN AMERICAN CULTURE

by Robyn Wiegman

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James Baldwin once described the intertwining lives of Anglo and African in American culture as "a wedding," a metaphor that is at once illuminating and hauntingly inappropriate as a characterization of the long and bloody history of racism and slavery in the New World. While capturing the inextricability of blacks and whites in America, Baldwin's imposition of a gendered, heterosexual paradigm reproduces a larger cultural tendency to read "race" as a replication of the binary structure of sexual difference--masculine/feminine, whole/lack, self/other, man/woman. Such a grafting of sexual difference onto race obfuscates the power relations both *within* the space of "otherness"--that is, the discrepancies in power between black men and black women--and between black and white men, falsely constructing black men as stand-ins for the feminine. Part of the strategy of American cultural production is just this sleight-of-hand where the masculine "raced" other is engendered in representation, the threat of masculine sameness averted through the replication of a gendered construction. Through this collusion of race and gender structures, black men are reined into the ideological orbit of

cultural hegemony, their images intricately tied to the reproduction of the white patriarchal economy.

Because the category of race is fragmented by gender--black men gaining access to power via the masculine--and gender is hierarchicalized along racial lines--white men holding racial hegemony over black men--this study investigates the intersection of race and gender in American cultural production by looking, specifically, at the various ways black men are inculcated into the patriarchal economy via the discourse of sexual difference. My intention throughout is to further feminist theory's understanding of the construction and maintenance of patriarchal structures by focusing purposely on areas of cultural power relations that often appear outside the scope of a feminist analysis. Such a study depicts the necessity of feminist investigation into the various structures complicit in the perpetuation of the white patriarchal economy, enabling us to begin to unravel the intricacy of race and gender in American culture.

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## Introduction

James Baldwin once described the intertwining lives of Anglo and African in American culture as "a wedding," a metaphor that is at once illuminating and hauntingly inappropriate as a characterization of the long and bloody history of racism and slavery in the New World. For Baldwin, and other writers both before and after him, the matrimonial metaphor is intended to construct an image of cultural relations that captures the inextricability of blacks and whites in America. Such a metaphor is evocative in depicting the system of contractual dispossession that the ritual wedding engenders for the *other* partner. In the scenario of sacred union, the binary structure of power relations--where one side draws authority from its unequal "intercourse" with the other--is fixed in the presentation of a united front; here, the ritualistic pomp of the ceremony disguises the cannibalistic process of the binary, that loss of (feminine/black) autonomy and self-possession in the affirmation of (masculine/white) oneness. In this sense, Baldwin's metaphor highlights the unequal binary system of race in American culture, its construction of the white self whose empowerment comes in a gross consumption of the black other, that necessary outsider whose image always mirrors the "original" term of whiteness.

But Baldwin's metaphor presents a problem common to American



representational strategies, for the imposition of a gendered, heterosexual paradigm reproduces a larger tendency to read "race" as a replication of the binary structure of sexual difference--masculine/feminine, whole/lack, self/other, man/woman--a structure that cannot fully account for the representation of race as a category of difference. Ironically, such a grafting of sexual difference onto race obfuscates the power relations both *within* the space of "otherness"--that is, the discrepancies in power between black men and black women--and between black and white men, falsely constructing black men as stand-ins for the feminine. Indeed, part of the strategy of American cultural production is just this sleight-of-hand where the masculine "raced" other is engendered in representation, the threat of masculine sameness averted through the replication of a gendered construction. As Trudier Harris's work on literary and historical castration rituals depicts, the figure of the black male other has been systematically constructed across a discourse of sexual difference where black masculinity can be recuperated within a paradigm that seeks to override masculine sameness. Such a material and representational trope has as its goal not simply the emasculation of black men but the rejuvenation of the patriarchal economy where the white masculine point of view resurrects itself as the central term of cultural signification.

Although gender and race have been politically and discursively linked since the early nineteenth century, as representational paradigms and even as political movements, they are not mirror images of one another. This is true even though cultural practices seek

their seamless affinity in order to disguise the processes whereby race and gender, in the interests of hegemony, construct and reinforce one another. Because the category of race is fragmented by gender--black men gaining access to power via the masculine--and gender is hierarchicalized along racial lines--white men holding racial hegemony over black men--this study investigates the intersection of race and gender in American cultural production by looking, specifically, at the various ways black men are inculcated into the patriarchal economy via the discourse of sexual difference. Such a project begins the necessary task of unraveling the use of various structures of difference to articulate and maintain a seemingly stable patriarchal economy--even when that economy is clearly disrupted by differences among men. By analyzing how racial difference is negotiated through gender, this study hopes to expand feminist theory's understanding not simply of the construction of gender relations between men and women but more broadly, how the masculine economy is reliant on race for the full articulation of its power.

To this end, Chapter One establishes the theoretical perimeters of this work, introducing the historical representation of power relations between black and white men in American culture by outlining the ideological construction of the interracial male bond from the early nineteenth century to the present era. The following two chapters explore in depth the function of this bond as a representational device through which race differences are negotiated in the affirmation of a normative masculine perspective, focusing

first on nineteenth and twentieth century literary representations (Chapter Two) and then on contemporary film (Chapter Three). The segregation of literature and film in these chapters is not meant to reinforce traditional distinctions between the literary and the popular, but rather to delineate both the differing strategies used in these modes of production and to isolate the contemporary recuperation of white masculine power being forged through proliferations of the interracial male bond.

While these early chapters focus on how cultural hegemony is negotiated through the gendered structure of the interracial male bond, Chapter Four considers the historical development of the use of the discourse of sexual difference to represent black men by black male writers themselves, revealing an increasing reliance on gender to situate black men in the patriarchal economy in the twentieth century. In the Coda, I turn to what appears to be a new strategy of negotiating the black male's problematical status in American culture by considering the example of *The Cosby Show*. Here, through an apparent stabilization of gender relations, class becomes the necessary lubricant for the diffusion of racial differences, the spectacle of commodification functioning to reiterate the cultural rhetoric of a post-Civil Rights egalitarianism.

My intention throughout this study is to further feminist theory's understanding of the construction and maintenance of patriarchal structures by focusing purposely on areas of cultural power relations that often appear outside the scope of a feminist analysis. Such a study depicts the necessity of feminist

investigation into the various structures that aid the perpetuation of the white patriarchal economy, allowing us to begin to unravel the intricacy of race and gender in American culture.

American Cultural Production  
and the Negotiation of Difference

*Black and white alike have sustained a  
. . . discourse that inscribes (and reinscribes)  
AMERICA as immanent idea of boundless, classless,  
raceless possibility. . . . The great break with  
a Europe of aristocratic privilege and  
division has been filled by virtuoso riffs on  
AMERICA as egalitarian promise, trembling  
imminence in the New World.*

--Houston Baker (65)

At the heart of American cultural production lies this representation of egalitarian promise, a "boundless, classless, raceless possibility" that stridently disavows the hierarchical structures of difference that sustain the social order. In its reiteration, the contradictory terrain of American cultural relations is charted and the distance between democratic rhetoric and constructions of difference superficially "healed." Such a process

is possible because, as Baker notes, both black and white discourses reinscribe democratic possibility, establishing the veil that is necessary to the perpetuation of cultural hegemony, that condition, as Stuart Hall writes, "of social . . . moral and political leadership [achieved] by a particular social bloc" (47). In the terms of this study, social bloc connotes the full range of practices engaged in the construction of the white masculine point of view--an ideological rather than biological perspective<sup>1</sup>--through which gender and race categories are both defined and denied in the cultural economy. Because American culture is quite adept at overcoming internal tensions to present itself as symbol of democracy and equality to the world, the processes involved in representing this highly ideological perspective as a natural and inevitable social organization are the focus of concern here.

While difference is denied through the ideological rhetoric of AMERICA, these same differences must be continually reconstituted in order to maintain the hierarchies necessary to the articulation of the white masculine hegemony. American cultural production functions paradoxically: grounded in a simultaneous display and denial of difference, it requires the continual production of otherness to act as the threat against which it can both construct and represent itself. As Judith Williamson writes of British culture, ours too, "deeply rooted in imperialism, needs to destroy genuine difference, to capture what is beyond its reach; at the same time, it needs *constructs* of difference in order to signify itself at all" (101). Only through the presence of others can a cultural "norm" be invested

with political meaning--their marginalized, seemingly excluded presence is the founding distinction of American hierarchical systems.

In diffusing the contradiction between egalitarian promise and hierarchical practices, cultural production reveals itself not as a process of domination of one discourse over another but as a *negotiation* in which, as Tony Bennett writes, "dominant, subordinate and oppositional cultural and ideological values and elements are 'mixed' in different permutations" (xvi). These permutations, these shifting configurations of ideologies, demonstrate the extent to which the achievement of hegemony involves accommodation, recuperation and consent--and therefore must be won again and again in the continual negotiation over the terms of its power. It is primarily in the representational realm that these negotiations between the white masculine hegemony and marginalized groups are made, for American culture exists not in some pure historical space but as its own representation. Academic distinctions between high and low culture, popular forms and literary canons, dissolve when viewed from this broader perspective of American cultural production where differences are constructed, presented and transformed into the specific needs of a contemporary discourse. Through the many cultural forms of representation--film, television, visual arts and printed texts--the values and ideologies that mark American culture are both contested and enforced.

The great ideological feat of American cultural production is its ability to continually negotiate--in the guise of a stable

construction of meaning--the space between hegemonic rhetoric and the hierarchies of difference that underlie the social order. What often emerge as radical, disruptive perspectives are incorporated over time into the ideological apparatus of hegemonic discourses. This is evident in the mass commercialization accompanying the authorization of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday as a national holiday in 1987--when even McDonald's used (commodified and consumed) his image to align itself with the same community it so masterfully exploits.<sup>2</sup> Signalling a kind of "official" end of the Civil Rights Movement--and totally erasing the more politically strident discourse of Black Power, the national holiday was commercially represented as the fulfillment of King's famous dream, regardless of the very real loosening of black political and economic power during the decade. Reduced to King's singular image and subsequently transformed into a symbol of the supposedly inherent democracy and equality of American culture, the discourses of the civil rights movement were represented in--and relegated to--the terms of the cultural hegemony; as such, it now functions as an incorporated, negotiated version, of cultural ideology.<sup>3</sup>

This recuperation of difference, permeating every level of social discourse, constitutes in itself American cultural production, sustaining hegemonic structures through the repetitious display of dissent and accommodation. The concept of negotiation thus depicts cultural relations as a dynamic process where, in Bennett's summary of Gramsci's class-based analysis,

the bourgeoisie can become a hegemonic, leading class only



to the degree that bourgeois ideology is able to accommodate, to find some space for, opposing class cultures and values. A bourgeois hegemony is secured not via the obliteration of working class culture, but via its *articulation* to bourgeois culture and ideology. . . . (xiv-xv)

This description of cultural productions of class relations, with its subtle and historically accountable reading of power, replaces what Bennett describes as the two main critical approaches to cultural production--the structuralist, which conceives of culture as an ideological machine that obliterates everything in its path, and the culturalist, which romanticizes all popular forms as the true expression of marginalized perspectives (xii); in his new scheme, authority is not simply imposed but negotiated across the many practices and discourses that constitute the cultural order.

While this negotiation necessitates that the hegemony accommodate various challenges to its power--King can now be imaged as part of a great American tradition of democratic struggle--the process, as Robert Gray notes, allows "structures of ideological hegemony [to] transform and incorporate dissident values, so as effectively to prevent the working through of their full implications" (qtd in Bennett, xv). As labor union negotiators across America, like civil rights workers, can affirm: negotiation is rarely a process by which two (or more) equally empowered sides or perspectives are engaged in struggle, nor are the power relations between the sides always configured in precisely the same way; what

is constant, however, is that, within the negotiation process, power is exchanged and confirmed, concessions are made but seldom is the initial imbalance fully overcome. Like an American bargaining with a Mexican peasant in Tijuana over turquoise jewelry, power *is not* evenly distributed in the negotiation process, though to certain (undoubtedly American) onlookers it might appear that way. What we have instead are cultural relations that in themselves inscribe the politics of capitalist/racist imperialism where what each side stands to lose--a commodity for one, the means of living for the other--is significantly different and unequal.

In this sense, the legal notion of negotiation as the process of reaching agreement applies to the analysis of cultural production only if we realize the extent to which such an "agreement" will always be bound to the power relations constructing the scenes of contact. In the case of the Civil Rights Movement, for instance, these power relations refer to the racial ideology of the first half of the century that defined and assured black cultural, economic and educational subordination. These relations allowed white American hegemony to answer the threat posed by black militancy not with a fundamental change in values and assumptions, but with the ability to articulate recuperatory practices against the constructed image of an errant past. As W. Lawrence Hogue contends, American culture

altered system elements and produced some marginal options, thereby producing space for a token inclusion of the Afro-American within . . . its ideological apparatus. But this inclusion did not mean that a transformation had taken

place . . . . Rather, the incorporation of the Afro-American as the Other meant a redefinition or appropriation of the Afro-American to make him or her appear safe and "natural." (159)

Although significant change has been made in the lives of certain black Americans in the past twenty years, the emphasis on individual middle class as opposed to group achievement betrays the tokenistic impulses toward inclusion as a shift in the formation--and not necessarily the foundation--of white supremacy in America.<sup>4</sup>

While the concept of negotiation has been applied most often to class relations in a capitalist society, the previous example demonstrates its usefulness in describing the broader construction of difference in American culture where capitalism, patriarchy, heterosexuality and white supremacy intersect to establish the exclusionary system that characterizes hegemonic structures--a system connoted by "the white masculine point of view." Although such a term tends to repress the classic conception of class relations as a struggle between the bourgeoisie and the working class, it captures the ideological complicity between race and gender structures, the two forms of difference under examination here. It is perhaps important to stress that my focus on race and gender is not meant to (re)construct a hierarchy of cultural relations--privileging gender and race as systems of oppression over that of class (or other hierarchical forms of power)--but to foreground the relationship between these two primary categories of differences. Such a methodology is posed in response to contemporary theoretical

explorations into Difference in which distinct categories have become homogenized in the nearly cliched, polysyllabic term "genderraceclass," a critical feat that only mystifies the various power relations that are negotiated in the achievement of cultural hegemony.

Ironically, this study began as an investigation of the relationship between gender, race and class, but the problems--of erasure and diffusion--encountered in seeking a theory to accommodate all three structures of difference in American culture were, ultimately, theoretically and ideologically insurmountable. It seems neither desirable--nor theoretically sound--to conceive of difference in such a monolithic way, particularly because cultural production itself tends to read all structures of difference through the same binary paradigm, inscribing gender, race and class as a singular evocation of oppressor/oppressed and not as intersecting, multiple and structurally different versions of difference. Such an all-purpose model fails both to account for the processes by which culture itself is (re)produced and to comprehend the plurality inherent in questions of race, class and sexual difference, reducing them to one large Difference that can always be treated the same. This simplification of difference, which tends to erase difference altogether by glossing crucial distinctions among class, race, gender, and other forms of difference, works politically to recuperate cultural hegemony. As such, any critical endeavor that seeks a singular, interchanging model for the understanding of cultural differences is bound to be complicit with their further

reification.

Because of this need to explore specific configurations of difference and not simply the ahistorical, theoretically popular notion of Difference or Marginality, this study concentrates on the representational and ideological intersections of gender and race as they converge in the representation of the black male, specifically focusing on the cultural tendency to read and construct race as a replication of the paradigm of sexual difference. The faulty analogy of such a method--which levels out the gendered power relations *within* the space of "otherness" and misrepresents the structural functioning of relations among men--is explored through a detailed investigation of the interracial male bond, that representational space so frequently portrayed as site of American democratic achievement. In narrowing the focus to a seemingly small piece of the cultural terrain--in purposely failing to account for all permutations of the gender-race nexus--I hope to replace sweeping generalizations about difference with a methodology that depicts complexity, contradiction and complicity among the gendered relations of race between black and white men in American culture. To this end, the concept of the negotiation of the masculine connotes both the structure of power relations between men and women and those among men, for American hegemonic structures rely on a simultaneous--though not structurally identical--negotiation of racial difference. As a primary site for the intersection of these two structures, the interracial male bond functions, ideologically, to recuperate gender and race difference in American culture by presenting a seemingly

homogenized masculine space, one that gains power through its opposition to the feminine. Because the discrepancies in power between men are cloaked by the bond's fundamental gender construction, it is necessary to begin by exploring the structural features of gender on which the articulation of the interracial male bond depends.

In theoretical discourse, the construction of difference has most often been cast in terms of gender; defined in feminist film theory as the construction site of sexual difference, representation marks the territory where the masculine affirms its own dominance through the colonization of its opposition, the feminine. As Teresa de Lauretis writes, "woman is constituted as the ground of representation, the looking-glass held up to man" (15). It is through her image that the masculine can endlessly construct itself by positing an other whose difference from maleness can be seen. The emphasis on the visible is what gives sexual difference its significance, for the economy of the visible confirms women's difference by sighting her lack--lack of phallus, lack of maleness. Predicated on the specter of the phallus, representation is constructed from the perspective of he-who-has-something-to-be-seen. All "difference" in such a system designates and collapses back into the space of "origin"--the masculine point of view--which represents woman only in her function as mirror for the phallus, as the reflection of masculine wholeness. "Once reduced to phallomorphic

measures," Jane Gallop writes, "woman is defined as 'really castrated'. . . . She has no desires that don't complement his, so she can mirror him, provide him with a representation of himself which calms his fears and phobias about (his own potential) otherness and difference" (70).

In its reliance on the phallus for articulation, sexual difference and the representational circuit of desire are processes "inscribed in the male body, since they are dependent on the initial--and pivotal--experiencing of one's penis, or having a penis" (de Lauretis, 23). This inscription, with its supposedly neutral grounding in nature (biology), reveals the asymmetry of the gender system, its enunciation from the site of the male body where "having a penis" can be translated into a noncorporeal, "universal" point of view that draws power and meaning from its binary opposition to the feminine. This transformation of the male body as the construction site of sexual difference (even as it presents this difference through the image of woman) to the creation of an universal masculine perspective characterizes the economics of the visible by allowing visibility to function on both the material and symbolic level. As such, the male body presents not only an origin, an original, "essential" difference from which to articulate gender but it provides terms for the representation of that difference, terms that continually negotiate the distance between the male body and a point of view that is distinct from it.

It is through this point of view that women can be reined into the gender system even as their bodies testify to their lack.

Becoming representations of a displaced/ castrated phallus, women are not simply markers of the feminine but of an exiled and specularized masculine. Such asymmetry, in Judith Roof's use of mathematical analogy, shows the masculine to exist as the 1 that can close up the infinite emptiness of the 0, the feminine. In representation it is not only the sight of the penis that can fill the (feminine) void but the masculine point of view constructed in its place. As a commodity circulated within the representation of the masculine, woman functions not only to maintain its boundaries but to give meaning to them as well. In this sense, as Monique Wittig writes, "[w]oman is an imaginary formation and not a concrete reality" ("Point of View," 63). Because her construction is seen as the construction of gender, "there are not two genders. There is only one: the feminine, the "masculine" not being a gender" ("Point of View," 64). But Wittig's description, aptly characterizing the construction of the feminine, paradoxically suggests that while gender is a system enunciated through the images/bodies/symbols of women, as a process it constitutes the masculine. Therefore, while the masculine, as Wittig writes, is not a gender, it is indeed Gender.

The heterogeneity superficially presented through the articulation of masculine and feminine reveals itself as a distinctly homogenous construction, what Luce Irigaray calls the hom(m)osexual. As she explains:

The exchanges upon which patriarchal societies are based take place exclusively among men. Women, signs, commodities, and currency always pass from one man to



another. . . . Thus all economic organization is homosexual. That of desire as well, even the desire for women. Woman exists only as an occasion for mediation, transaction, transition, transference, between man and his fellow man, indeed between man and himself. (192-3)

While Irigaray sees points of collapse between an organizational homosexuality and genital desire given the same name, the structure she describes goes beyond any simple account of sexual activity by characterizing the broader representational economy as one structurally reliant on women to serve as mediations between men. Her notion of homosexuality is particularly useful for articulating how the heterosexual imperative--like the feminine--exists only within a certain representational circuit, as an ideology issuing from a masculine construction site. In its reiteration as cultural imperative, heterosexuality "imposes on women the rigid obligation of the reproduction of the 'species'" (Wittig, "Category," 66), an obligation that commodifies female labors by designating her production as items in an exchange between men. It is no accident that heterosexual production is cast in terms of the masculine: his wife, his children, his family, his lineage. As Gallop writes, "There is no real sexuality of the heteros" (66), for "a woman in a heterosexual encounter will always be engulfed by the male homosexual economy, will not be able to represent her difference" (74). Marked repeatedly by the phallus, the heterosexual--and the representation of the body of woman necessary to its (re)production--are always already grafted onto the homosexual circuit.

In the process of positing woman as man's castrated other, representation transforms her into a spectacle, an image of pure surfaces that both reaffirms the primacy of the visible by emphasizing the appearance of difference and colonizes her as a signified of the masculine. Her body functions, as Guy Debord writes in an analysis of spectacle in general, "not [as] a collection of images but [as] a social relation among people, mediated by images" (4). The spectacle of woman, the scene of her body as the affirmation of masculine wholeness, acts to wed the masculine subject with himself, to confirm the gender system as one infinitely involved in articulating, preserving and perpetuating a masculine hegemony. "The spectacle is the existing order's uninterrupted discourse about itself" (24), Debord writes, and this discourse, cast in terms of gender, is always masculine. In this sense, the spectacle of woman functions as the displaced site of the construction of the masculine, for her body must be crossed and recrossed in the process of establishing her as the "objective" space of difference. Simultaneously existing as "object to be looked at, vision of beauty . . . locus of sexuality, site of visual pleasure, [and/] or lure of the gaze" (de Lauretis, 37), the spectacle of her difference confirms the circuit of masculine desire that underwrites patriarchal culture, defining, as de Lauretis writes, "a sexual difference thus conceived: male-hero-human, on the side of subject; and female-obstacle-boundary-space, on the other" (121). Through such positioning, woman as spectacle, as the scene of difference, imbues the masculine subject with the illusion of unity, her body inscribing a gender

stability by maintaining difference as a visible, pleasurable, natural construction.

The specularity of woman allows the masculine point of view to present itself in the appearance of stability, occupying as it does the position from which the representational and cultural economy is articulated. This apparent stability is necessary to the maintenance of patriarchal relations not simply because it suggests an inevitability of social organization but because it allows for differences within the masculine to be assuaged. Through the image of woman, through her use as cultural and representational mediation, relations between men can be portrayed as stable, as themselves not dependent on difference. Given this representation--and its obvious benefits to patriarchal culture--it is quite ironic that feminist theorists have seldom investigated how these differences among men are negotiated or how the masculine itself is a problematical entity, reliant on the continual representation of stability in order to maintain the hierarchical structures of cultural hegemony. In failing to account for the various ways differences among men overlay, intersect and confirm the gender system, we have strangely reinscribed--against our most overt political intentions--a patriarchal order that appears not only internally cohesive but seemingly impervious to change.

The appearance of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* in 1985 is therefore

significant in its focus on the intersections between gender and class in representations of 19th century England where, as she argues, "the emerging pattern of male friendship, mentorship, entitlement, rivalry, and hetero- and homosexuality was in an intimate and shifting relation to class; and . . . no element of that pattern can be understood outside of its relation to women and the gender system as a whole" (1). By investigating narratives constructed around an erotic triangle--two men and one woman--Sedgwick's work characterizes to some extent the process of negotiation under examination here, highlighting the various ways that differences among men are diffused through the structure of gender; she writes, "in the presence of a woman who can be seen as pitiable or contemptible, men are able to exchange power and to confirm each other's value even in the context of the remaining inequalities in their power" (160). Functioning as a commodity, women--as the representation of difference--solidify the bond between men, superficially healing their differences by establishing the masculine norm necessary to the construction of gender dominance.

Analyzing women as the mediation between men, Sedgwick draws on Rene Girard's contention that the desire between two men in an erotic triangle with a woman is just as intense--if not more so--"than anything in the bond between either of the lovers and the beloved" (21). Sedgwick rejects the notion that this bond is based on homosexuality, citing the circuit of woman's exchange as a distinctly heterosexual one: "we are in the presence of male heterosexual desire, in the form of a desire to consolidate partnership with

authoritative males in and through the bodies of females" (38). In seeing this economy as heterosexual, Sedgwick seeks to distinguish between a homosexual desire based on genital sexuality and an apparently heterosexual circuit that involves the use of women as sexual/representational mediations between men. For this reason, she uses the term "homosocial," which is

formed by analogy with "homosexual," and just as obviously meant to be distinguished from "homosexual." In fact, it is applied to such activities as "male bonding," which may, as in our society, be characterized by intense homophobia, fear and hatred of homosexuality. (1)

In negotiating the exclusivity signified by the binary homosexual-heterosexual, "homosocial" thus describes the entire spectrum of male bonding configurations that enact patriarchal power, including but not limited to homosexuality.

As Sedgwick defines it, the continuum of male bonding signified by "homosocial" is radically disrupted in the nineteenth century with the advent of the historically determined category "homosexual." This sexual designation, with its attendant cultural taboo, asserts a "set of discriminations for defining, controlling, and manipulating" (85) male bonds. "The result has been a structural residue of terrorist potential, of blackmailability, of Western maleness through the leverage of homophobia" (89). Distinguishing in this way, Sedgwick specifically counters Irigaray's term "homosexual" to refer to the patriarchal traffic in women; such a description, Sedgwick writes, makes an "expensive leap of register . . . in a sacrifice of

sex itself: the male "homosexuality" discussed here turns out to represent anything but actual sex between men" (26). While Sedgwick collapses the structural intent of Irigaray's homosexuality into an equation with genital activity,<sup>5</sup> her use of homosocial carries the assumption, as the earlier definition evinces, that patriarchal relations among men are not internally cohesive, are themselves fragmented by cultural constructions of difference.

Because of these differences, we need to read the cultural domain of masculine sexuality as one negotiated in specific historical contexts,<sup>6</sup> one that constructs, as Sedgwick suggests, power for certain groups of men but one that reinforces rather than challenges patriarchy by emphasizing relations between men as the space from which power is articulated. It is particularly significant, then, that the historical period during which the term "homosexual" emerged--it was coined in 1869 by a British physician (Weeks, 26)--was one marked on both sides of the Atlantic by the sharpening of gender. Because of the potential disruption of the patriarchal family brought on by the growing industrial economy, the articulation of masculine dominance, and of woman's role as subordinate, required a structural realignment. The creation of categories of sexual behavior--homosexuality and heterosexuality--served the interests of the patriarchal system by positing genital activity in such a way as to preserve the institution of the family as the primary site for maintaining the social order. We might see the structural intent of the heterosexual imperative as one designed not simply to control male sexuality but through which women's

sexuality can more firmly be harnessed to the patriarchal project. Because of its power to "own" women's reproduction, the heterosexual imperative reinforces masculine dominance even when that dominance seems to be threatened by a changing economy and, significantly, by a growing rebellion among (some) women for equal rights.

In Sedgwick's argument with Irigaray over the terms in which to conceptualize the relationship between male sexualities and patriarchal power, the political landscape most visibly at stake is that of gay male culture. Ultimately Sedgwick seems interested in investing male homosexuality with a power to critique and transform the patriarchal economy through an alignment of gay male interests with those of feminism.<sup>7</sup> In her latest work, Sedgwick's focus on the "epistemology of the closet" isolates gay male culture in the twentieth century as a politically subversive arena from which critiques of the cultural economy can be made. But here, Sedgwick seems to undercut the implications of her own analysis of cultural production by discounting the ability of patriarchy to negotiate not only class differences but, more significantly, various kinds of differences among men through gender structures. This problem arises in part because of her emphasis on the male-male-female erotic triangle as the symbolic equivalent "with large-scale social structures" (25), woman's presence being a precondition for the negotiation of power relations among men. But, as we shall see by turning to the construction of the interracial male bond in American representation, it is not simply the figure of woman but the discourse of sexual difference that functions as the mediation of

differences among men.

Forging a scene of equality between men, the image of the interracial male bond was ushered into the American cultural landscape through James Fenimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales*, a sequence of novels that has as its center the husky white woodsman, Natty Bumppo, and his Indian soulmate, Chingachgook. Their relationship, in the words of Leslie Fiedler, who first sketched the contours of this dominant American typology, establishes what would become a seemingly archetypal scene in nineteenth-century cultural production:

two lonely men, one dark-skinned, one white, bend together over a carefully guarded fire in the virgin heart of the American wilderness; they have forsaken all others for the sake of the austere, almost inarticulate, but unquestioned love which binds them to each other and to the world of nature which they have preferred to civilization. (*Love and Death*, 192)

In its rhetoric of fraternity, the male bond is presented as the locus of equality, a space significantly without women where masculine differences are deferred and a stable, seemingly undifferentiated masculine economy affirmed. While this denial of difference is a facade--the racist and capitalist structures of American culture prevent full participation not only to women but, in varying degrees, to many men--it is through the male bond that



American culture negotiates the space between the actual oppression of men and their collective domination of women.

As a recurrent feature of the cultural terrain, the interracial male bond provides the means for Fiedler's exuberant declaration: "we can never shake off the nagging awareness that there is at the sentimental center of our novels . . . nothing but the love of males!" (*Love and Death*, 368). This reading of American literature as a romance between dark and white men has often been dismissed by critics because of the homosexual implications of such a characterization<sup>8</sup>; and yet, there remains something striking in the persistence of the image of the interracial male couple--striking not because it signifies homosexual desire, or in Fiedler's terms, "a failure . . . to deal with adult heterosexual love" (*Love and Death*, 12), but because it demonstrates a broader problem in the representation and construction of power relations among men. It is no accident that, as the nineteenth century wore on, the originary scene of the bond as the friendship between white man and Indian gave way to the image of "the fugitive slave and the no-account boy side by side on a raft borne by the endless river" (*Love and Death*, 368), a transformation that evinces the bond's relation to the larger racial tensions and contradictions of American culture. It is in this sense that the male bond functions as the site for masculine negotiations by forging allegiances among men--even, indeed especially, in the face of differences between them.

While the image of the male bond is reiterated throughout all periods of American cultural production, it is not a fixed,

monolithic or ahistorical structure. Its proliferation indicates instead a cultural reliance on the male bond to diffuse tensions of the cultural order *within* specific historical contexts. The rise in representations of black-white bonding during the second half of the nineteenth century--and the rapid escalation in their number during the past thirty years--demonstrate the bond's tie to the needs of a contemporary discourse, particularly those moments when black male threats to the white patriarchal hegemony are most pronounced. From this perspective, Fiedler's reading of the interracial male bond as "the central myth of our culture. . . . the most deeply underlying image of ourselves" (*Love and Death*, 182) fails to consider its construction as a stridently ideological structure; as Richard Slotkin writes, "myth gives us history impacted in a metaphor whose referents are (or are asserted to be) eternal and timeless" (80). As such, the "mythology" of the male bond--as a supposedly preconscious cultural dream/nightmare--evinces its own cultural reification, treating "ideas, metaphors, and linguistic conventions as if they were palpable aspects of material reality" (Slotkin, 73). Veiling its inscription of cultural ideology with a pretense to American essence and identity, the male bond functions as a reified mythos, negotiating the problematical distance between egalitarian promise and the hierarchies of difference that maintain the social order.

Contrary to Fiedler's sentimentalized notion of the bond as the "mutual love of a *white man and a colored*" ("Come Back," 146), then, the interracial male couple provides the framework through which the white masculine hegemony can continually (re)construct its power. In

this sense, Fiedler's description of *Moby-Dick* as "perhaps the greatest love story in our fiction" (*Love and Death*, 370) replicates the broader cultural representation of the male bond as achievement of "raceless possibility," a myth contingent upon the adoption of the white masculine point of view--the only perspective from which the dark man's sacrifice for the white man's life can be ideologically "justified." In fact, it is the willingness of the dark man to die for his white brother (the ultimate demonstration of male affection) that characterizes bonding scenarios--instances of the white man's death for the dark man are significantly rare.<sup>9</sup> Such a narrative inscription of ethnocentric ideology marks the male bond as the site for the recuperation of the patriarchal economy in the name of whiteness. Critical idealizations of the male bond only reinscribe the construction of this economy by accepting the hierarchies of difference sustaining it as somehow natural and inconsequential functions of literary marriages between men.

Like Fiedler, recent critics of male bonding in American literature have merely reified the origins of this patriarchal mythos by characterizing it, in the words of Robert K. Martin, as "democratic union of equals" (11), a union supposedly capable of achieving "feminist goals" (94); through the "affirmation of the values of nonaggressive male-bonded couples," Martin asserts, "the power of the patriarchy can be contested and even defeated" (70). Similarly, Joseph A. Boone invests the bond with the ability to transform structures of authority in American culture by citing its "potentially radical critique of the patriarchal norms, restrictive

roles, and sexual inequity characterizing nineteenth-century American familial and social life" (187). Such constructions of the male bond as utopian alternatives to the heterosexual hierarchy--as though the two exist in a binary opposition--obscure rather than transform the connection between relations among men and patriarchal power. Through this reconstruction of the cultural economy, the male bond can be elevated to the epitome of equality, permitting "a level of equal interchange and individualism that the dualistic assumptions underlying conventional marital union negate" (Boone, 193)--a move that reinforces both women's exclusion from the bond's privileged space and the patriarchal rhetoric of male fraternity as the source and soul of American democratic possibility.

Rather than lending itself to feminist goals as Boone and Martin insist, the presentation of the male bond as "democratic union of equals" replicates the ideological construction of the masculine perspective, for women's absence reinforces rather than denies the gendered ideology that structures and sustains patriarchal culture. Contending that the nineteenth century American male quest writer "sidestepped the social and literary problematic of the sexes by imagining [the] world without women, hence ostensibly free of the gendered system" (192), Boone collapses the structure of gender into a superficial representation of women. In this scheme, gender itself exists only as woman; without her as the signifier of difference, relations between men can be viewed as outside the hierarchical structures of society--and therefore outside of gender itself. But, while the democratic mythos of brotherhood is maintained "without

women," it is constructed by her difference and by her necessary exclusion, for only through a masculinization of the bond--only through its construction as a stridently "male" space--can it function as negotiation. Through its representation as a gender-neutral structure, then, the male bond provides an illusion of autonomy, of self creation even in the face, ironically, of the patriarchal project. Such a complex ritual of denial is necessary to the negotiation of the masculine, for the male bond thus appears opposed to all structures of subordination while it is predicated most strenuously on gender.

The representation of the male bond as a site beyond gender guarantees not only its power but its proliferation as symbol in American culture. Through such a representation, the patriarchal exclusion of women can be reconstructed as the radical and necessary precondition for the transformation of patriarchal relations. This curious logic is at work in Martin's reading of the Melvillian canon:

By . . . eliminating the role of women in these novels, Melville can focus on the conflict between two erotic forces: a democratic eros . . . finding its highest expression in male friendship and manifested in a masturbatory sexuality reflecting the celebration of a generalized seminal power not directed toward control or production; and a hierarchical eros expressed in social forms of male power as different as whaling, factory-owning, military conquest, and heterosexual marriage . . . all of which indicate the transformation of primal,

unformed (oceanic) sexuality into a world of pure copulation. (4)

In this construction of the conflict in Melville's novels, Martin reinscribes the phallus as the central signifier of erotic relations in both their democratic (masturbatory) and hierarchical (heterosexual) forms. The binary opposition in such a scheme collapses back into the space of the masculine, demonstrating not a transformation of patriarchal relations--that would, for instance, allow female desire(s) to be represented--but a colonization of all erotic alternatives in the name of seminal power.

The elimination of women in such a paradigm, replicating the construction of gender, enables the masculine to integrate the feminine--as image, principle, and/or evocation of androgyny--by appropriating all sexualities/ desires/ differences to itself. Therefore, while women are excluded from participation in the male bond, their exclusion becomes the vehicle for the masculine to incorporate the feminine as a marker of the democratic and transformatory potential of relations among men. As Martin writes, "Ishmael's return to the surface . . . is also the restoration of the feminine and maternal to a world that has forsworn all softness and affection. Ishmael survives the cataclysm of patriarchal aggression to be restored to the lost maternal principle from which he has been exiled" (70); and Boone echoes, "Melville most allusively and deeply explores the psychological connection between the self-sufficient male identity and an acknowledgment of the "feminine" within man" (195). Women's banishment can thus restore full humanity to the

masculine player by allowing him to claim the feminine as his own; while both Boone and Martin would claim that such a disconnection of the feminine from the body of woman disrupts the binary opposition masculine/feminine, they fail to consider the extent to which the binary is itself an articulation of the masculine and thus how the appropriation of the feminine by the masculine is merely another instance in a long tradition of patriarchal colonizations of the female "other."

It is precisely through their reiteration of binary relations that both Boone and Martin misread the ideological features of the male bond. By citing the heterosexual as the central structure of patriarchal relations, these critics rather simplistically construct the male couple as the symbol of transgression of heterosexual--and hence patriarchal--relations. As Boone writes, "[a]s symbolic alternative to the conventions and constructions associated with the social ideal of wedlock, the "pure marriage of males" facilitates bonds that are deeply committed yet--unlike hierarchically-ordered marriage--not detrimental to either partner's sense of personal freedom" (193). But one cannot help wondering how--as in Fiedler's earlier analysis--the body/coffin of Queequeg catapulting Ishmael back to life is an expression of "personal freedom." In order to cast the male bond as a radical democratic alternative to hierarchically-ordered marriage, such studies are forced to read the bond through the white protagonist's point of view. Only in this way can Boone, for instance, assert that "Huck and Jim's loving attachment is forged in a mutuality of spirit that, over time,

becomes genuine, equitable and non-possessive: as such it transcends the structures defining the relations of man and wife, parent and child, white and black, in American society" (201). The ideological function of representations of the interracial male bond necessitates such a replication of cultural hierarchies--only from such a position can AMERICA be realized.

Functioning as a recuperative force of patriarchal America, the mythology of the male bond, predicated as it is on gender difference, thus helps to accommodate even the most strident race challenges to the hegemony. This complicity among categories of difference is what gives contemporary America the ability to enhance hegemonic power even in the process of negotiating with various "marginalized" groups and discourses. In this sense, race as a category of difference is not a structure that parallels gender relations but one that intersects and confirms them--a structure, in other words, intrinsic to the patriarchal economy of American culture. This notion of patriarchy--of masculine relations--as constitutive of more than gender difference is crucial to the understanding of the concept of negotiation, for it is the intersection among differences (class, ethnicity, sexual preference as well as gender and race) that accounts for the cultural production of hegemonic structures and discourses. These intersections result in complex configurations that vary not only across time but within specific historical contexts, demonstrating the extent to which cultural power is neither monolithically constructed nor monolithically maintained.

Such a conception of patriarchal relations pivots on the idea



that patriarchy is itself a historical--as opposed to natural or inevitable--construct. In *The Creation of Patriarchy*, Gerda Lerner traces the formation of patriarchy by analyzing the archaic state and its use of sexual domination as both the model and means for perpetuating race and class hierarchies. Through the structural domination of women, Lerner suggests, the early patriarchal state articulated ways of harnessing men into its system of classification and separation. "By subordinating women of their own group and later captive women, men learned the symbolic power of sexual control over men and elaborated the symbolic language in which to express dominance and create a class of psychologically enslaved persons" (80). Given women's status as masculine property, the traffic in women provides the means for men to negotiate their relations to one another, the exchange of women guaranteeing their supposedly natural superiority, thus compensating for the inequalities between them. Therefore, Lerner writes, "all males, whether enslaved or economically or racially oppressed, could still identify with those like them--other males--who showed transcendent qualities in the symbol systems of the master" (22).

The function of the mythology of the male bond is precisely this enforcement of the "symbol systems of the master," for, as has been noted above, capitulation to the bond's rhetoric requires the adoption of the white masculine point of view, the perspective from which patriarchy articulates the various systems of hierarchicalization necessary to its perpetuation. While Lerner's work is important in understanding the intersections of difference--

particularly the way women function to solidify relations among men--she concedes too much in imposing gender as the model on which all other categories of oppression are structured. Such a description of patriarchal relations tends to simplify rather than explain the complexity of various structures of difference, inscribing gender as the original, primary difference in a way that reiterates a strangely ahistorical and monolithic notion of the development of differences. In other words, while Lerner rightly insists on a historical reading of patriarchal societies, her privileging of gender as the primary category of difference--as indeed the vehicle through which race and class structures were first articulated--collapses all systems of difference into the model of sexual difference, a critical feat that fails to decode the complexity of their intersections. While gender, race, class and other forms of difference share structural similarities, their differences are not, historically or transcendentally, the same.

In American patriarchal relations, any hierarchical ordering of structures of difference merely obscures the complicity among race and gender, particularly at the site of the interracial male bond where the tensions between these categories are simultaneously reiterated and diffused. This reiteration and diffusion is epitomized in more recent years by King's famous invocation of the male bond as a symbol for racial equality: "I have a dream that someday all men, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands. . . ." While King intended "men" in its generic role as a stand in for "men and

women," his rhetoric nonetheless participates in an ideological trope common to American culture's representation of itself<sup>10</sup>; this trope, in Sacvan Bercovitch's words,

absorbs the very terms of opposition into the promise of the New, that long-nurtured vision of Futurity that carries us forever back, through a procession of sacred landmarks--the Gettysburg Address, "The American Scholar," the Declaration of Independence, the legendary *Mayflower* Compact, the imagined discovery of America--to the ideological premises of modern democratic liberalism. (*Ideology*, 438)

In its evocation of these premises, the interracial male bond quite powerfully recreates/renarrates the cultural terrain, eclipsing the distance between democratic rhetoric and hierarchical structures by invoking that long-nurtured dream of a classless, raceless America. One of the stunning achievements of American patriarchal organization is its use of the gendered ideology of the male bond to negotiate race and class differences among men--the mythos of men together providing an efficient point of access for cultural hegemony to construct and maintain its power.

Through the proliferation of interracial male bonding narratives, cultural production negotiates the difficult terrain of race and gender difference, foregrounding the image of the black man in order to recuperate his potential protest and challenge to white

masculine power. In the "post" Civil Rights era demarcated in contemporary bonding narratives, the black man's resituation within the ideological project of the white masculine point of view is achieved through a simultaneous displacement of race as a category of oppression--"things have changed . . . It's a wonderful country" (*White Nights*)--and a reassertion of gender--"the brotherhood of the ring" (*Lords of Discipline*). In this process, the discourse of sexual difference functions to divert attention away from the reconstitution of difference within the masculine, reiterating the representation of relations among men as internally cohesive, as themselves without difference. Such a process participates in what Susan Jeffords calls "the re-masculinization of American culture," a recuperatory project aimed at rejuvenating cultural hegemony, specifically the structures of gender that are necessary to the smooth functioning of American culture.

While Jeffords' work focuses on the imagery of the Vietnam veteran, the consequences of the recuperatory process she describes replicates the broader ideological project of contemporary configurations of the interracial male bond; she writes:

At this point in time, gender is being foregrounded as a category through which issues of race, class, and sexual preference are being denied. Vietnam representation reveals the ways in which contemporary popular narratives are repressing class or race differences as relevant concerns. Instead, through the re-masculinization of American culture that is now taking place, gender

differences have been reaffirmed as a primary interpretive frame for American social relations.

In this process of recuperation, the space of cultural marginalization is cleared of its historical occupants--blacks, women, the poor, etc--and reoccupied by the seemingly decentered voices that had "previously" held sway in American power relations.<sup>11</sup> The re-masculinization project thus reveals a second level of recuperation, reaffirming not only gender but race structures as well, for the ultimate beneficiary of this renegotiation of patriarchal relations is the white masculine point of view.

Through the re-masculinization process, the white masculine can be reasserted in cultural production as the site for the eradication of cultural differences, thereby diffusing race challenges posed, particularly, by discourses of black power in the 1960s. In this way, an overdetermination of phallic authority becomes the privileged emblem of a newly democratized American culture, one through which black men can be reined into the ideological orbit of hegemonic structures, diffusing--often paradoxically through representations of a strident masculinity<sup>12</sup>--potential racial threats to white masculine power. As an ideological tool, the bond thus simultaneously posits cultural egalitarianism by delineating the representation of black masculinity while reinscribing white masculine power, casting the white man as both victim of the social order and its rejuvenated hero. As we will see, contemporary configurations of the bond are particularly fond of portraying white male victimization; in this way, the "singular voice" that has been unfairly attacked and

silenced in the wake of black and feminist discourses can regain its own "stunning truthfulness" (*Lords of Discipline*), reasserting itself in the guise of a masculine economy that evinces no internal difference.

Once established as a stridently masculine space, the interracial male bond becomes the site for the reconstruction of difference, a reconstruction that hierarchicalizes the supposedly undifferentiated masculine space along racial lines. This recuperation of the black male's access to patriarchal power has been accomplished historically through both representational castrations of the black male body and ritualistic physical enactments. Indeed, since the Emancipation Proclamation, castration has functioned as the premiere trope governing the imaging of black men in American culture, a trope whose initial emphasis on literal disempowerment through genital mutilation has been reworked--though not entirely replaced--in the 1980s by symbolic castrations: narrative structurings that situate the black man as emblem of a rejuvenated masculine while disempowering him of that masculinization through the ideological colonization of his body/his presence in the name of the white masculine point of view. While interracial male bonding narratives draw their power by establishing the binary of gender (where the masculine opposes itself to an alien, seemingly castrating feminine), it is the masculine itself that most strenuously (re)constructs the cultural status of the black male, simultaneously "manning" and "unmanning" him--proclaiming and diffusing sameness through cultural productions of race as a category of difference.

In this way, the representation of the black male in American cultural production is intricately linked to the discourse of sexual difference, for it is his relation to the gendered structure of masculine power that most significantly governs both his representational and material position in white patriarchy. It is not surprising then that the most prominent stereotypes of black men in the cultural economy are emblems of the two poles of sexual difference: either he is constructed as the castrated coon, whose passivity, docility and feminine characteristics evince his difference from white masculine ideals (as in Harriet Beecher Stowe's passive Uncle Tom); or he is depicted as the super stud, the throbbing black phallus that poses a threat not only to white women but to white civilization as well (as in *Birth of a Nation*). In both cases, it is through the discourse of sexual difference that the black male is situated in the patriarchal economy, his body and sexuality constructed in relation not only to women and the feminine but, more importantly, to the white masculine itself.

In its inscription as either a feminized or ultra-masculinized representational body the image of the black male is sutured to the structure of sexual difference, functioning on one hand as the disempowered evocation of a feminine space of phallic absence and, on the other, as the longed-for and forever feared site of an ultra-masculine presence. Both positions guarantee not only that the black male body is defined as a purely sexualized terrain but that, as the

sexual, it will be contained within the functioning of cultural stereotypes--the black male body existing as a discursive playground for a limited number of fixed ways of viewing. As Kobena Mercer writes,

Stereotypes of black men bear witness to the repetition of a "colonial fantasy", collective and cultural "fantasies" of power over black bodies, in which certain myths and fictions about "race" inscribe and institute *idées fixes* about the "nature" of black sexuality and black male sexuality in particular. ("Imaging," np)

Through stereotypes, what can be, in patriarchal terms, a seemingly empowering representation of the black male body and its sexuality, the super stud, becomes instead a fantasy of white conquest, the black male body simultaneously affirming the masculine while denying the racial threat of its ultra-masculinity through the fetishistic display of the black body as sexual stereotype.

The stereotype is always, in this sense, a way of transforming the black body into a sexual fetish of white desire, regardless of which stereotype--tom, coon, clown, rapist, whore--is being invoked. In this way, the stereotypes of black men in American cultural production function in terms of what Mercer calls the colonial fantasy, the desire to own, manipulate and probe the body of the Other as the vehicle, always, for the imaging of the white male (sexual) self, a self and significantly a body seemingly impervious both to the stereotype and the fetish. Through the fetishization of the black male body--a fetishization evinced both by the



proliferation of the stereotypes designed to contain it and by the obsessive cultural need to look at and repress the desire for it--the black male body is situated in the same representational space inhabited by the female body, a space where it can be objectified, aestheticized and reproduced as the "tabula rasa for a white [and male] writing that speaks only of its own . . . sexuality" (Mercer, "Imaging," np). Such positioning of the black male body works to invest the white male "eye" with the power to construct the very terms of representation, reducing the body of the black man to a cultural framing that functions, like the binary structure of gender, to send back the empowered viewer images of his white/masculine self.

But the difference between the positioning of women and black men as fetishized objects of the gaze is that, in the case of the latter, as Mercer notes, "both subject and object . . . are male" ("Imaging," np). This sexual sameness "sets up a tension between "active" and "passive" . . . transfer[ing] erotic investment in the power and pleasure of looking to the site of racial difference" ("Imaging," np). Through the use of the stereotype, the white masculine look can negotiate the potential disruption of power inherent in this sexual sameness, stabilizing the masculine economy of desire by reducing, in Mercer's words, "the black man's flesh to a flat surface charged with the task, the "work," of servicing and staging a white male desire to look" ("Imaging," np). The negotiation of masculine sameness is thus accomplished at the site of the black male body by first, positioning that body in a replication of the paradigm of sexual difference and then reasserting racial

difference by framing the black male body in the comfortable stereotypes of white racial fantasy. In this way, the black male body can be "enslaved to the image-reservoir of the white male imaginary about the sexuality of the racialized Other" ("Imaging," np), the threat of masculine sameness averted through the construction of a fetishized raced body.

It is this paradigm of sameness underlying the representational economy of the black male body in American cultural production that not only makes it such an important site of cultural negotiations but that also casts black men into a structurally different category of difference than those that govern either black or white women or white men. There are major benefits for cultural hegemony, however, in a strict reading of the representation of black men as a replication of the paradigm of sexual difference. As Richard Dyer writes in an analysis of the career of black actor and singer Paul Robeson,<sup>13</sup>

It is no accident that there are similarities between how black men are represented and how women are depicted . . . it is common for oppressed groups to be represented in dominant discourses as non-active. . . . their passivity permits the fantasy of power over them to be exercised, all the more powerful for being a confirmation of actual power; their passivity justifies their subordination ideologically . . . [for] their activity would imply challenge . . . to the dominant it would imply change. (*Heavenly Bodies*, 116)

In aligning representations of black men with the constructed

position of women, dominant discourses are able to neutralize black male images, exchanging potential activity and aggression against white masculine hegemony for the structurally passive realm of sexual objectification.

Significantly, these stereotypic representations of the black male are often diffused in the narration of the interracial male bond where the superficial representation of a masculine equality is the necessary precondition-- particularly in contemporary configurations--for the full rejuvenation of the white masculine point of view. Part of the cultural seductiveness of the bonding scenario is due, no doubt, to its seeming disruption of the traditional gendered stereotypes governing the imaging of black men, a disruption that enables the bond to offer the spectacle of democratic realization precisely because of its negotiation of these stereotypes. Indeed, because most bonding narratives participate in the "re-masculinization" project of contemporary cultural production, black men in scenarios of the interracial bond often achieve an unusually empowered representation of masculinity--the black man as law and order, for instance--but this achievement is always contained by a narrative structure that hierarchicalizes that power in relation to the white masculine position, thereby recuperating the radical potential of an equal and powerful masculine black male to challenge white cultural power. Thus, while the interracial male bond often represents the black man in ways that seem to counter the stereotypes of feminization or savage masculinity, it does so not "for the nigger" (*Lords of Discipline*) but for the recuperation of the image

of the white man whose ideological role in the perpetuation of racial hierarchies must be denied so that he "can be the hero" (*Lords of Discipline*).

As the representational structure through which the disjunction between masculine sameness and racial difference can be negotiated, the interracial male bond thus plays a crucial role in the construction and maintenance of the white masculine hegemony. In its structural reliance on gender and race, the bond demonstrates the larger process of cultural production where various categories of difference intersect to reinforce hierarchical constructions. Because of this collusion between gender and race, black men can be reined into the patriarchal economy at the same time they are denied traditional access to masculine power. This incorporation of patriarchal values is, as Mercer and Isaac Julien write, a contradictory process, created by the particular history of black men in patriarchy:

[t]he hegemonic repertoire of images of Black masculinity . . . has been forged in and through the histories of slavery, colonialism and imperialism . . . [In] the denial of certain masculine attributes, such as authority, dignity and familial responsibility . . . black men have adopted and used certain patriarchal values such as physical strength, sexual prowess and being in control to create a system of black male gender roles in which 'macho' or 'toughness' are used as a means of survival to cope with the repressive, violent and destructive power of the

plantocracy and the state . . . The apparent incorporation of patriarchal values into black male gender identities is [thus] a contradictory process. ("True Confessions," 7)

In this contradictory process, in which the denial of traditional patriarchal rights forges the adoption of other strategies of masculine gender identity, the black male body and its sexuality serve as a representational battleground, the locus of mediation between the structures of race and sexual difference.

This fascination with the body of the Other depicts a fundamental aspect not only of the interracial male bond but American cultural production, a method for constructing and containing the threat posed by black men to patriarchy's hierarchical masculine hegemony--a threat never wholly alleviated but dispersed and recuperated by positioning that body as the site where gender and race converge. As the representational terrain for the (re)production of race and gender tensions, the black male body is simultaneously presented as visually different and yet, paradoxically, masculinely the same--a contradiction that results in a cultural economy that is both gender solidified and racially hierarchicalized among men. In such processes of cultural production, all writing of the black male body is itself a negotiation across the intersecting discourses of race and gender.

In establishing masculine power by virtue of the visibility of maleness, the patriarchal economy guarantees gender separation within

every social hierarchy, insuring the continued political and sexual subordination of all women. And yet the process of maintaining this homosexuality--of negotiating all masculine differences through the gender system to achieve the illusion of cohesion, stability and equality--requires the homogenization of the masculine economy. This homogenization--produced at the site of the interracial male bond--is achieved through a negotiation of the tension implicit in the black man's position in American culture. In this way, cultural production simultaneously empowers the black male through a reinscription of gender while reconstructing his position in relation to white men through the invocation of the economy of visibility that governs the construction of race as a category of difference. Beneath the appearance of a stable masculine economy, in other words, the structure of race depends on the same essentializing economy of the visible that constructs gender, a way of simultaneously inscribing a masculine economy while guaranteeing that it is internally fragmented among men.

In the replication of the economy of the visible that governs sexual difference, the very notion of race reveals itself as a cultural construction, race becoming, in the words of Dyer, "an idea in the discourse of biology, a way of grouping people according to perceptions of bodily difference" (*Heavenly Bodies*, 139). But the availability of the body to "tell" the difference, to evince racial categorization through the "look" is highly problematic in American culture--so problematic, in fact, that the legal system has long been used to establish criteria for the determination of race. Because of

the possibility of indeterminacy, our culture must codify racial categorization; traditionally this has meant that any non-white blood makes one "raced" regardless of actual skin color. As Henry Louis Gates, Jr. writes, we have "inscribed these differences as fixed and finite categories. . . . It takes little reflection, however, to recognize that these pseudoscientific categories are themselves figures. Who has seen a black or red person, a white, yellow, or brown? These terms are arbitrary constructs" (6).

Given the constructed nature of racial categorization, it is not surprising that black writers, in particular, have been drawn repeatedly to the mulatto figure in American literature. This figure, stranded between two artificial boundaries--black and white--is traditionally presented as a lost individual, one bereft of any "natural" communal affinity based on the visibility of "color".<sup>14</sup> For many of these characters, individuality, indeed "wholeness," can come only through the embrace of blackness, an embrace that transforms the dominant order's emphasis on visibility into some kind of essential, genetic--and therefore invisible--racialness.<sup>15</sup> In this way, many black writers have sought to negotiate the distance between race as a construct and the necessity of defining a cultural identity within the alienating landscape of American culture. What often happens in this exchange, however, is that "race" itself is reinscribed as something real. In other words, the process of translating the experience of Otherness into a cultural identity is a process strangely wed to the ideological structure from which differences are enunciated. As Gates writes, "[b]lack writing . . .

served not to obliterate the difference of race; rather, the inscription of the black voice in Western literatures has preserved those very cultural differences to be repeated, imitated, and revised in a separate Western literary tradition, a tradition of black difference" (12). By positing "blackness" as something natural that exceeds the visible--as something inherent in the fact of "black blood"--the hierarchical structure of race can be maintained, for the binary system on which "race" operates is left fundamentally untouched.

The designation of the mulatto as "black" works to maintain the privileged space of cultural power, in essence imbuing whiteness with a reality that is nothing more than the creation of a term to signify racial wholeness. Because American culture denies racial mixture a designation of its own, those of mixed heritage are cast as pure cultural excess--if not the undesignated space, the box marked Other that is both the problem and the result of the race system, they are confined to one portion of the binary structure, accommodated only through the process of either/or. The creation of racial difference requires this homogenization of racial categories so that all diversity is polarized into white/non-white distinctions. Racial difference that exists outside of American culture's fundamental designations, black and white, are themselves rendered invisible.<sup>16</sup> The paradox of the race hierarchy system is, in this sense, reminiscent of gender: in the privileging of visibility, boundaries are set in such a way that all differences are cast back into a negativized figure of the seminal term, in this case, of whiteness.



"Race" itself is the stand in for everything other than whiteness; as such, its pretense to visibility is a decoy for its more structural intent: to empower whiteness, that which on its own lacks both racial and cultural meaning.

In its appeal to visibility, American culture inscribes difference as spectacle at the very moment of enunciating race as a category of difference. Racial designation therefore becomes essential in the establishment and maintenance of the white masculine point of view, for the continual articulation of race as spectacle allows for difference to be recuperated into the ideological interests of the hegemony. This is apparent, for instance, in the representational reduction of the Civil Rights Movement to the singular image of King; integrated into the cultural fabric, the image of King circulates as a commodity, offering "proof" of America's inherent democracy and thereby discouraging potential unrest. Such "tokenism" negates the structural racism at the heart of American culture while rewriting the Movement into an homogenous entity that can more easily be contained. As Adolph Reed Jr. writes, "the social order legitimates itself by integrating potentially antagonistic forces into a logic of centralized administration. Once integrated, these forces regulate domination and prevent disruptive excess" (62). Discourses of black power offered by other black leaders, Malcolm X or Stokely Carmichael, for example, can be confined to footnotes or depicted only in comparison to the commodified and consumable image of King.<sup>17</sup> Whatever radical difference the discourses of the Movement might have used to

challenge the hegemony is thus reinscribed as pure spectacle--as the appearance of wholeness and not its reality.

Martin Luther King as the signifier, the sole representation of the black struggle inscribes the past through the supposedly natural and inevitable rhetoric of AMERICA, terms benefitting the power structure by presenting American culture as one evolving toward the full enunciation of its democratic possibility. At the same time, the symbol of King appeals to the disenfranchised group by offering it an image of its own success--a success precisely because of King's discursive focus on democracy as the founding distinction of American culture. In the call for equal rights, King's representation of American cultural relations did not address, as Reed explains, "the structural or systematic character of social relations and therefore could only denounce racial exclusion as an evil anomaly" (70). Asking America to become its own representation, the Civil Rights Movement, as it was represented by King, was able to be renegotiated into the very terms of the already existing structure.

In conceiving of itself in the democratic rhetoric of cultural ideology, the movement gave shape to the cultural accommodation that would later integrate "blackness" into the process of specularization that constitutes American culture. In this process, the mere appearance of difference--the representation of King's birthday as a national holiday, for instance--is used to heal the tensions posed by the hierarchical construction of American culture. By representing the discourses of black culture as homogenous, without internal differences, American culture can absorb their potential excessive

Otherness by reducing racial threat to the spectacle of disruption--by portraying it, in other words, as a momentary explosion that has now been healed by the representational fulfillment of one leader's "dream." The transformation of difference into spectacle inscribes the visible as essential difference, commodifying the black subject as object in the negotiation of white masculine power. In this way, the power of "race" to challenge the hegemony, to force a rearticulation of American culture and not simply to reiterate its rhetoric of democratic equality, is recuperated, the subversive cultural excess moved from the margins to an authorized space where the radical threat can be contained, transformed and dispersed in the new clothes of cultural spectacle and political "neutrality."

Contemporary cultural production reflects the increasing power of visibility to construct the racial Other as specular commodity in patriarchal/capitalist discourses. The emphasis on visibility arises in particular through a strategic recuperation of radical discourses of the 1960s when the emergence of marginalized points of view threatened the cultural program of patriarchal relations as they had been known in the twentieth century. These voices of feminist, anti-war, and Civil Rights movements have forced a new process of containment, one that paradoxically foregrounds the *specter* of the dissonant voice as it cannibalizes that voice, transforming the historically marginalized discourse into a spectacle or, in Baudrillard's term, a simulation--a representation of the

representation of difference. In this sense, the very visibility of difference functions as a renegotiation of the problematical terrain of the patriarchal economy: marginalized voices are represented, hence (superficially) included in American culture while the emphasis on visibility enables the white masculine point of view to be reasserted, masquerading as an inclusive structure--as the articulation site of democratic possibility--but based more firmly on the continual enunciation of difference.<sup>18</sup>

The burgeoning process of specularizing difference is enhanced by contemporary modes of production, particularly television and cinema, which depend heavily on the economy of the visible for the negotiation of patriarchal relations. These apparatuses, in their very nature, privilege visibility and are constructed on the premise of absence/presence, inscribing the voyeuristic gaze and the fetishization of difference through the "look." While feminist film theory, in particular, has concerned itself with the gendering of this look, the dichotomization of masculine spectator/feminine spectacle cannot account for differences among men, all of whom do not have equal access to looking in American culture. As the history of lynching makes clear, "sexual looking carries with it the threat of actual rather than symbolic castration," for "some groups have historically had the license to "look" openly while other groups have "looked" illicitly" (Jane Gaines, 70, 76). The very notion of the look, of the privileging of the visible, is predicated on an always already raced construct, one in which the masculine space of looking is fragmented among men; its apparent seamless construction

demonstrates the way gender is used to diffuse masculine differences, establishing the illusion of masculine wholeness against the sight of the castrating/castrated female body.

By presenting difference as an easily consumable image, viewers/readers are suspended at the surface level of representation where the mere appearance of difference can be used to heal the tensions posed by challenges to the hegemony. Contemporary popular culture is particularly clever in this regard, masking hegemonic ideology through the spectacle of difference. Programs such as *L.A. Law* and *The Cosby Show* make the top ten precisely because of their ability to simultaneously foreground and displace difference; in both cases, class privilege is the overwhelming sign of cultural egalitarianism and issues of gender and race become passing themes that reaffirm rather than disrupt the smooth functioning of the program's internal dynamic.<sup>19</sup> These representations are not simply barometers of the social milieu but its process and product; they signal the ease with which the spectacle of difference, its superficial representation, seduces audiences into the comfortable position of imagining a stable American economy.

This process of specularization functions not only in the realm of popular culture but structures its supposed antithesis, the literary canon, as well. Contrary to the aesthetics of "high culture"--which privileges the text/object apart from its cultural and ideological construction--literature participates in the construction and consumption of difference, colonizing otherness into versions of the hegemonic Same. Such a process is both possible and

problematical because of the inherently ideological nature of representation, its historically specific construction that establishes the frame of reference necessary to any production of meaning. Existing in multiple dialogues with the historical frame, representation is both limited by and constituted as the terms of its production--terms which, in their manner of representation, can reinforce and/or challenge hegemonic ideology. In its reiteration of a binary logic--image, spectator; participant, observer; absence, presence; masculine, feminine--representation mimics, often transparently, the vampiristic process of diffusion and empowerment characteristic of any binary system: one side draws authority, power, its very existence from its oppositional relation to the other while this other becomes the embodiment of the "original," seminal one/term.<sup>20</sup>

In foregrounding gender and race as spectacles, American culture consigns difference to the realm of cultural exchange. Circulated as a commodity, the specularized subject reaffirms the white masculine point of view by superficially easing the inequities of the cultural order, indicating, through the representation of her/his difference, AMERICA's raceless, classless, genderless possibility. Such a representation obviates the historical resistance in American culture to any struggle for full participation, inscribing the rhetoric of equality as one constitutionally inherent in America since its inception. In doing so, this specularization process alleviates the tensions of a culture structurally bound to the continual enunciation and transformation of difference. Recast as the exchange objects in

the negotiation of white masculine power, the specularized individual offers the appearance of progress and equality, masking the structures of difference that both characterize and construct American culture.<sup>21</sup>

Because patriarchal culture is integrally bound to multiple enunciations of difference and not simply to the reiteration of gender, an investigation of race differences among men provides the means for understanding the way race and gender intersect in American culture; in doing so, we can enhance feminist theory's understanding of the construction of oppression, for American hierarchies are forged at the expense not only of all women but of racially and economically "different" men as well. This allows us to begin to articulate the complexities of Heidi Hartmann's often quoted definition of patriarchy as "relations between men which . . . though hierarchical, create interdependence and solidarity among men that enables them to dominate women" (14). While Hartmann notes the hierarchical, her focus on interdependence and solidarity portrays a patriarchal structure in which all men are seen to participate rather equally in the domination of women. But repressed in the space between "the hierarchical" and the representation of masculine "interdependence" are the processes of negotiation whereby race differences among men can be superficially settled, presenting patriarchy as both natural and structurally monolithic. The ease to which feminist theory has reiterated this apparent stability attests

to the difficulty of viewing patriarchy as not simply ideologically but historically constructed. As Mervat Hatem writes, we "must stop thinking of patriarchy as a product of a natural commonality of interests among men which has manifested itself throughout history. . . it is more important to trace historical changes in this system of male alliances and sexual control" (252-3).

In terms of nineteenth century American history, for instance, it would be inaccurate to conceive of black men acting equally with their white masters to maintain the patriarchal system of the Old South. The history of the African man in America, in fact, depicts the opposite, as Trudier Harris's work on historical and literary lynching shows, for black men themselves have been literally and symbolically denied access to white masculine power, a denial often characterized by castration. Harris painstakingly traces these castration rituals--which, significantly, increased dramatically after black emancipation--depicting a complex system in which race and gender intersect to thwart challenges to hegemonic power. Seeing castration as a "communal rape of the black man" (23), Harris's work describes the white man's role in "confirming" that the myth of the black rapist is real: "When [the white man] acts to save his woman from the mad, rampaging, overly endowed black man . . . . [h]e sees himself as savior, father, keeper of the purity of his race" (21). This representation of the black man functions to reiterate white masculine hegemony, maintaining the position of black men and women even as the social order itself is radically disrupted by black emancipation.



As this example makes clear, American patriarchy is structurally dependent on its ability to respond to changes in the cultural fabric--it must continually re-present the terms of its power in order to absorb and recuperate the difference against which it defines itself. For this reason, Hatem writes, we need to view patriarchal systems as "resilient, without being static or unchanging, because they are tension laden" (271). In seeking to maintain its illusion of stability, patriarchy must simultaneously foreground and alleviate its own tensions. Therefore, while black men become part of the "system" in the attainment of legal rights, their full participation is denied in the very terms through which American culture has represented their sexuality in the post-emancipation years. Defined as rapists, as criminals, as the destroyers of white civilization, black men are inculcated into the white patriarchal system through a denial of the classic patriarchal rights of domination over all women.

And yet the paradox of the patriarchal system is that given such cultural representations, the terms of manhood are upheld even within the group most violated by those terms. The cultural emphasis on masculinity weighs so heavily--and becomes such a marker for social power--that the very articulation of gender helps to heal the rifts between men caused by racial hierarchies. The process of negotiation within the interracial male bond--allowing both partners to reiterate the dream of raceless possibility--replicates the contradiction at the heart of American culture's representation of itself: while it gives men the ability to dominate women, the seeming equality within

the masculine is an illusion of wholeness, for differences between men are necessary to the functioning of America's hegemony. In discarding feminist theory's "problematic assumption that there is an automatic and natural patriarchal alliance among men (of different classes and cultures) against women" (Hatem, 252), we can begin to concentrate on how these differences among men are negotiated to present a seamless masculine economy.

While race, then, does not function simply as a mimicry of the gender system, its representation is enacted in similar sequences and solidified in its relation to gender. By seeking to inscribe visibility as the marker of difference, race pretends to establish what is the obvious distinction of the gender system: physical/biological difference. The nineteenth century's obsession with "proving" the physical subordination of blacks either through skull measurements or limb length attests to the wish-fulfilling invocation of the visible as the "essential" confirmation of hierarchical systems. While even today part of the racial creed is that there are innate differences between black and white, these differences have been articulated out of specific historical moments when the need, for instance, to "prove" innate black male violence could strengthen the white man's hold on his own power network. Similarly, the idea that race difference instills genetically a criminal mentality lends support to our complex legal apparatus and its reinscription of the white masculine point of view. What June Howard writes of the period of Naturalism is true of our own: "The attitudes and practices of the ideology of criminality fundamentally

respond to class and racial conflict and the need to maintain social order" (87). Through this need emerge categories of difference--particularly race and gender--as seemingly visible, natural divisions, divisions that endlessly rewrite the cultural economy from the ideological perspective of the premiere race and gender.

Just as the feminine is itself the ultimate construct of the masculine, so too does race function to reiterate the primary term of an asymmetrical binary structure. Within this binary, however, within the term that is itself the articulation site of difference, there is ultimately no monolithic wholeness, regardless of its representation as such. "Race" itself, for instance, is fragmented by gender and class divisions--while whiteness is a sign of cultural privilege, white women, as subordinates within the gender system, are positioned differently than white men in the patriarchal economy; similarly, black women, through the collusion between race and gender, are quite differently situated than black men. These differences, while complicating any analysis of American culture, are both emblems of potential disruption and, paradoxically, the seams through which the hegemony is not simply sealed but superficially healed. This "healing" can take place because the process of negotiation among men--the process whereby masculine difference can be reiterated in the guise of structural wholeness--has rarely been viewed in any consistent or sustained manner. But a study of negotiations both within and between gender and race hierarchies at particular moments in history can enable us to understand the seemingly cohesive but contradictory--and therefore mutable--

structure of American culture.

## Notes to Chapter One

<sup>1</sup> The white masculine point of view is not a biologically determined perspective but an ideology through which American patriarchal culture articulates itself as an universal, all encompassing system while elaborating multiple and shifting configurations of difference; both women and men of different races, classes and sexual preferences can and do adopt this ideological perspective.

<sup>2</sup> By exploitation here I refer to McDonald's practice of hiring blacks, particularly black youths, at minimum wages; the company's rhetorical support of King's dream is pathetically ironic in light of the capitalist advantages accorded it through the continuing failure of blacks to secure economic parity with whites.

<sup>3</sup> It is important to emphasize here that the negotiation of the Civil Rights Movement occurs not in relation to the events themselves but to their representations both within the movement--as in the various discourses produced by its leaders--and in American culture at large. In this sense, negotiation is constituted as representation, particularly the representation of the historical period signified by the concept of the Civil Rights era.

<sup>4</sup> The contemporary hysteria over Jesse Jackson's potential to become democratic presidential nominee is a case in point. With both *Time* and *Newsweek* featuring Jackson on their covers--one asking "Can He Win?" and the other simply suggesting "Jesse!?"--the skepticism over the possibility of his candidacy has changed to alarm. When *Newsweek* asks, "Could Jesse Jackson really be nominated?" (23), it answers the question by citing its own poll: "[h]e seem[s] almost sure to lose to George Bush: in a trial heat, a new *Newsweek* poll found Bush beating Jackson 58 to 32 percent" (23). While we could assume that such reasoning represents an awareness of American culture's deep seated racism, it is never race that is cited as his weak point. Indeed, because of our cultural representation of a post-Civil Rights era, Jackson's blackness is supposedly ignored. See Shapiro and Martz.

<sup>5</sup> Sedgwick's reading of Irigaray's notion of the homosexual relies on a problematical equation of the larger structure of patriarchal relations with genital activity. In Irigaray's terms, all masculine desires, both heterosexual and homosexual, are contained in the concept of the homosexual, which denotes the way cultural sexualities are based on and articulated around exclusively masculine desires. Despite her argument with Irigaray, in fact, Sedgwick's own description of the male pact as it is transversed by class appeals to Irigaray's homosexuality. This "desire to

consolidate partnership with authoritative males in and through the bodies of females" (38) is heterosexual only in its surface presentation, for beneath this cultural imperative is an economy characterized most strenuously by the masculine, by the *hommo*.

In this sense, what Sedgwick calls the homosocial is precisely Irigaray's *hommo*sexual; in maintaining the sexual, Irigaray is interested in reflecting sexual difference as the founding distinction of the patriarchal economy, not genital activity. As such, the *hommo* reveals its existence beneath both the heterosexual and the homosexual, for all masculine desire is articulated in relation to the representational space designated by woman and/or the feminine. The heterosexual is thus a veil for the *hommo*sexual, functioning most specifically, as Sedgwick's own work indicates, to confine women to an economy of circulation and commodification that benefits the patriarchal structure by alleviating tensions between men. That this economy rejects the homosexual indicates not a fundamental incompatibility--as the Greeks show, homosexuality can be integral to the construction of masculine domination--but signifies the necessary adjustments of the patriarchal economy to specific challenges to its hegemony during the nineteenth century.

<sup>6</sup> Both Foucault and Weeks discuss sexualities as historical constructs, homosexuality in particular being "a production of social categorization, whose fundamental aim and effect was regulation and control" (Weeks, 93).

<sup>7</sup> While the male homosexual is indeed victimized by the social order, the form of his oppression reinforces the intent of the heterosexual imperative to distinguish not men from men but women from men. In transgressing the heterosexual pact, the gay male is labelled "woman," a label he can shun by reentering the heterosexual economy, either in reality or by facade. But the male homosexual does not become "woman" even though he may be called such by the ideology of a woman-hating culture, nor does he necessarily abdicate his masculine privilege over women. To see the cultural taboo against homosexuality as a conscription against the love of men for one another dismisses the connection between male sexualities and the patriarchal exclusion of women. It further displaces what Sedgwick herself has called the continuum of male desire which, moving from strictly nonsexual bonding to actual consummation, reinforces the patriarchal elevation of relationships between men.

Indeed, the very visibility of gay male culture in this century attests to the status of masculine sexuality, for while gay men are indeed victimized by the gender system, while they may be denied total access to patriarchal power, their sexuality is as inculcated into the patriarchal economy of the visible as that of male heterosexuality. It is the economy of the visible--where the penis is transformed into the patriarchal sign of power--that structures not only male sexualities but those of women as well. While Sedgwick rightly looks at homophobia as a device for controlling male sexuality, this does not negate the *hommo*sexual economy that orders

and fashions all cultural sexualities for both men and women.

<sup>8</sup> Critics following Fiedler have interpreted his reading of the interracial male bond as homosexual not only because of its description as "love" but because both blacks and homosexuals are the focus of Fiedler's seminal article on the interracial configuration, "Come Back to the Raft Ag'in, Huck Honey!" In his latest work, Fiedler comments on critical misreadings of his intentions:

Both [the authors a Seattle and *New York Times* article] have heard at second or third hand that I had dared suggest that Huck and Jim were queer as three-dollar bills. What I actually contended . . . was that, in a society characterized on the conscious level by fear and distrust of what I called then "homoerotic love" ("male bonding" has since become the fashionable euphemism) . . . there has appeared over and over in books written by white American authors the same myth of an idyllic anti-marriage: a life-long love, passionate though chaste, and consummated in the wilderness . . . between a white refugee from "civilization" and a dark-skinned "savage," both of them male. (*What Was Literature?* 15)

But even here, Fiedler continues to read the interracial male bond through the binary structure evoked by the notion of "anti-marriage," conjuring up the opposition heterosexual / homosexual. Concern over the genital activity accompanying the love of the male bond obscures the bond's function as patriarchal construction site for the establishment and privileging of masculine relations. In this sense, the male bond might be viewed as a mediation between the homosexual and the heterosexual, a third term that can incorporate the continuum of desire that links the two.

<sup>9</sup> The most prominent example of the white man dying for his dark brother is *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* where McMurphy's sacrifice becomes the vehicle for the Chief's resurrection to life. But, as I explore in Chapter 2, this inversion of the bond's usual typology indicates not a substantial change in the ideological structure of the bond but a new strategy for the recuperation of masculine difference in the Civil Rights years.

<sup>10</sup> King's use of the image of the interracial male bond reiterates the ideological dream of a "raceless" America, a dream of democratic fraternity often achieved at the expense of women, particularly women of the previously disenfranchised group. Indeed, when the black suffrage and women's rights movements of the nineteenth century articulated their common desire for inclusion in the white patriarchal economy, the result was a battle over who was to be included first: whether the guarantee of full rights to black men was to supercede the enfranchisement of all women. Left in the wake of both movements, of course, was the black woman, whose enfranchisement in 1920 came as a by product of a movement wholly unconcerned with her specific needs. The history of unionization in

America as well as women's experience in the Civil Rights and Leftist movements of the 1960s attests to this gender bifurcation imposed even within groups challenging the hegemony. The necessity for the modern women's movement grew out of the shared exclusions of these radical protest groups, for the quest for equality seemed a strikingly masculine one to women asked to lie prone for the revolution.

<sup>11</sup> The recent controversy over the dismissal of a white male student from a Women's Studies course at the University of Washington is a case in point. In his various public appearances, Pete Schaub has maintained that he was the victim of censorship and academic discrimination by radical ideologues, that as a male in a feminist setting, he was made to fear castration by the man-hating instructors of the course (see Schaub and Tang). In a telling scenario, Schaub appeared to discuss his case against the Women's Studies program on a local program, "Town Meeting," which had advertised the event as an exploration of the problems of sexual harassment. While he sat on the stage, a woman who recently won a discrimination case (against the Tacoma bank that employed--and still does--two men who demanded sex in exchange for her advancement) was positioned in the audience, her story receiving only a few minutes of attention while the white male victim, who has appeared on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, in *People* magazine and has been approached for the rights to a TV movie concerning the incident, commanded both the attention and the sympathies of the audience.

Schaub's story, like those of other white male victims from Jim Baake to Bernard Goetz and Oliver North, is important not for its individual narrative but because of its participation in the broader representational phenomenon that is rehabilitating not only the masculine but the hegemony of white dominance, that which must be preserved for the continued articulation of patriarchal relations as we have known them in American culture. It is not coincidental that the benefactors of the present recuperatory project, the new "victims" of cultural relations, tend to be both white and male--the previous and, in contemporary terms, the seemingly fallen inheritors of the "old" cultural hegemony. Through the representation of white male victimization, the ideological position of the white masculine point of view can be shifted from center to margin, established as simply one more marginalized voice in cultural production and hence as an alternative discourse, not the reigning ethic of hegemonic structures.

In offering the white masculine point of view as the new perspective of cultural marginalization, black and feminist discourses can be represented as exclusionary in themselves--Schaub can assert, for instance, that the

manner in which "Women's Studies" is taught is startlingly hostile to the very principles of freedom, inquiry and tolerance on which this school was founded . . . The occasional questions I asked, along with the fact that I'm a white male . . . apparently makes me a symbol that my



detractors seem obsessed with smashing, first through a campaign of harassment, then by attempting to throw me out of "their" class. (4)

Only in the reconstructed context of contemporary cultural relations can the white masculine be imaged as the excluded, the rights of the historical oppressors endangered by the ideological programs of those who were once, but are no more, oppressed. This revision of the social and historical arrangement of race and gender is frighteningly apparent in the Supreme Court's recent decision to review a landmark Civil Rights case that bans discrimination in private institutions on the basis of race. By questioning the government's right to "interfere" with the functioning of individual companies, the Supreme Court, regardless of whether or not it eventually overturns the case, tacitly sanctions the current cultural recuperation of white masculine power.

<sup>12</sup> This is perhaps most apparent in the way black male power is inculcated into American patriarchal culture through economic inducements to military service. As long as the white masculine hegemony can represent itself as the site of a strident masculinity--and emphasize black male physical power--the ability to rein black men into the white masculine point of view by using them as America's military "arms" can be effected. It is no accident that the number of blacks in the armed forces rises in direct relation to declining rates of black employment and economic parity.

<sup>13</sup> According to Dyer, the representations of Robeson in the various stereotypes of a racist culture helped to contain his significantly large statured image, "placing [him] in the same positions as women typically occupy" (*Heavenly Bodies*, 117). In this way, a potentially threatening--because of its masculine power--image of the black male was neutralized through objectification.

<sup>14</sup> See, for instance, William Wells Brown's *Clotel*, or *A President's Daughter*, Charles Chesnutt's *The House Behind the Cedars*, Nella Larsen's *Passing* and *Quicksand*, Jessie Fauset's *Plum Bun*, and Walter White's *Flight*.

<sup>15</sup> Both George Schuyler's *Black No More* and Mark Twain's *Pudd'n'Head Wilson* explore the fallacy underlying the very notion of race in American culture. In Schuyler's novel, for instance, a black man discovers a chemical formula that turns black skin white. Once the majority of blacks becomes "white," a new product is made that enhances the darkening of white skin so that Caucasians may reconstruct a cultural hegemony that now privileges darker skin. Schuyler's satirical farce thus depicts the arbitrary construction of race as a vehicle for cultural hierarchies, undercutting the notion that color itself carries an essential meaning.

<sup>16</sup> While my focus on blackness as a signifier of race is a problematic reinscription of the invisibility of other racial

categories (such as Native American or Asian), it occurs in part because blacks have forged the most visible and potentially radical critique of American racial relations. Subsequent studies drawing on this methodology will be important in determining the ways in which representations of other racial difference either refine or refute my analysis here.

<sup>17</sup> I am not discounting the power and unity brought to the Civil Rights movement by King. But as Reed writes,

It is apparent now that the egalitarian ideology coincided with corporate-liberalism's cultural program of homogenization. . . . The development of black activism . . . assisted the development of a new mode of domination based on domesticating negativity by organizing spaces in which it could be legitimately expressed . . . To the extent that organization strives to ground itself on the mass it is already integrated into the system of domination . . . In short, opposition increasingly becomes a spectacle in a society organized around reduction of all existence to a series of spectacles. (71, 77, 78).

<sup>18</sup> Like the post-Civil War period of a century ago, the present reconstruction of social tensions is, in effect, a recontainment; certain seemingly representative voices gain an audience in American culture while the hierarchical relations of gender, race, ethnicity and class are mediated through the new social rhetoric, adjusted but not dislodged as the basic categories of difference sustaining this culture. Those who achieve greater access to the benefits of a materialist culture--women and people of color who enter the middle classes as emblems of this social equality--are the token representatives of the new order, often the same people who view their successes as individually motivated and not the products of a culture negotiating internal dissent. The fallacy of a new cultural pluralism is evident everywhere: in the decline of black enrollment in colleges across the nation, the increase in nonwhite poverty and unemployment, the loss of social welfare programs for the poor, the burgeoning numbers of the homeless, the growing membership of white supremacist groups, and the increasing inaccessibility of health care, including abortion, for women. Such instances of exclusion, of radical dispossession are hardly indicators of a society that has confronted and overcome the old orthodoxy of white/male power.

But the strength and cultural attractiveness of the belief in a transcendent America is not simply that it veils the material relations at work in contemporary culture, allowing us the easy assumption that democracy has finally been achieved, but that through this posture the discourses of dissent, particularly those of black power and feminism, can be rendered obsolete, no longer pertinent to the needs of our society. As Allan Bloom asserts, "[t]here is very little ideology or militant feminism in most of the women [in college today], because they do not need it . . . the battle here has been won" (107); and of black studies programs, he writes, "[they] largely

failed because what was serious in them did not interest the students, and the rest was unprofitable hokum" (95). The myth that feminist and black discourses have been incorporated into the American cultural consciousness as a belief in innate equality becomes, ironically, the vehicle for discarding the very discourses that struggled against the barriers of segregation and sexism; in this way, the reconstruction project of the contemporary era can have its cake, the satisfying belief in egalitarian achievement, and eat it too, cannibalizing the voices of dissent in a massive recuperation of the twentieth century's most radical period of social challenge.

<sup>19</sup> In defining the Huxtable family's class status as part of the racial egalitarianism of American culture--and significantly as something "earned"--*The Cosby Show* casts equality in economic terms, an hegemonic sleight-of-hand epitomized by an episode in which Cliff's father delivers a quote from Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech in which the Constitution is referred to as a "promissory note to which every American was to fall heir." This construction of race through the economic metaphor invokes a seemingly "new" portrait of American culture, one that masks the historical and present position of black people, creating a 1980s type of minstrel where blackness is only the latest face in the unending spectacle of difference that represses the hierarchical structure of the social order.

<sup>20</sup> I do not mean to suggest here that representation imposes an inescapable rigidity. My concern is with how the binary structure reflects larger social arrangements and how representation functions as a cultural product and not simply as a neutral or separate process. Because it is culturally scripted, representation offers a space for ideological production. While that space can be transformed into a disruption of hegemonic assumptions, representation never exist outside of ideology--or outside the negotiations of difference.

<sup>21</sup> For this reason, we should view the conservative character of contemporary America not as the product of a rejuvenated moral/religious tradition, but as a consequence of the ongoing struggle of the white patriarchal system to heal rifts created by threats to its power, particularly those of the 1960s: feminist, anti-war, leftist/labor, and Civil Rights. By depicting the conservative retrenchment as a retapping of the source and soul of the democratic ethos, the white masculine position can be recuperated and transformed into the site of democratic enunciations. This trope of displacement is evident in current representations of Vietnam veterans, the modern victims of the unknown power system of American society, as well as the variety of "new men" presently dominating American television, figures such as Cliff Huxtable (*The Cosby Show*), Michael Kuzak (*LA Law*), Jack Morrison (*St. Elsewhere*) and Alex Keaton (*Family Ties*). While there are clear differences between these characters, their representation is grounded in a denial of male

participation in the hegemony, hence a denial of the masculine as a social construction of power.

The story line revolving around the rape of intern Jack Morrison on *St. Elsewhere* is indicative of this process where gender is obfuscated in an attempt to redefine cultural oppression as something that happens, particularly in contemporary American society, to white men. The focus on male rape reconstructs the historically gendered system of sexual violence by making it appear to be transgender; claims to women's specific victimization can be dismissed. As in Richard Wright's *Native Son*, which will be discussed in Chapter 2, rape can now be defined as "not what one did to women. Rape was what one felt when one's back was against a wall. . ." (214). The elision of gender aids the recovery of the masculine position by making previously gender-specific violence appear to be aspects of a society out of control, a society that now more than ever needs the masculine to prevent the victimization of those once seen as the benefactors of hierarchical structures.

"A Spectacle of Fidelity":  
Gender, Race and the Interracial Male Bond

As master and man stood before him, the black upholding the white, Captain Delano could not but bethink him of the beauty of that relationship which could present such a spectacle of fidelity on the one hand and confidence on the other.

--Herman Melville, *Benito Cereno*

Embedded in Captain Delano's distinctly American look at the figures of Spaniard Benito Cereno and his African cargo, Babo, are the traditional assumptions of the mythology of the interracial male bond; continually cast as locus of fraternity, the bond presents the spectacle of fidelity even in the face of hierarchies that separate master from man. The real beauty of Delano's perception lies in his ability to inscribe the scene of differences among men as the site for the affirmation of a stable economy. Such a reification is necessary to the perpetuation of the masculine position for, as Delano's wistful interpretation makes clear, the male bond depends on

the deferral of difference, a deferral enunciated from the white masculine point of view<sup>1</sup> where "the black upholding the white" can be recast as the epitome of confidence and fidelity. Such a presentation allows the male bond to function as construction site of "classless, raceless possibility" (Baker, 65) by superficially "healing" the space of difference among men. Its continual depiction, from classic American literature (*The Deerslayer*, *Moby Dick*, *Huckleberry Finn*) to popular forms (*I Spy*, *The A Team*, *The Defiant Ones* (Dir. Stanley Kramer), *Shoot to Kill* (Dir. Robert Spottiswoode)), indicates not a simple obsession with male friendship but a broader representational pattern in which the mythos of the interracial male bond serves to reiterate a normative masculine perspective.

The ideological feat of the mythology of the male bond is the representation of it as somehow culturally innocent, existing outside of the very structures of difference that intersect to maintain it. For this reason, the bond is frequently depicted beyond the reaches of civilization, on ships, in forests, on deserted islands, across long empty prairies--all those places Huck was seeking when he lit out with Jim for the territory. But no matter how far the male couple goes, it still cannot escape--because it is ideologically dependent upon--the figure of that other whose presence can be burdensome, castrating, reaffirming: anything, as long as it is also always returning like the *Rachel* to pull male survivors from the sea. As the most stable feature of the male bond, gender--either the image of woman or the evocation of the "feminine" space of otherness--gives

the bond its cultural power, providing a seemingly "essential" difference against which the masculine can define itself. This "essence" of difference guarantees that the space of difference within the bond, its internal hierarchies of race, sexuality, class, and ethnicity, are diffused in the affirmation of masculine wholeness.

In order to investigate the bond's structural relation to both gender and race, this chapter analyzes four texts, "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids" (1855), *Benito Cereno* (1855), *Native Son* (1940) and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962), demonstrating not only the changing shape of difference within the male bond but also how its mythology works to recuperate potential disruption by articulating relations among men across the discourses of gender and race. While Melville's paradisiacal male bond features no interracial configuration, his diptych is important in establishing the ideological assumptions constructing the bond, particularly how these assumptions position women and the feminine; by moving from the diptych to *Benito Cereno*, the dynamics of race are explored in their relationship to the masculine mythology of democratic fraternity, providing the context for considering the negotiation of masculine hegemony in nineteenth century cultural production. By concluding with analyses of two twentieth century works, the chapter charts the historical relationship between the representation of the interracial male bond and cultural hegemony, investigating not only the confederacy between the mythology of the male bond and the white masculine point of view that structures it

but the literary tradition defined by such all male fraternities, not to claim their disruption of patriarchal power, or to cite their complicity with it, but to understand how the male bond functions as both a product and a process of American culture.

Perhaps more than any other writer, Herman Melville has been perceived as *the* American master of male bonding narratives, a writer devoted to its sentimental rendering of life among men. But while his work is often constructed around a male couple or fraternity, Melville's depiction of the bonding scenario cannot be read as simple affirmation, especially his explorations of 1855, "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids" and *Benito Cereno*.<sup>2</sup> Written consecutively, these pieces record a Melville far more skeptical of the bond than in his earlier novels where, for instance, Ishmael and Queequeg sleep "in our hearts' honeymoon . . . a cosy, loving pair" (*Moby Dick*, 54). In a nation heading toward Civil War, with a dawning Women's Rights Movement and hastening industrialization, the image of the loving interracial male couple, as Melville must have realized, seems wholly out of place. While we have no "proof" of Melville's desire to beg the question of the interracial male bond's mythology of "abounding, affectionate, friendly, loving feeling" (*Moby Dick*, 348), his critiques of its underlying ideological assumptions occupy an important moment in nineteenth-century American cultural production, foregrounding the tensions of a social order fond of portraying itself as standard of democracy for the world.



Melville exposes the function of the bond as the reiteration of the masculine point of view in "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids," creating, as he often does, an unreliable narrator, one whose attraction to the "banded" bachelors insures his complicity in the structures of difference governing Paradise.<sup>3</sup> While Richard Fogle describes Paradise as "the highest art" (46), Melville's subterranean manipulation of the narrative voice yields an indictment of the bachelor's intellectual and moral bankruptcy, preventing any simple equation of the narrator's perspective with Melville's own. By exploring the world of female sacrifice and re/production that underlies the male bond, Melville critiques the structure of Paradise: its predication on a privileged masculine point of view that veils its exclusionary nature through the mythos of the democratic equality of the male bond. Only in considering the narrator's capitulation to the bond's mythos can the difficulties in decoding the symbolic layers of the diptych be resolved, for it is the romance of men without women that most clearly prevents the narrator from deciphering the geography of his own discourse.

In his acceptance of the male bond as the epitome of democracy and equality, the narrator fails to interpret the ideological implications of his own description of Paradise and Tartarus as "counterpart[s]" (214). While they are indeed counters to one another--on one side exists the masculine, symbolized by the repressed homosexuality of Paradise, and on the other is the feminine, marked by the nightmare geography of compulsory heterosexuality--they fail to reflect their opposites equally;

instead they duplicate a singular representational economy--the economy of gender in which women's difference is constructed by and subsumed into the masculine. Collapsing the seemingly parallel and separate universes of Paradise and Tartarus into one another, Melville's diptych reveals not only the male bond's structural reliance on images of compulsory heterosexuality and female re/production but the function of the heterosexual to veil the underlying homosexual economy of the male bond. In penetrating this veil of the heterosexual, the *hommo* exposes itself as already there, as the crucial structure of both the male bond and masculine hegemonic power.

It is no accident that Melville's exploration of the seemingly segregated spheres of gender arises when American society itself was becoming increasingly stratified along gender lines but as a result of the expanding industrial economy. His analysis of the transformation of women's role from compulsory reproduction to factory production demonstrates the cultural process of the mid-nineteenth century: given the changing dynamics of the marketplace, women's participation in the labor force--as well as their more general social movement for suffrage and equal rights--necessitated both ideological and economic recuperation by the masculine. Women's difference as a biological "fact" was reconstituted as a class distinction, their labor tied to new structures of masculine control. Melville's skepticism toward this changing gender economy is apparent in his depiction of the female world as "Tartarus," a man-made living hell, a world where women's labor constructs the privileged space of

the masculine Paradise. Through his narrator's obsession with Paradise, Melville depicts the recuperative potential of the mythology of the male bond, exposing gender--women's reproduction and production--as its repressed assumption, an assumption that provides the means for its representation as "the highest art."

The narrator's relationship to his own discourse is a problematic one because of his inability to decode its symbolic levels; when he describes the road to Paradise, for instance, he is unaware of its metaphoric enactment of anal sexuality:<sup>4</sup>

you adroitly turn a mystic corner--not a street--glide down a dim, monastic way, flanked by dark, sedate and solemn piles, and still wending on, give the whole care-worn world the slip, and disentangled, stand beneath the great cloisters of the Paradise of Bachelors. (202)

As the symbolic language of the male homosexual act, the narrator's description establishes desire for the masculine as the preeminent rule of Paradise, a desire distinctly in contrast to the "care-worn world" where the Benedick tradesmen, "with ledgerlines ruled along their brows, [contemplate the]. . . rise of bread and fall of babies" (202). Unlike the tradesmen, who are ruled both by the market place and the social heterosexual imperative, the bachelors "had no wives or children to give an anxious thought" (209).<sup>5</sup> In opposing the homoeroticism of Paradise to monogamous heterosexuality, the diptych quickly establishes a fundamental distinction of the male bond: cast as site of masculine freedom, it exists outside of society, apart

from women and children, those who can most threaten the solidarity of male companionship. Defined in such a way, the bond depicts itself as culturally innocent, a "natural" formation, not a gendered structure crucial to the cultural construction of difference.

Within its privileged space, and contrary to its democratic ethos, the male bond is predicated on class hierarchy, a structure of difference repressed by the spectacle of commodification and consumption that governs Paradise. As the narrator is drawn to the leisure of the bachelor world--where one can "[i]n mild meditation pace the cloisters; take your pleasure, sip your leisure, in the garden waterward; go linger in the ancient library; go worship in the sculptured chapel" (202-3)--it is the bachelors' elaborate feast that most fully captures his attention and admiration. As he tells us, "nothing do you know . . . till you dine among the banded Bachelors and see their convivial eyes and glasses sparkle. Not dine in bustling commons . . . but tranquilly, by private hint, at a private table; some fine Templar's hospitably invited guest" (203). While the narrator is momentarily aware of their consumption as a "moral blight"--"the worm of luxury crawled beneath their guard . . . and the sworn knights-bachelors grew to be but hypocrits and rakes" (203)--he is able to confirm that "the Templar's fall has but made him all the finer fellow" (204). Inscribing the scene of men together as locus of conviviality, the narrator invokes the mythology of the male bond, healing potential disruptions caused by an awareness of the hierarchical construction of Paradise.

The narrator's partnership in the bachelors' corruption, his

repression of the sources of their leisure and subsequent absorption of their class values, is depicted best by his (mis)perception of the waiter, whom he ironically names Socrates:

All these manoeuvrings of the forces were superintended by a surprising old field-marshal (I can not school myself to call him by the inglorious name of waiter), with snowy hair and napkin, and a head like Socrates. Amidst all the hilarity of the feast, intent on important business, he disdained to smile. Venerable man! (207)

While the narrator wants to read the waiter's demeanor simply as a refusal to participate in the "hilarity" of the dinner, it is "Socrates'" exclusion from the paradisiacal male bond that actually constructs his silence, an exclusion predicated on class difference. When the narrator writes, "I am quite sure, from the scrupulous gravity and austerity of his air, that had Socrates, the field-marshal, perceived aught of indecorum in the company he served, he would have forthwith departed without giving warning" (208), he portrays his misunderstanding of "Socrates'" loyalty and the economic necessity governing the waiter's servitude. "What the narrator mistakes for Socrates' decorum," Ray Browne writes, "is actually disgust" (223).

As the representative of the invisible servant class that upholds the bachelor Paradise, Socrates, recalling Plato's Symposium, also functions to undermine the narrator's depiction of the intellectual atmosphere of the gathering. This silent philosopher represents a tradition of inquiry absent from the "Senate of the

Bachelors"; their conversation results only in emotional and philosophical sterility:

Pain! Trouble! As well as talk of Catholic miracles. No such thing.--Pass the sherry, Sir.--Pooh, pooh! Can't be!--The port, Sir, if you please. Nonsense; don't tell me so.--The decanter stops with you, Sir, I believe. (209)

Obsessed with oral gratifications, this world replicates the tradition of the Symposium but without its philosophical debate; the key intellectual figure is now reduced to silence and subservience. While Marvin Fisher correctly asserts that Socrates "asks no irritating questions, leads men to no unseen truths," he misreads the class implications of Melville's critique by contending that this ironic philosopher "helps them to lose themselves, rather than know themselves, by supplying an endless array of bottles" (75). The agency of the bachelor's corruption cannot be displaced onto the servant class, for, as Carolyn Karcher has noted, Paradise's existence is based on the labor of this anonymous populace (*Shadow*, 124). In describing Paradise as "the very perfection of quiet absorption of good living, good drinking, good feeling, and good talk. We were a band of brothers" (209), the narrator invokes the mythology of the male bond, repressing the hierarchical systems constructing such democratic fraternities.<sup>6</sup>

For the narrator, the height of the bachelors' brotherhood is expressed in the ritualistic consumption of the Jericho Horn. Rich in metaphors of the morphology of the male body, the horn serves as the vehicle for the bachelors's sexual rite, their 'consummation' of

brotherly conviviality. Passing it around the table, each man inserts "his thumb and forefinger into its mouth," thereby taking snuff, the symbolic aromatic sperm to the "noble main horn" (209). The narrator responds to this ritual with delight--"Capital idea this, thought I" (209)--and as the evening begins to break up, he admits, "I was the last lingerer" (210). While the phallic connotations of this ritual are unacknowledged by the narrator, they clearly develop the homosexual metaphor that fashions the first half of the diptych. According to Robert Martin, this metaphoric consummation indicts the bachelors for "[d]e-eroticizing their homosexual selves" (106), transforming homosexual love "into homosocial 'fraternity' with its implicit misogyny" (105). But, while patriarchy uses the taboo against homosexuality to maintain its heterosexual veil, the taboo obscures the homosexual nature of patriarchal relations. Martin's view of men's physical love for one another "with its potential for the realization of divine beauty" (105) merely reenacts the mythology of the male bond on its most literal level, providing no lens for discussing the patriarchal oppression of women.<sup>7</sup>

Melville's metaphoric use of the male body links, structurally, both the homosexual and the homosocial as manifestations of the (same) masculine position by emphasizing the patriarchal obsession with 'the seen'--that which visibly marks difference. By foregrounding the male body, various kinds of internal differences among men can be seemingly assuaged in the affirmation of gender sameness. Women, who clearly lack the visual attribute of power, are

always already situated outside the bond; their lack establishes the necessary space for the construction of the masculine, for the female articulates, as Irigaray says, "[t]he negative, the underside, the reverse of the only visible and morphologically designatable sex organ . . . the penis" (26). In this economy of the visible, the male body can come to stand for a universal masculine perspective, one that superficially transmutes class, race and sexual differences between men, but only superficially, for, as Melville's bachelors indicate, only from the hegemonic perspective of the wealthy bachelors can Socrates's secondary status in a class hierarchy be seemingly denied. Subsumed in the specter of the phallus, the masculine representational economy heals its internal disruptions, reiterating itself as a homogenous, universalized construction.

Given the narrator's absorption in the pleasures of the all male Paradise, it is no accident that when he turns to Tartarus he encounters the landscape of a specifically grotesque female body, one that elicits in him castration fear.<sup>8</sup> Moving from "bright farms" to "bleak hills" (210), the narrator penetrates--in the masculine imaginary of heterosexual intercourse--a "Dantean gateway," a dark hellish entrance into the vagina. His metaphoric contact with the female body makes him imagine the past phallic power of his surroundings, those "primitive times when vast pines and hemlocks superabounded throughout the neighboring region." But now, "[b]rITTLE with excessive frost, many colossal tough-grained maples, snapped in twain like pipe-stems, cumbered the unfeeling earth"



(212). His stark description of the alabaster world of female labor, the flip side of the Edenic bachelor temple, defines the female body as both castrated and castrating; her body is responsible for the symbolic death associated with masculine entry into the heterosexual, a death that can only be overcome, as we shall see, through the reconstitution of the male bond.

Revealing himself to be a seedsman who has planted "through all the Eastern and Northern States" (211), the narrator is the symbolic semen in this grim, castrating female landscape; significantly, his first words in Tartarus are a metaphoric penetration: "is there no shed hereabouts which I may drive into?" (214). In this heterosexual economy, women, like sheds, function as sheaths for the phallus, the colonized space of masculine desire. As the narrator's description of the women's role in the factory process demonstrates, the heterosexual is simply another veil for the *hommo*.

In one corner stood some huge frame of ponderous iron, with a vertical thing like a piston periodically rising and falling. . . . Before it--its tame minister--stood a tall girl, feeding the iron animal with half-quires of rose-hued note paper, which, at every downward dab of the piston-like machine, received in the corner the impress of a wreath of roses. (215)

In their subservience to the "piston-like machine," the women bear the stamp of the phallus, the wreath of roses--classic image of romance linked now with death--connecting the heterosexual with the loss of life and self. Without their own master signifier, women can

only enter the representational system through a phallicizing process that first affirms their castration and then forces them to wear the mark of it by becoming symbols of the phallus itself. In Tartarus, the women's very blankness is symptomatic of their inability to be represented except as/by the phallic, making them the tame ministers to the expansion of a masculine economy.

The heterosexual as a veiled version of the *homo* is enacted not only through the factory women but by the paper making process itself. Requiring only a miraculous nine minutes, the paper is made through a symbolic replication of human gestation, prompting Michael Paul Rogin to see the mechanization as "monstrous, sexual, maternal" (204). But, as Cupid shows the narrator, the paper begins not in the female rag room but in the symbolic male body, "two great round vats . . . full of white, wet, wooly-looking stuff" (218). It pours "from both vats into that one common channel yonder, and so goes, mixed up and leisurely, to the great machine," a colossal structure housed in a room "stifling with a strange, blood-like, abdominal heat" (218). There, the paper "drops" from the machine "as of some cord being snapped" (220), completing the mechanical reproduction of the heterosexual as a replication of the asymmetry of gender: the male creates, the female--sheath for the phallus--incubates.<sup>9</sup> The two halves of Melville's diptych thus exist as gendered evocations of a singular economy; what initially appear as separate male and female worlds are in fact the product of the same masculine point of view, one that constructs democracy and equality only in the privileged space of a masculine paradise.

Through the male bond, the narrator negotiates Tartarus without fully recognizing its cultural implications--even though, in contrast to his decidedly un insightful passage through Paradise, he has moments of connection. As he says early on, "Machinery--that vaunted slave of humanity--here stood menially served by human beings . . . The girls did not so much seem accessory wheels to the general machinery as mere cogs to the wheels" (215-16). But in his initial confrontation with a mill girl, whose face is so shockingly "pale with work, and blue with cold," he seeks refuge in the social intercourse he knows best: "is there no man about?" (214), he asks. Rescued for the first of three times by one of the two men in the factory world, the narrator maintains his masculinely constructed point of view, a critical perspective that fails to account for the "strange emotion" that overtakes him in Tartarus. While he notices the women's "agony dimly outlined on the imperfect paper," his awareness is short-lived as Cupid, "with the protecting air of a careful father" (221), rushes him outside. This male-aided escape allows the narrator to reconstruct the scene so that he can tell Old Bach, foreman and significantly the "principal proprietor," that "Yours is a most wonderful factory. Your great machine is a miracle of inscrutable intricacy" (222).

Where class distinctions might pose a separation or distance between the men in Tartarus, the visibility of the factory women's difference functions as mediation between the narrator and Old Bach, healing their own potential differences and establishing the necessary "norm" from which the masculine can continue to construct

itself. Through his capitulation to the male bond, the narrator smooths over potential disruptions caused by class differences between himself and the men. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick writes, "in the presence of a woman who can be seen as pitiable or contemptible, men are able to exchange power and to confirm each other's value even in the context of the remaining inequalities in their power" (160). As Melville's diptych reveals, hierarchical structures are necessary to the perpetuation of the male bond; articulated from a privileged masculine point of view, the male bond functions as the recuperatory site of social tensions. Bonding with Cupid and Old Bach--the only bonding to take place in Tartarus--guarantees the narrator's denial of the hierarchical structures implicit in Paradise and Tartarus, enabling him to lend his economic approval to female oppression by purchasing the symbolic children of their labors, the envelopes.

The purchase of these envelopes--to be "stamped, and superscribed with the nature of the seeds contained" (211-212)--presents the products of the "heterosexual" economy as ones specifically owned and circulated by men. This means the narrator can claim the production--and reproduction--of the female body as his own, for within such a circuit, woman's labors are exchanged as commodities, the production of her body bereft of value unless superscribed by the masculine. The commodification of her labor thus marks her body as his territory, the ground for his insemination and consumption. As the narrator looks at the piles of paper "dropping, dropping, dropping" from the machine, he thinks of how "[a]ll sorts of writings would be writ on those now vacant things--sermons,

lawyer's briefs, physician's prescriptions, love-letters, marriage certificates, bills of divorce, registers of birth, death-warrants, and so on, without end" (220). Indeed all social discourse will be written on the blank pages of female labor. In this way, the male bond articulates a system of exchange through the heterosexual imperative that represses its reliance on the biological and economic reproduction of the female body<sup>10</sup> and, significantly, enables hierarchies among men to be negotiated into the appearance of masculine solidarity. The narrative ordering of the diptych foregrounds this structural relationship, for differences within the masculine precede their unification against the presence of woman.

While women's exclusion operates as the male bond's basic ideological assumption, Melville's diptych is particularly important in capturing the changing patriarchal economy of the nineteenth-century, its transformation of women's labor from compulsory reproduction to factory production. Contrary to previous feminist descriptions of the period as a "feminization," the nineteenth century was engaged in a massive cultural negotiation whereby the further segregation and fragmentation of gender roles eased the tensions caused by women's participation in the labor force. As Melville demonstrates, the emerging industrial economy transformed the compulsory nature of women's reproduction in the patriarchal family into the symbol system for articulating her new relation to capitalism. By constituting women's difference as a class oppression, the full range of women's labor could be tied to an economic system in which their bodies served as commodities in a

circuit of exchange defined by men. As such, the major trope of the patriarchal family--the colonization of women's reproduction in the name of the Father--was enacted in the factory, in the large scale production of commodities; women's labor thus became not only the essential though invisible support of the family but the underlying assumption of the economy as well. In articulating the connection between reproduction and production, Melville's depiction of the changing configuration of gender at mid-century isolates a broader pattern in American culture, one that had begun in the first moments of industrialization--and one whose legacy remains with us today.

In "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids," Melville not only undercuts the narrator's idealization of the bachelor world by exposing its reliance on gender and class, he also makes a gesture towards race as a hierarchical structure necessary to the maintenance of the male bond. The narrator's description of the "cloisters" of Paradise symbolically connects it with the American system of slavery by recalling southern gentility:

Dear, delightful spot! Ah! when I bethink me of the sweet hours there passed, enjoying such genial hospitalities beneath those time-honored roofs, my heart only finds due utterance through poetry; and, with a sigh, I softly sing, "Carry me back to old Virginny!" (205)

Evoking the "southern plantation idyll, with its images of carefree hosts, hospitable mansions, and convivial gatherings" (Karcher, *Shadow*, 122), the narrator's description links paradise with "old

Virginny," staunch supporter of the Peculiar Institution. Through such a suggestion, the diptych captures the ideological compatibility of the class and slave systems, their necessary repression for the maintenance of both the male bond and the representation of America as democratic possibility.

But it is in *Benito Cereno*, the piece Melville wrote immediately after the diptych, that he develops the full implications of race as a hierarchical structure transmuted through the mythology of the male bond. Grounded in the context of pre-Civil War America, Melville's exploration of violent slave revolt hinges, like "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids," on an unreliable point of view, one that capitulates to the bond's mythology of fidelity and fraternity. Crafting *Benito Cereno* around the perspective of Amasa Delano, whose interpretation of the activities aboard the *San Dominick* are filtered through his American innocence--what Marvin Fisher calls his "carefree bachelor approach" (114)--Melville explores America's inability to confront its own dark shadow, slavery.<sup>11</sup> Significantly, Delano's ship, which comes to the aid of the revolting *San Dominick*, is named *Bachelor's Delight*, recalling the tradition of Paradise and its depiction of the men together as site of a privileged white masculine freedom. This intertextual connection allows us to extend our analysis of the ideological configuration of the male bond to America's most codified system of oppression, race.

While it is based on the 1805 revolt of the Spanish *Tryal*, Melville's story speaks directly to the cultural tensions of mid-

nineteenth century America, a nation bound on one hand to its policy of manifest destiny but heading on the other for its own rupture over the consequences of internal colonization and slavery. As Eric J. Sundquist describes, "Melville's tale brings into view the convulsive history of the entire region and epoch--from the Columbian discovery of the Americas, through the democratic revolutions in the United States, Haiti, and Latin America, to the contemporary crisis over the expansion of the "Slave Power" in the United States" (94). In particular, the story foregrounds and critiques the hegemonic perspective governing American racial politics where the belief in and reiteration of the democratic impulse of American culture is contradicted by the continued existence of slavery. The vehicle for Delano's misreading of the misty waters surrounding the *San Dominick* is the mythology of the male bond, the hegemonic structure from which American culture can represent itself as site of freedom even, as the founding fathers knew, when "We the People" is only partially representative of the "united" states.

Delano's first impression of Benito Cereno, captain of the flailing *San Dominick*, and his African servant, Babo, replicates the paternalistic mythology of nineteenth-century race relations by couching the black as the happy, devoted minister to his benevolent master:

Sometimes the negro gave his master his arm, or took his handkerchief out of his pocket for him; performing these and similar offices with that affectionate zeal which tran smutes into something filial or fraternal acts in



themselves but menial; and which has gained for the negro the repute of making the most pleasing body-servant in the world; one, too, whom a master need be on no stiffly superior terms with, but may treat with familiar trust: less a servant than a devoted companion. (245)

Such a representation glides over the potential for social chaos by casting the image of master and servant in terms of a natural fraternity, as if the social order itself is fundamentally stable not simply in spite of but *because* of its internal hierarchy. As George M. Fredrickson discusses, by the 1850s pro-slavery apostles had developed arguments that slavery itself was a "positive good," providing a system of control for an inferior race and preventing violence by reining black "despotism" into the paternalistic Christian structure (59). Implicit in such an argument is the assumption that the slave system engendered fraternity between master and servant, creating the foundation for a black equality "comparable with [that of] white" (Fredrickson, 62).

While Delano's attitude toward slavery cannot be fully equated with pro-slavery sentiment, Melville is clearly depicting his symbolic American as a man stranded between slavery and its abolition, stranded in a sense between democratic rhetoric and the country's fundamental economic and cultural reliance on slavery as an institutionalized construction of difference. As Sundquist writes, Delano "speaks both for the founding fathers, who sanctioned slavery even as they recognized its contradiction . . . and the contemporary northern accommodationists, who too much feared sectional strife and

economic turmoil to bring to the surface of consciousness a full recognition of slavery's ugliness in fact and in principle" (103). Delano's repression of this ugliness takes the form of "a singularly undistrustful good-nature" which, Melville writes, prevents any "imputation of malign evil in man" (239). In cloaking his perception of the consequences of slavery by inscribing his own vision of good will and benevolence, Delano is able to cast the scenes aboard the *San Dominick* in terms of a "natural" relation between slaves and master. Even when he begins to become suspicious of the activities of Cereno and Babo, he uses his confidence in Nature to overcome his own discomfort. The sight of slumbering African women and their children, for instance, becomes Delano's vehicle for affirming: "There's naked nature, now; pure tenderness and love . . . These natural sights somehow insensibly deepened his confidence and ease" (268). Here, significantly, his capitulation to an essential gender difference masks the ugliness of slavery by reconstructing hierarchy as nature.<sup>12</sup>

At the heart of this ideal of fraternity, even democracy, in the master/slave bond lies the image of Sambo, the faithful black servant whose inherent deficiencies are somehow overcome--controlled--by his close contact with superior blood. As part of the ethics of a "positive good," this attitude is demonstrated by Delano's perception of the mulatto servant Francesco, whose pleasant attendance to his master is the consequence of mixed blood. As Delano tells Cereno: "For, it were strange, indeed, and not very creditable to us white-skins, if a little of our blood mixed with the African's, should . .

. have the sad effect of pouring vitriolic acid into black broth; improving the hue, perhaps, but not the wholesomeness" (284).<sup>13</sup> The spectacle of whiteness, whether in "untainted" breeding or through a "hybrid," allows Delano to draw everything he witnesses into his own perspective, one that defines whiteness as a natural site of privilege and social power. His attitude corresponds to nineteenth-century views, both North and South, that blacks were physically, intellectually and temperamentally different from whites, their difference the result of inferiority (see Fredrickson, 312). In his representation as the symbolic American racial "mind," Delano finds that most blacks make "natural valets and hair-dressers," bear "the great gift of good humor . . . as though God had set . . . [them] to some pleasant tune," and remain docile "from the unaspiring contentment of a limited mind" (278-9). Cast in such terms, negroes represent "an old weakness" for the American captain, "just as other men [take] to Newfoundland dogs" (279).

By appealing to American sentimentalization of the master/ slave relationship, Babo and his partner, Atufal, construct an elaborate play of revenge that presents the spectacle--the appearance and not the reality--of order and stability, manipulating Delano's expectation of black servitude and white rule by foregrounding it. "As master and man stood before him, the black upholding the white, Captain Delano could not but bethink him of the beauty of that relationship which could present such a spectacle of fidelity on the one hand and confidence on the other" (250). Casting the relationship between black and white men in terms of fidelity and

confidence, Delano constructs an ideological sleight-of-hand reminiscent of Melville's narrator through Paradise and Tartarus; both reinscribe the scene of differences among men as the epitome of cultural equilibrium, diffusing obvious social hierarchies by relying on the specular representation of masculine fraternity. This fraternity, as Babo already knew, acts as a decoy for the more problematical construction of a racist "democratic" culture; in simulating it--through the mythology of the interracial male bond--Babo can control the American captain's perception of the distressed *San Dominick*. It is ironic that Babo's vehicle for cloaking slave revolt is the very mythos that represents blacks as intellectually inferior, as docile Uncle Toms devoted to their masters' needs, for, as Melville writes at the end of the story, it was Babo's "brain, not body, [that] had schemed and led the revolt," his "hive of subtlety" that crafted the masquerade of the loyal servant.<sup>14</sup>

Delano's wish-fulfilling invocation of a natural and congenial bond between master and slave--like the relationship between man and dog--insures his continual misinterpretation of the signs of revolt surrounding the *San Dominick*. By believing that "[t]he best account [of the ship's mishaps] would, doubtless, be given by the captain" (247), Delano's maintains a belief in the power of the dominant point of view to explain "the true character of the vessel" (240), to provide a universal and ideologically pure perspective. In reality, Delano anticipates the return of a hegemonic voice that can heal the scene of violence by reinforcing its own structure--the structure from which the incidents on the slave ship have been created.

Positioned as the symbolic American who awaits an answer to the intricate knot of slavery, Delano looks to the dominant group for a solution that can be little more than a strategic recuperation of the hegemony. "[H]e strove," Melville writes, "by ignoring the symptoms, to get rid of the malady" (271). Indeed, the "resolution" of the narrative succeeds only in creating a new spectacle out of the events aboard the *San Dominick*, destroying the leader of the revolt by fire and mounting his head on a pole in the plaza where its eternal muteness can represent the power of American intervention to restore order, to momentarily and superficially heal the malady without recognizing its continuing symptoms.

In a larger sense, of course, this ending ironically and pathetically demonstrates the inevitability of violence and cultural disruption in the struggle over slavery, pointing to the American's inability to learn from even this first-hand descent into the revolting *San Dominick*. As Delano tells Cereno in their "cordial conversations" following Babo's attack on the Spaniard, "the past is passed; why moralize upon it? Forget it. See, yon bright sun has forgotten it all, and the blue sea, and the blue sky; these have turned over new leaves" (314). But Cereno has witnessed his own slavery and the knowledge of the hatred that waits beneath the mask of fidelity between black and white men, a hatred so deep and terrifying "the Spaniard's melancholy sometimes ended in muteness" (314). The mutual silence at story's end of Benito Cereno and his captive and captor, Babo, is linked to the silence of Socrates and the factory women in "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of

Maids," a silence borne from oppression. In both stories, the only voice remaining at the close of the text is the white masculine point of view, a perspective of dominance that refuses awareness of the hierarchical structures--race, class and gender--through which it constructs and maintains itself.<sup>15</sup>

It is difficult to say what exactly happened to Melville to account for the change in his depiction of the male bond from "that matrimonial sort of style" (*Moby Dick*, 33-4) in 1850 to "a dark satyr in a mask, holding his foot on the prostrate neck of a writhing figure, likewise masked" (*Benito Cereno*, 241) in 1855. But the evidence of America's growing fracture over race at the same time it extended itself in a gesture of "brotherhood" to countries throughout the world suggests that the mythos of "the loving male couple" could no longer be sustained, not even by a writer who had previously seemed to celebrate the "monkey rope" linking together white and dark men. Although other writers would continue to cast black and white in the paternalistic mythology of confidence and fidelity, Melville's work of the middle years of the 1850s explains the construction of the male bond not only as a hegemonic structure but as a "spectacle," an image that represents more of an ideological illusion than the reality of American culture.

The image Melville presents of the violence beneath the veil of American interracial fraternity is often thought to culminate in the Civil War where "brother" fought "brother" in a tragic struggle over

the innate rights of man. But the emancipation of five million slaves was neither a wide-spread cultural recognition of black humanity nor the proud achievement of the democratic ethos. As the post-war period's reconstruction of white superiority through the Ku Klux Klan and mob violence make clear, the transformation from slavery to "freedom" was marked by a simultaneous disruption and reconstitution of cultural hierarchies, a recuperation of hegemonic power enacted chiefly through white terrorism. The rise of black lynchings in the years following the war--10,000 by 1895 according to one source (Wells, 8)--is indicative of a broader American attitude toward black entrance into the cultural order: greeted by a few as the manifestation of a liberal ideal, "freedom" was far from the reigning social reality.

It was during the Reconstruction period, in fact, that lynching--a previously casual term for trial without the law<sup>16</sup>--became synonymous with racism and death, particularly the ritualistic death of black men who threatened the masculine economy by becoming potential heirs to its power. As Angela Davis depicts, the threat of white retaliation for black claims to power culminated in the construction of an illegal--though entirely socially accepted--system of exploitation, one that began with lynching but was later enhanced by the creation of the mythology of the black rapist. She writes, "[b]efore lynching could be consolidated as a popularly accepted institution . . . its savagery and its horrors had to be convincingly justified. These were the circumstances which spawned the myth of the Black rapist--for the rape charge turned out to be the most

powerful of several attempts to justify the lynching of Black People" (185). The use of the rape mythology inverts white male sexual abuse of black women--a premier fact of slavery--with a new cultural ideology that casts black men in the role as rapists, terrors against white civilization. Gaining popularity in the last decade of the nineteenth-century, this ideology marked the beginning of the new century as one of continued oppression and violence, in effect substituting chattel slavery for a reconstructed system of control.

Characterizing the hysteria surrounding the mythology of the black man as rapist is white Senator Ben Tillman's 1907 speech before Congress. A proponent of mob retaliation against the defilers of white womanhood, Tillman claims,

the white women of the South are in a state of seige. . . . Some lurking demon who has watched for the opportunity seizes her; she is choked or beaten into insensibility and ravished, her body prostituted, her purity destroyed, her chastity taken from her. . . . Shall men . . . demand for [the demon] the right to have a fair trial and be punished in the regular course of justice? So far as I am concerned he has put himself outside the pale of the law, human and divine. . . . Civilization peels off us . . . and we revert to the . . . impulses . . . to "kill! kill! kill!" (182)

Tillman's acceptance and reiteration of the image of the black man as the incarnation of primitive sexual appetite conjures up, in the words of Davis, "armies of Black men, their penises erect, charging full speed ahead toward the most conveniently placed white women"



(197). Such a characterization confirmed white male power in the face of a changing cultural economy, one in which blacks entered the American system as legitimate parties in their own rights, no longer property of white men. Where the slavery period envisioned the Uncle Tom figure as the signification of the "positive good" of a system that protected and cared for its black "children," once emancipated, these children became virile men who wanted for themselves the ultimate symbol of white civilization: the white woman. The transformation of the image of the black man from simple, docile Uncle Tom to violent sex offender represents the process of American cultural production where images are shaped according to specific historical configurations.

As the property of white men and the keeper of the purity of the race, white women became, in the ethos of nineteenth century racialism, the pivotal point around which the myth of the black rapist was articulated. Her status as the pedestalyzed woman marked her as the cultural currency of the white patriarchal system, the landscape on which the struggle for masculine domination was--and to some extent continues to be--played.<sup>17</sup> In casting themselves as the protectors of white womanhood, white men reaffirmed their role as social and familial "heads," a reconstruction that, as Trudier Harris writes, "had as its basis the larger reason informing almost all black and white relationships in this country: the white man's craving for power and mastery as indications of his ultimate superiority not only in assigning a place to his women, but especially in keeping black people, particularly black men, in the

place he had assigned for them" (19). In this dual role, the mythology of the black male rapist feeds not only into racial hierarchies but gender structures as well; as part of a broader cultural pattern where race and gender intersect to recuperate the white patriarchal structure, the mythology of the black male rapist necessitates the continued domination of white men over all people, reinforcing the structures of difference governing American culture.

When Davis argues, then, that "[r]acism has always served as a provocation to rape, and white women in the United States have necessarily suffered the ricochet fire of these attacks . . . . causing [them] to be indirectly victimized" (177), she sidesteps the function of the mythology of the black rapist to reinscribe gender difference, to construct the white masculine position as the site from which cultural wholeness can be both articulated and maintained. As cultural currency, the white woman's sexuality--her purity and chastity-- functions as an elaborate decoy for what is at the very heart of American culture a struggle over masculine claims to power. "The issue," Harris writes, "really boils down to one between white men and black men and the mythic conception the former have of the latter" (19). This mythic conception arises from the specific context of post-war America, representing the threat to masculine power created by the emancipation of black men. To counter the potential encroachment on white male power, the mythology of the black male rapist established the necessary image of an alien and threatening masculinity against which white masculine control could define and exert itself.

In its construction as the vehicle for denying black men traditional masculine rights over all women, the myth of the black rapist was given cultural validation through the burning and castration rituals that accompanied accusations of sexual violation of white women by black men.<sup>18</sup> These rituals, a predominant feature of the early twentieth century racial landscape, made literal what had previously been a symbolic emasculation of black men; stripping the black man of his most visible claim to masculine power, castration functioned, in Harris's words, as a "communal rape," providing white men with visible "proof" of the inferiority of black manhood. This "rape" is, significantly, a reenactment of the patriarchal ideology of gender where women are cast as the "castrated" ones in the construction of masculine power. Forcing black men to embody, literally, gender divisions, these castration rituals enabled white men to not only "act out a fear of castration" (Harris, 23) but to imagine black men as less than men, as essentially different and therefore unentitled to the traditional patriarchal power conferred on those "with-something-to-be-seen." When Harris writes that "the lynched man becomes a source of sexual pleasure to those who kill him" (23), the collision of race and gender structures can most powerfully be seen.

By the time Richard Wright was born in Natchez, Mississippi in 1908, these lynching and burning rituals had become wide-spread throughout the American south. Harris views the historical

occurrence of these rituals as the basis of Wright's aesthetic vision: "the lynching metaphor becomes for Wright's characters the stimuli in reaction to which their life responses are made. The male characters live, eat, and breathe the threats perpetually hanging over their heads" (95). Wright's now-canonical work, *Native Son* (1940), is perhaps our literature's most compelling story of the black man caught in the mythology of the rapist--that death, as Bigger Thomas says, "before death came" (228). The novel revolves around the fated life of Bigger, his employment by a liberal white family, his accidental murder of their daughter, Mary, and his subsequent flight and trial. This pattern, as Wright describes in his essay, "How "Bigger" Was Born," is symptomatic of American race relations: "[a]ny Negro who has lived in the North or the South knows that times without number he has heard of some Negro boy being picked up on the streets and carted off to jail and charged with "rape." This thing happens so often that to my mind it had become a representative symbol of the Negro's uncertain position in America" (xxviii).

And yet, even in a text so critical of American racial structures, Wright capitulates to the dream of interracial male bonding as the image for a new social order, "an image of a strong blinding sun sending hot rays down . . . in the midst of a vast crowd of men, white men and black men and all men, and the sun's rays melted away the many differences, the colors, the clothes, and drew what was common and good upward toward the sun. . . ." (335). While we might like to cloak this inscription of the male bond in generic

clothes, the strangely recuperatory gesture that concludes the novel indicates its larger gender bias: "Tell . . . Tell Mister . . . Tell Jan hello," Bigger says to his lawyer, Boris Max, a request that embodies Bigger's attempt to bond with the white boyfriend of the woman he has slain. This bonding between black and white men is negotiated across the body not only of white Mary Dalton but of Bigger's girlfriend, Bessie, whom he raped and murdered. Indeed, the novel demonstrates how the relationship between black and white men is articulated through the bodies of women; cast as commodities in the negotiation of power between men, women function as both prize and pawn, mediations that confirm the racial system of difference as one integral to the continual construction of the homosexual nature of patriarchal culture.

While Wright's analysis of the black man's relation to American society absolves *Native Son* of ideological complicity with the full range of hegemonic inscriptions in American culture, his equation of freedom with manhood establishes a conformity to gender structures that results in Bigger's destruction of female life, both white and black. Consciously or not, *Native Son* privileges that bonding upon which the cultural organization depends: relationships between men. In doing so, it establishes Bigger's inability to fulfill conventional conceptions of manhood as a primary source of black male oppression. This is apparent in the opening scene of the novel where Bigger's mother harangues him about his failure to provide for the family: "We wouldn't have to live in this garbage dump if you had any manhood in you . . . you the most no-countest man I ever seen in my

life" (12). Her tirade fills Bigger with shame and hatred, causing him to despise not only himself but his family as well. When Bigger's mother visits him in prison at novel's end and begs on her knees before Mrs. Dalton for Bigger's life, he is again "paralyzed with shame; he felt violated" (280). This violation, this symbolic emasculation, accompanies Bigger in his entire relationship with the white world.

As a central metaphor in the novel, emasculation comes to stand for the black man's status in a racist culture, a culture that, as Wright says in his autobiography *Black Boy*, "could recognize but a part of a man" (284).<sup>19</sup> In *Native Son*, such a loss, such an inability to be fully "a man" is the symptomatic condition of black alienation in American society; as Bigger tells his friends early in the novel: "Every time I think about it I feel like somebody's poking a red-hot iron down my throat. Goddammit, look! We live here and they live there. We black and they white. They got things and we ain't. They do things and we can't. It's just like living in jail. Half the time I feel like I'm on the outside of the world peeping in through a knot-hole in the fence. . . ." (23). In his description of being an outsider in American culture, Bigger significantly uses the figure of the red-hot iron, an image that casts his oppression in highly sexual and phallic terms. Segregation, racism and poverty, all offered up by the white social order, are the burning irons in Bigger's throat, his manhood violated by the symbolic phallus of white masculine power. As Bigger says later to Max, "a guy gets tired of being told what he can do and can't do . . . You ain't a man

no more . . . [White folks] own everything . . . They after you so hot and hard you can only feel what they doing to you. They kill you before you die" (326-7). Being a "man" is equated with access to freedom and power, and the white world, so "hot and hard" against one, acts as the ultimate castrator of black claims to traditional manhood.

This image of the white world as castrator clearly draws on the burning and lynching rituals common to Wright's era, foregrounding what Harris has isolated as the sexual undercurrent of such acts of mob violence:

For the white males . . . there is a symbolic transfer of sexual power at the point of the executions. The black man is stripped of his prowess, but the very act of stripping brings symbolic power to the white man. His actions suggest that, subconsciously, he craves the very thing he is forced to destroy. Yet he destroys it as an indication of the political (sexual) power he has. . . . In some historical accounts, the lynchers were reputed to have divided pieces of the black man's genitals among themselves. (23)

The castration and distribution of the black man's genitals acts as the ultimate sign of white masculine power, rewarding white men with the "proof" of their superiority both politically and sexually while demonstrating to all black men their powerlessness before white authority. In this sense, the ritual is a perverse sexual encounter where the white man, who has created the mythology of the overly

endowed black male rapist, must destroy his own creation and nightmare. Enforced to punish black male trespass of white womanhood, these rituals act out a drama over phallic power, both its literal embodiment and its symbolic articulation.<sup>20</sup>

In *Native Son*, the sexual dimension of the struggle between black and white men is symbolized in the capture of Bigger Thomas. Hiding on the roof of a building, Bigger is entrapped by white men wielding a fire hose, "the rushing stream jerked this way and that . . . Then the water hit him . . . He gasped, his mouth open . . . The water left him; he lay gasping, spent . . . The icy water clutched again at his body like a giant hand; the chill of it squeezed him like the circling coils of a monstrous boa constrictor" (251). The passage that depicts Bigger's subsequent conquest by this monstrous phallic image extends the horrific sexual encounter: "He wanted to hold on but could not. His body teetered on the edge; his legs dangled in the air. Then he was falling. He landed on the roof, on his face, in snow, dazed" (252). Finally brought down by the monstrosity of white masculine desire for and hatred of the black man, Bigger loses consciousness, his strength gone as the violent parody of romantic coupling ends. This conclusion reflects back on a description of Bigger earlier in the chase: "He was a long, taut piece of rubber which a thousand white hands had stretched to the snapping point" (214). Within the mythology of the black male rapist, white men have indeed seized Bigger by his genitals in a contorting gesture that reinforces their power to control the black man sexually and otherwise.



In capturing Bigger, the white men--nearly eight thousand in all searching the city--think they have made the world safe again for white womanhood. As the prosecutor, Buckley, says in his plea for the imposition of the death penalty: "the law is strong and gracious enough to allow all of us to sit here . . . and not tremble with fear that at this very moment some half-human black ape may be climbing through the windows of our homes to rape, murder, and burn our daughters! . . . Every decent white man in America ought to swoon with joy for the opportunity to crush with his heel the woolly head of this black lizard" (373). While Bigger's murder of the white woman, Mary Dalton, is accidental and his subsequent burning of her body destroys police ability to prove sexual abuse, Buckley claims, "the central crime here is rape" (377). It is for the rape of Mary Dalton that Bigger will die in the electric chair. His trespass of the sacred property of white men makes him the symbol of all that the white world must protect itself from; as the "infernal monster," "treacherous beast," and "worthless ape" (377), the story of Bigger Thomas enacts the mythology of the black male rapist, casting the black man in his fixed role as an alien and dangerous threat to white male power while establishing the white woman as the prized object, the epitome of the barriers erected by white society.

Because of the intensity of the taboo against black men and white women, Bigger accepts Mary's death as a conscious act: "Though he had killed by accident, not once did he feel the need to tell himself that it had been an accident. He was black and he had been alone in a room where a white girl had been killed; therefore he had

killed her" (101). In accepting responsibility for Mary's death, Bigger sees himself as refuting white masculine authority, as gaining an advantage that had eluded him before: "The knowledge that he had killed a white girl they loved and regarded as their symbol of beauty made him feel the equal of them, like a man who had been somehow cheated, but had now evened the score" (155). Through his destruction of the objectified symbol of white patriarchal rule, Bigger claims his right to masculine selfhood; no longer does he need the knife and gun, traditional symbols of masculinity, that initially accompanied him to the Dalton home: "[w]hat his knife and gun had once meant to him, his knowledge of having secretly murdered Mary now meant" (141). Mary's death symbolizes Bigger's transgression of white authority, becoming the reconstituted meaning of his life. In killing her, he destroys the emblem of his own thwarted manhood, allowing himself to feel for the first time "a confidence, a fulness, a freedom; his whole life was caught up in a supreme and meaningful act" (111).

Bigger's acceptance of Mary's murder and his consequent sense of freedom are particularly meaningful when viewed in terms of an earlier and seemingly insignificant event in the novel. Before setting out for the Dalton home on the day of Mary's accidental death, Bigger gathers with friends at Doc's poolroom to discuss plans for robbing Blum's Delicatessen. While the men had pulled other "jobs," this was to be their first robbery of a white man.

For months they had talked of robbing Blum's, but had not been able to bring themselves to do it. They had the

feeling that the robbing of Blum's would be a violation of ultimate taboo; it would be trespassing into territory where the full wrath of an alien white world would be turned loose upon them; in short, it would be a symbolic challenge of the white world's rule over them; a challenge which they yearned to make, but were afraid to. (17-18)

The language here of "violation," "taboo," and "symbolic challenge" significantly scripts the robbing of Blum in the same terms as the mythic encounter between a black man and a white woman. This scene and a later one in which Bigger purposely argues with Gus as a way to avoid going through with the plan indicate the more fundamental conflict that lies at the heart of the mythology of the black male rapist: the struggle over social, political and sexual power between black and white men.

More importantly perhaps, the incident surrounding Blum clarifies the role of the white woman as a decoy in the negotiation of power among men. While white women have been complicit in the lynching and burning of black men, at times using the charge of rape themselves in order to protect their positions in the racial hierarchy, the mythology of the black rapist sets them up as the displaced site of a masculine struggle, the embodiments of white masculine desire and hence the emblems of a thwarted masculinity for black men. Instead of robbing Blum or somehow challenging Mr. Dalton, who has made his wealth off the over-priced rentals in the "Black Belt," Bigger lives out a drama crafted by the intersection of race and gender, a drama that raises the white woman to the pedestal

only to make her bear the burden of the racist patriarchal structure by having her symbolize its hierarchical construction. This does not absolve the white woman from her complicity in maintaining racial oppression though it does point to the broader pattern in American culture where differences between men are played out within a highly charged configuration of gender. Where women traditionally function as commodities in systems of exchange between men (see Rubin), within the racial structure of American culture, the commodification of white women works to enforce other structures of difference by setting a price only white men can afford.

At the same time, of course, the commodification of black women has no exchange value on the cultural market; like Bigger's girlfriend, Bessie Mears, the black woman's value constitutes a negation. Bigger's real rape and murder of Bessie gains value only as "evidence" of his more heinous crime against the white woman. During his trial when they bring in the table which bears Bessie's mutilated body, Bigger knows "[t]hey were using his having killed Bessie to kill him for his having killed Mary . . . Though he had killed a black girl and a white girl, he knew that it would be for the death of the white girl that he would be punished. The black girl was merely 'evidence'" (307). As Bigger recognizes, "[c]rime for a Negro was only when he harmed whites, took white lives, or injured white property" (307). Because of this, Bessie's death, though it may be Bigger's real crime, enters the scene only as proof that Bigger is innately evil, driven to the murder of a black woman through his lust for a white one. While Buckley contends that, as

prosecutor, he "represent[s] the families of Mary Dalton and Bessie Mears" (372), Bigger's "bestial monstrosity" is evinced not by the murder of Bessie but by his ravishment "of the finest and most delicate flowers of our womanhood" (373), white Mary Dalton. Having served as evidence of his proclivity for rape and destruction, Bessie will be as insignificant in the eyes of American society in death as she was in life.<sup>21</sup>

For Bigger, however, Bessie's murder, like Mary's death, comes to stand as a significant symbol in his life. "[T]hese two murders were the most meaningful things that had ever happened to him. He was living, truly and deeply. . . . Never had he had the chance to live out the consequences of his actions; never had his will been so free" (225). While Wright seeks here to depict the constraints of a life that is itself a kind of death--murder becoming the most viable and natural extension of such oppression--the collapsing of Bessie's death with Mary's overrides *Native Son's* articulation of the discrepancy governing the value assigned to black and white women. In doing this, in casting the black woman as part of the larger symbol system of white society and his violation of her as a cathartic trespass, Bigger can redefine the concept of rape, displacing the horror of his act against Bessie because "rape was not what one did to women. Rape was what one felt when one's back was against a wall and one had to strike out, whether one wanted to or not . . . it was rape when he cried out in hate deep in his heart as he felt the strain of living day by day" (214). That history weighs on this reinterpretation of rape as something perpetuated against

black men is obvious, yet such a universalization of sexual violence into masculine terms obscures the structure of gender that informs American rituals of black male castration. As symbolic "communal rapes" (Harris, 23), these rituals make visible--and then deny that visibility through castration--what structures patriarchal access to power: the visibility of the masculine, the penis.

In grafting patriarchal culture's most visible system of differentiation, symbolic and literal emasculations imposed on black men insure their status as "not men," as the castrated and powerless. In this sense, black men are literally made to bear a cultural affinity to all women for whom castration is the premiere sign of their position of exclusion in a patriarchal culture. And yet that affinity is disrupted and denied through the mythology of the black rapist which reinforces the structure of race relations by dividing them along gender lines. This mythology--this "death before death came"--prevents movement across race and gender, prevents cultural solidarity between all "castrated" groups in American society. In the structural collusion between race and gender, hegemonic authority can more firmly entrench itself, for these categories of difference reinforce rather than challenge the construction of racist patriarchy. White women, cast as the bearers of their race's privilege and taboo, wear that privilege to gain access to white power; black men, on the other hand, epitomizing in cultural representation the violence of an untamed race, are constructed in opposition to white women who then become the embodiments of thwarted black manhood.

Within this scenario, it is no accident that Bigger's decapitation and burning of Mary's body reenact the castration ritual historically used to control black men. Like white men who gain power through the castration and lynching of black men, Bigger is endowed with a sense of power in his violation of Mary, her decapitation constituting a version of castration itself. But because, as woman, Mary is already "castrated," Bigger's act has a greater intent: it functions as a ritualistic retaliation against the white masculine hegemony, Mary's dismemberment a symbolic emasculation of the white man. Indeed, her incineration completes the lynch motif, reducing Mary to a pile of ash and bone that recalls in its violence and horror the tradition of "mob justice" that characterizes the transformation from nineteenth century slavery to twentieth century "freedom." While Bigger lacks conscious recognition of his revision of the ritual,

[h]e wished that he had the power to say what he had done without fear of being arrested; he wished that he could be an idea in [white] minds; that his black face and the image of his smothering Mary and cutting off her head and burning her could hover before their eyes as a terrible picture of reality which they could see and feel and yet not destroy" (123).

Bigger's "murder" of Mary, even if accidental, allows him to claim her, to own her death as a refutation of the taboo that works to deny black men the full expression of their patriarchal rights as men.

In trying to call attention to the range of myths surrounding

black male presence in America, *Native Son* reinscribes the white woman as symbol of white culture and privilege, fashioning her as commodity in a masculine circuit of exchange. That this circuit is characterized by violence and death does not negate its function as a process integral to patriarchal culture, for the negotiation of power among men necessarily relies on the enforcement of other categories of difference, particularly race. In this sense, the construction of race difference in American culture can not be separated from the patriarchal structure, for through the making of difference among men, a masculine elite can wield power over the full range of cultural productions. *Native Son* characterizes how this difference is articulated across the body of both white and black women, their deaths becoming specularized images subtending an entirely homosocial (masculine) economy. Woman's use in this way is the epitome of what Eve Sedgwick describes as the homosocial structure of the patriarchal system: "the spectacle of the ruin of a woman . . . is just the right lubricant for an adjustment of differentials of power between [men]" (76). But this "lubricant" does not equalize relations between men--it constructs a seemingly cohesive masculine structure, one in which power is defined solely as a masculine province. "The homosociality of this world," Sedgwick writes in a discussion of the late Renaissance that is true of the history of the black man in America, "is not that of brotherhood, but of extreme, compulsory, and intensely volatile mastery and subordination" (66).

While this volatile game of mastery is played out on the bodies of women, it is through the spectacle of their ruin that the



masculine can begin to heal its own internal hierarchies. Bigger's relationship with his lawyer, Boris Max, and his fleeting moments of recognition that the "white looming mountain of hate" may not be "a mountain at all, but people, people like himself, and like Jan" (334) contribute to the novel's hesitant yet hopeful Marxian future where "after all everybody in the world felt alike" (332). Bigger's first moments of connecting with something other than his own fear, hatred or violence are when Jan visits him in jail, offering to help. Through Mary's death Jan has come to understand the Bigger Thomases of the world:

I think I know something of what you're feeling now. I'm not dumb, Bigger; I can understand, even if I didn't seem to understand that night . . . I just wanted to come here and tell you that . . . I'm not angry and I want you to let me help you. I don't hate you for trying to blame this thing on me. . . . [M]aybe in a certain sense, I'm the one who's really guilty . . . Though this thing hurt me, I got something out of it . . . It made me see deeper into men. It made me see things I knew, but had forgotten. . . . It taught me that it's your right to hate me, Bigger. (266-7)

This understanding, forged across the abyss of color and class that separates men, is made possible through the framework of gender that positions women's bodies as the representational terrain for hegemonic recuperation.<sup>22</sup>

The healing--no matter how momentary or elusive--that takes place between the man who has murdered and the man who has lost

someone in murder culminates in Bigger's most open and trusting gesture of the novel: "Tell Jan hello" (392), he says to Max, as he awaits the electric chair. Bigger's message, significantly hello and not goodbye, is part of the hope that Max has awakened in him, a desire for "a supporting oneness, a wholeness which had been denied him all his life" (335); it is the closest image to the one in the Communist pamphlet that Jan gives Bigger, "the pen-and-ink drawing of a white hand clasping a black hand in solidarity" (94); it is movement toward Bigger's earlier depiction of oneness, that "image of a strong blinding sun sending hot rays down . . . [into] a vast crowd of men, white men and black men and all men, and the sun's rays melted away the many differences, the colors, the clothes, and drew what was common and good upward toward the sun" (335). Such a reconciliation, while it is defined within a critique of American racial structures, draws on the mythology of the male bond that is so crucial to American cultural production, a mythology that even in its failure still functions to provide an image of success, of possibility. As *Native Son* depicts, it is across the bodies of women that difference among men is both constructed and recuperated. Though Bigger will die for his trespass of white authority, his bonding gesture at the end confirms the circuit of masculine desire that is itself so crucial to construction of gender and race in American patriarchal culture.

As part of the production of patriarchal culture, the mythology

of the male bond yields a highly exclusionary vision of American democratic potential--exclusionary not only for women but, as in *Native Son*, for black men as well. Such inscriptions of gender and race hegemony at the site of the interracial male bond function to recuperate cultural tensions, enabling white masculine hegemony to negotiate its power in various historical contexts. This process of recuperation is particularly apparent in Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, a 1962 novel whose depiction of cultural power relations can only be understood as a response to the growing Civil Rights and Women's movements of the period. Casting black men as the tyrannical aids to the fascist power of Big Nurse, *Cuckoo's Nest* inverts race and gender hierarchies not only to create the image of the victimized white man, one whose previous power has been unnaturally usurped by the "castrating bitch" of a modern matriarchy, but to rejuvenate that image into a symbol of cultural heroism. In this way, Kesey's novel negotiates the space between the white masculine point of view and hierarchies of difference that might challenge its rule, redefining the masculine as a category of oppression and the feminine and blackness its dictatorial oppressor.

Written through the perspective of the "deaf and dumb" Native American, Chief, the novel pivots around a white renegade, Randle P. McMurphy, who enters the institution in an attempt to escape prison work farms and quickly becomes the force of revolt against the "Combine," the metaphorical structure that embodies social, economic, racial and sexual oppression. Through McMurphy, *Cuckoo's Nest* establishes a dream of individual assertion and protest in the face

of such cultural oppression but it is an individuality that strangely casts the white man in the role of cultural hero, his life becoming a literal sacrifice to the mythic quest for AMERICA. While Kesey has long maintained that the novel's focus is the vanishing American, it is significant that McMurphy, the white man, must lead the Native American to his own individual freedom, McMurphy literally empowering the Chief to speak; it is McMurphy who can heal the differences between men within the institution to perfect a commonality among (some) male outsiders that leads them all to spiritual, if not physical, freedom. As the Chief says, "his relaxed, good-natured voice doled out his life for us to live . . . for all of us to dream ourselves into" (218). Resurrecting the white man as leader and hero of a cultural order that he had no hand in creating, the novel recuperates counterhegemonic forces. In doing so, *Cuckoo's Nest* articulates a dream of democratic freedom that is not only stridently masculine in its configurations but also, as we shall see, racially hierarchicalized in its manifestations.

*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* has been lauded as a revolutionary text, one that challenges the oppressive nature of American culture by depicting society as a mental institution where even its inmates volunteer for treatment because the violation of their humanity has been so complete; it is often taught as the classic embodiment of the struggle between good and evil, individuality and social conformity, speech and silence, a text that captures the threat of growing technologization to American democratic principles; in short, *Cuckoo's Nest* has often been

portrayed as emblematic of the social dissent of the 1960s, rife with radical insight and cultural challenge.<sup>23</sup> But such a perspective is possible only when traditional gender and race formations are allowed to remain stable,<sup>24</sup> for Kesey's novel relies on an assumption of difference, an assumption that transforms the historical domination of white men over women and black men into new terms; in this sense, *Cuckoo's Nest* ushers in a narrative strategy common to American cultural production since the earliest moments of the Civil Rights era where particular configurations of the interracial male bond become the means through which the white man casts himself in the role of cultural hero, his image the necessary one for the reconstitution of America's masculine wholeness.

In the recuperatory ethos of the novel, gender acts as the primary category of difference governing cultural oppression, for here liberation signifies a release not only from the "Combine" but from its guardian, women. By creating notions of power and submission through an inversion of cultural gender roles--the male becomes the insane victim of a social order dominated by women--Kesey reaffirms the patriarchal construction of gender, establishing a system of signification that relies on corporeal inscriptions of power. By virtue of being born male, men are depicted as possessing a supposedly natural--and essential--power, while women are seen as innately, physically inferior. As the Chief says of the institution's leading oppressor, Nurse Ratched, "she chose to ignore the way nature had tagged her with those outsized badges of femininity . . . and [she chose to ignore] sex, and everything else

that's weak and of the flesh" (138). Kesey's use of gender, allowing visible differences to function as social and ideological differences as well, privileges the white masculine perspective by making an universalizing leap from biology to nature--from physical difference (masculine strength versus female weakness) to "essential" difference (the right of masculine domination over a naturally inferior feminine).

In the novel's delineation of the forces corrupting American society, it is particularly the erosion of this natural patriarchal order that produces cultural oppression. Indeed, each of the men on the ward has been rendered emotionally if not physically impotent, a violation that comes to stand not only as the ultimate method of oppression within the institution but as *the* symbolic image for all cultural violations of humanity. The mass unmaning of the inmates is captured in Donald Palumbo's catalogue of the men on the ward:

Like the animals they are compared to, the Acutes have been "fixed," neutered by Big Nurse and the Combine. Harding fears he is not man enough for, and is belittled by, his sexy wife. Sefelt believes that the Dilantin he should be taking for epilepsy, which softens his gums, is also making him impotent. Billy Bibbet is a thirty-one year old virgin. The Chief fears that Big Nurse will "hunt me down with an electric saw, fix me" (178) if she learns he isn't deaf and dumb. (28)

These men, as Harding explains early in the novel, all suffer from the loss of that "one truly effective weapon against the juggernaut

of modern matriarchy" (66). That weapon, as the novel makes clear time and again, is the penis.

The reliance on the visibility of the penis as the "essential" mark of difference allows for the transformation of the penis into the Phallus, allows in other words for genitalia to be transformed in the cultural symbolic system into the premiere sign of power and privilege. While contemporary psychoanalytic theory has elaborated a complex theory that dissociates the penis from the Phallus, in Kesey's novel the penis is the phallus--the visibility of he-who-has-something-to-be-seen functioning as definition of domination and the lack of the visible engendering a supposedly natural subordination.<sup>25</sup> In the narrative structure of *Cuckoo's Nest*, it is the reconstitution of this system--the resurrection of phallic power--that governs McMurphy's role in the institution. His evocation of phallic authority is evinced most comically by his Moby-Dick underwear, "coal black satin covered with big white whales with red eyes" (76), but even the Chief's initial description highlights McMurphy's strident masculinity:

He sounds big. I hear him coming down the hall, and he sounds big in the way he walks. . . . He shows up in the door and stops and hitches his thumbs in his pockets, boots wide apart. . . . His face and neck and arms are the color of oxblood leather . . . He's got a primer-black motorcycle cap stuck in his hair and a leather jacket over one arm, and he's got on boots gray and dusty and heavy enough to kick a man half in two. (16-17)

Clad in the accoutrements of the rugged American male, there is nothing soft, feminine or weak in McMurphy's visage; this is what sets him apart from the impotent feminized men on the ward.

In this way, Kesey designates the penis--as the evocation of a true, essential masculinity--as the site from which men articulate their individuality, their natural difference and right to domination. Billy Bibbit, the stutterer, for instance, whose first spoken word was significantly "mamamamma," reaches effective speech and hence individuality only after he has achieved masculine sexual power (expressed with Candy, one of McMurphy's "whores")--an achievement that not only separates him from the domination of his mother but ushers him into the circle of the male bond where he too can gain power from its triumph over a threatening feminine. Significantly, Billy's only moment of speech unencumbered by stuttering (the mark of his "castration"), occurs immediately after his tryst with Candy when he momentarily escapes the power of Nurse Ratched through his indifference to her: "'Good morning, Miss Ratched,' Billy said, not even making any move to get up and button his pajamas. He took the girl's hand in his and grinned. 'This is Candy'" (263). This "recovery," lasting only until the nurse invokes the power of the mother--"'What worries me, Billy . . . is how your poor mother is going to take this'" (264)--is the product of a "natural" expression of his masculinity, that which has been repressed by the tyranny of the mother, the ultimate castrating female. Penis, sexuality and masculinity are thus linked together, inseparable in their enunciation of a natural power order.



Individuality and speech, as they are connected with Billy Bibbit, form a dominant paradigm not only of this novel but of other narratives in which social forces converge upon the individual to thwart freedom. But in line with Kesey's recuperatory vision of American culture, here--instead of the image of the silenced factory women or the disembodied muteness of Babo--we have speech denied to mainly white men and controlled tightly by women. For this reason, it is important to link individuality to speech through masculinity and the white masculine point of view, through gender and the site of the penis as the supposedly natural avenue for both individualistic expression and the attainment of American democratic ideals. To fail to do this results in the reinscription of hegemonic structures, a critical complicity epitomized by William C. Baurecht's summary of the novel's central theme:

Kesey portrays our national ideology of virile heroism in a story of democracy's triumph in true brotherhood. Two men, Chief Bromden and Randle Patrick McMurphy, come to love each other profoundly . . . Love, not power, glory, *machismo*, or the masculine imperial will, is the key to the meaning of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. . . . (279, 282-3)

In such a rendition, the "sexist and violent tendencies" of McMurphy are "transcended by his symbolic heroism and his humanity" (282), allowing the white male player to be set in conflict with a social force that is somehow completely outside him, against him and opposite to him--a social force that is completely female. In the

words of Harding, "We are victims of a matriarchy here" (59).

In casting women in the role as man's opposite, as the repressive forces of society--forces from which individuals, that is men, must escape for any kind of democracy or individuality to be realized--the novel must affirm not only that women have no natural right to power but that their use of it breeds oppression, repression and fragmentation. This is particularly apparent in the irony surrounding Nurse Ratched's notion of the therapeutic community as a "democracy," for the only equality the men achieve is equal access to the day book, the ledger in which they can tattle on one another. McMurphy's characterization of the therapy session as a "bunch of chickens at a peckin' party" (55) casts the system that Ratched operates in oppositional gender terms: "she ain't peckin' at your eyes. That's not what she's peckin' at . . . At your balls, buddy, at your everlovin' *balls*. . ." (57). In labeling the nurse "a ball-cutter" (57), female power is defined in reference to the masculine, as an ability to destroy the real power of masculinity. As the "castrating bitch," Nurse Ratched can only be disarmed by proving that she is in fact the castrated one, the one without the natural source of power, the female one. As McMurphy says, "I've never seen a woman I thought was more man than me" (68).

To a great extent, the novel is obsessively concerned with the disempowerment of Nurse Ratched--who is transformed from "Big Nurse" into "Miss Ratched," as Billy calls her in his moment of masculine glory--a disempowerment that evinces the symbolic feminizing that must occupy both the men's quest for masculine wholeness and the

larger symbolic struggle for American democracy. Initially, the Nurse is described in the phallussizing terms of the novel: "She's swelling up, swells till her back's splitting out the white uniform. . . . and she blows up bigger and bigger, big as a tractor, so big. . . ." (11). Her "bigness," her usurption of masculine power is ultimately overcome during the novel's climatic confrontation with McMurphy who exposes her femaleness, ripping "her uniform all the way down the front. . . [her] two nipples start[ing] from her chest and swell[ing] out and out, bigger than anybody had ever even imagined, warm and pink in the light. . . . [She] could no longer conceal the fact that she was a woman. . . She couldn't rule with her old power any more" (267, 268, 269). In the novel's articulation of male virtue and female evil, this quasi-rape functions to "right" the injustices of the institution, silencing the Big Nurse who, returning to the ward in a neck brace, communicates only by pencil and pad--her castrating bigness symbolically reduced to lead and her silence indicating her exclusion from the novel's thematics of speech, individuality and cultural freedom.

In the reconstruction of cultural practices as the victimization of the masculine by the feminine, the novel uses gender as the structure through which the white man's questionable actions may be rendered legitimate. This is apparent in McMurphy's financial dealings with the men on the ward. When the Nurse tries to point out how McMurphy manipulates the men to his own financial advantage, they ultimately interpret her inferences as part of her strategy for domination. McMurphy's capitalist system of pecking at the weak is

thus drawn as different from other kinds of financial exploitation in the novel, such as what the corporation does to the Indians. Through the unequivocal opposition to the Big Nurse, the inequality implicit in the relationship between McMurphy and the men can be smoothed over so that even though he makes money off of their various adventures, he is still erected as the liberator, as the spokesman for individual masculine wholeness. As the Chief says, "McMurphy was a giant come out of the sky to save us from the Combine that was networking the land with copper wire and crystal . . . he was too big to be bothered with something as measly as money" (224). But of course he has operated an elaborate con game on the men; only through the specter of the feminine can the various hierarchies among the men be reiterated as unity and cohesiveness.

In a troubling inversion of the real hierarchies of American culture, women are thus seen to dominate and dictate the systems of oppression under which men are subjugated. In using gender as the focal point for articulating societal oppression, Kesey's novel reconstructs the white masculine position as one of victimization and not domination. In this way, McMurphy's own charge of statutory rape, for which he was initially admitted to the institution, becomes a vehicle for further expression of his masculine bravado--as he asserts, "she was *seventeen* . . . and plenty willin'" (44), as indeed are all women who, in the novel's ethos, do not deserve the label of castrating bitch. By casting McMurphy's rape of an alleged fifteen year old as a form of comic relief--"that little hustler would of actually burnt me to a frazzle by the time she reached legal

sixteen. She got to where she was tripping me and beating me to the floor" (45)--the novel displaces rape as a form of violence against women, transforming it into a supposedly universal metaphor for the oppressive system enforced by the institution. Significantly, McMurphy's own obvious admission that the girl was indeed underage carries no weight in the novel; his rollicking sexual conquests become instead the means through which the men can dream themselves into rejuvenated manhood, as if McMurphy "was transmitting his own blood into [them]" (27).

But it is not only the reconstruction of rape as a metaphorical victimization of men that signals *Cuckoo's Nest* inversion of cultural hierarchies, for the novel also posits literal rape--what the black ward aides perform on new or disruptive patients. The usual procedure for breaking an admission into the institution is executed by Nurse Ratched's three black assistants who

take [the Admission] into the shower room, where they strip him and leave him shivering with the door open. . . . "We need that Vaseline," they'll tell the Big Nurse, "for the thermometer." She looks from one to the other: "I'm sure you do," and hands them a jar holds at least a gallon, "but mind you boys don't group up in there." Then I see two, maybe all three . . . running that thermometer around in the grease till it's coated the size of your finger, crooning, "Tha's right, mothah, that's right," and then shut the door and turn all the showers up to where you can't hear anything but the vicious hiss of water on the

green tile. (15)

With the Nurse's blessing, these black men enact a kind of racial sex revenge against the predominately white inmates of the hospital, sexual violence becoming both the source and symbol of the inmates' victimization within the institutional microcosm of American society. McMurphy's refusal to be "penetrated" in such a way--"get back away from me with that thermometer, Sam" (15)--becomes the novel's first act of rebellion, an act that significantly casts McMurphy in opposition to the tyrannical power of black men.

In suturing the image of the black man to that of the white woman--"They are in contact on a high-voltage wave length of hate, and the black boys are out there performing her bidding before she even thinks it" (32)--Kesey depicts both as representatives of the same forms of social power that have been responsible historically for black and female oppression. This reconstruction of American cultural relations defines the tabooed relationship between black men and white women in an absurdly new way: while black men have been lynched and castrated in America for simply looking at a white woman (in part because of the white woman's status as property of white men),<sup>26</sup> we now have a representation that sets these forbidden agents in league with one another to enforce cultural hierarchies and oppression. A narrative significantly written during the early days of the Civil Rights era, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* accomplishes a doubling of cultural inversions: no longer are women or black men the objects of sexual violence, but now the white man--and those who adopt his ideological perspective--are the real victims of sexual and

social abuse. In his lament over the loss of white masculine power, Kesey thus resurrects it as the perspective through which the various social structures of the Combine can be resisted and, perhaps, ultimately transformed.

In the novel's exorcism of its self-constructed representatives of oppression, the victimization enacted by women and black men necessitates not only the disempowerment of Nurse Ratched, as discussed above, but an equally "appropriate" rebellion against her black ward aides, whose control must be both contested and subverted in order for the full-scale assault on the institution's oppressiveness to be made. In a key episode late in the novel, the men are corralled into the showers for a special cleansing, ordered ostensibly because of their contact with McMurphy's "whores" during their fishing expedition. Here, as Chief describes it, "We lined up nude against the tile, and there one black boy came, a black plastic tube in his hand, squirting a stinking salve thick and sticky as egg white. In the hair first, then turn around an' bend over an' spread your cheeks!" (227). This thinly disguised sexual violation by the symbolic black phallus is designed specifically to counter the men's feelings of "swelling . . . bigger and bigger" (212), becoming "conquering heroes" (216) as they returned from the sea; significantly, it is black men who perform this ritual cleansing, "raping" the men's new found sense of masculine power by asserting their own "perverse" black masculinity.

More importantly perhaps, this scene becomes the vehicle for the

Chief's first overtly rebellious act, an act that establishes his fundamental affinity not to those who share a similar history of marginalization and genocide in American culture but to the white man who built his hegemony on the literal and symbolic rape and castration of both blacks and Native Americans. As Washington, an aide who is scarred from an earlier encounter with McMurphy, moves down the line of naked men, the atmosphere is comic--"this wasn't the way things used to be before that damned redhead came around" (227)--until he stops in front of the paranoid George, who is deathly afraid of bodily contact with any substance. "For all I know," Washington threatens with his phallic tube, "you got bugs on you a good *inch deep*!" (228). George's hysteria heightens as Washington warns, "You either bend down and take this stuff--or I lay my *hand* on you . . . Put this black! filthy! stinkin'! hand all over you!" (229). This torture of George forces McMurphy into action as he and Washington begin to fight. "You goddamned coon," McMurphy says, "Goddamned motherfucking nigger!" (229). When McMurphy is attacked from behind by one of the other black aides, he shakes him off, as the Chief says, "like a bull shaking off a monkey, but he was right back. So I picked him off and threw him in the shower" (231). In this way, the previously castrated, "deaf and dumb" Chief awakens to life, his feelings of power evinced by his description of throwing the black aide to the floor: "he didn't weigh more'n ten or fifteen pounds" (231).

In its construction of racial relations, *Cuckoo's Nest* thus quite efficiently denies the possibility for any solidarity between



historically disenfranchised groups, establishing instead the white man's mythic heroism as the vehicle for the Native American's individual empowerment. Through such narrative configurations, the interracial male bond achieves its ideological function in American culture: reiterating the white masculine point of view by constructing the bond as the site for the attainment of cultural democracy and individuality. Through Kesey's depiction of black men in cahoots with women as the oppressive forces of society, the masculine space of power and privilege expells the black man, channeling his potential (masculine) sameness into the realm of sexual difference. The structure of gender is thus used to disguise the racial implications of the novel's depiction of black men--through the liasion with women, the black man can be figured as "ballcutters," the new emasculator of those who, in the ethos of the novel, should inherit cultural power. In this way, gender carries a dual function: it works both to inculcate black men into a paradigm of sexual difference and to solidify the bond between McMurphy and the men on the ward. Paradoxically, then, gender functions both to assert masculine sameness (between McMurphy and the other inmates) and to guarantee that the power implicit in this sameness is not available to black men.

In this way, *Cuckoo's Nest* manipulates gender to establish its own racial hierarchy--a racial hierarchy that can be cleverly denounced through the image of the Chief, whose Native American heritage posits an interracial male bonding scenario, superficially disguising the novel's underlying reassertion of racial hegemony.

But the counterforce of one masculine Other with another merely clarifies Kesey's method of purgation where the most threatening masculine figure, the black man, can now be cast with women as the representatives of all cultural oppressions. Kesey's inversion of the historical terms of every social hierarchy signals the recuperation of the white masculine position. Significantly, it is the Chief's white mother who is responsible for the ultimate "shrinking" of his Indian father, not the white male capitalist structure that has pushed Indians onto reservations and off them according to the profitability of the exchange. As part of the matriarchy of modern America, the Chief carries his mother's name, Bromden, not his father's, and the domination of the white mother is seen as a symbolic emasculation of the Native American father: "My papa was a full Chief and his name was Tee Ah Millatoona. That means The-Pine-That-Stands-Tallest-on-the-Mountain . . . He was real big when I was a kid. My mother got twice his size . . . He fought [the Combine] a long time till my mother made him too little to fight any more and he gave up" (186-7). Like his father, the Chief has become too small to fight until McMurphy "blows him back up to full size" (189).

As the previous example makes clear, masculinity equals individuality in the novel's symbolic structure and it is a masculinity characterized from the white masculine point of view whereby sexual difference becomes the means for reiterating the cultural hierarchies marking American society. McMurphy's apparent defeat--his "frontal lobe castration"--is the sacrifice necessary to

his creation as hero and savior of the men. That he must die in order for them to live does not undercut the power of the white masculine perspective--it confirms it, for in this way the individual white masculine quest is elevated to source and symbol for collective action; such a conflation of the individual and the collective depicts the white man as the liberating force for the oppressed collective within American culture. As the Chief says, "The thing he was fighting, you couldn't whip it for good. All you could do was keep whipping it, till you couldn't come out any more and somebody else had to take your place" (265). Through McMurphy's battle with the Combine, the men are provided with the Other against which they can define themselves--the otherness of women and black men. It is no accident that the only "positive" image of woman is as whore, her body the landscape on which the men can act out their masculinity, "growing bigger" in their struggle against the oppression of the contemporary world.

In its negotiation of the white masculine perspective, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* draws on strategies that, as the next chapter explores, are crucial to the reconstruction of power relations in both the Civil Rights and post-Civil Rights era. But it is rather unique in its evocation of the vanishing American, the figure who quite nostalgically narrates the radical disjunction between the freedom of the land and the constraint and mechanization wrought by modern industrialization. In an age of growing struggles for black and feminist power, the white man dons the voice of the Chief to speak of the loss of a culture he can ironically depict himself as

having no ideological hand in destroying, a culture brought down by white women, its fragmented remnants overseen by sexually perverse black men. Critics who have sought to explain and excuse these gender and race relations in the novel--what Michael Boardman calls its "local rhetoric" (173)--in order to posit some larger, "universal" truth are perhaps correct about one thing: the seeming universal power of the interracial male bond to act as the recuperatory site for challenges to white masculine hegemony. In this strangely "universal" strategy of American cultural production, historical domination has been recast as oppression and the local rhetoric of gender and race helps resurrect that "universal" image of the white male, our cultural savior, indeed the *keeper* of our social liberties.

## Notes to Chapter Two

<sup>1</sup> The notion of the "the masculine point of view"--distinguishing between biological sex and a hegemonic perspective--comes from Susan Jeffords's work and is useful as a way to describe the ideological perspective from which patriarchy articulates itself. For this reason, it is important to see that this point of view is always already "raced" in American cultural production.

<sup>2</sup> At this historical juncture, critical complicity with the myth of men together seems not a working toward "feminist goals" as Boone and Martin contend but a recuperation of them so that the very structure perpetuating white masculine domination may now be strangely resurrected as the symbol and source of cultural freedoms. Such an occupation of the feminist position is no accident, for American culture is being marked everywhere by a recuperatory masculine ideology: imbued with the feminine--even the feminist--the white masculine point of view can present itself as no longer part of the ideological construction of masculine dominance. It is this occupation of the feminist position in valorizations of the male bond that is most troubling, for it points out the ability of the white masculine point of view to continue envisioning itself everywhere.

<sup>3</sup> While the notion of the narrator's role as unreliable is not new (see Dillingham, 11; Garcia, 68; Karcher, *Shadow*, 121; Rowland, 390), previous critics have failed to focus on the idealization of the male bond as the particular method through which the narrator disguises the sociopolitical nature of Paradise.

<sup>4</sup> Franklin has noted the anal imagery of the narrator's description of the location of Paradise.

<sup>5</sup> Although other critics have noted how Paradise is based on a rejection of the heterosexual, they have interpreted this rejection--and Paradise's subliminal homoeroticism--as the source of Melville's critique. Sandburg, like Fiedler (*Love and Death*), views Paradise as an exploration of impotency, of man "retreating to [an] all-male childhood to avoid confrontation with heterosexual manhood" (2).

<sup>6</sup> In a similar move, Boone strips male bonding from its cultural context, reifying the connection between relations among men and patriarchal power. His applause for "the true source maintaining the male bond . . . its mutuality--of spirit, of gender, of democratic fraternity" (193) is as misguided as Melville's narrator through Paradise who idealizes its "band of brothers."

<sup>7</sup> In privileging male homosexuality, Martin contends that the nonaggressiveness of the male couple will transform the phallus as a

patriarchal instrument of power. As such, Melville's phallic punning and masturbatory imagery, particularly in *Moby-Dick*, are "exploration[s] of the social potential of male homosexuality to break down the forces of aggression identified with the patriarchal structure" (82). Linking male homosexuality with a benign masculinity that can deconstruct male dominated culture, Martin reinscribes the phallus as controlling symbol and metaphor of the patriarchal economy; this revision--and re-erection--of the closed economy of the phallic signifier is perhaps best demonstrated by his insistence that "[s]urely no one can read Melville without rejoicing in the verbal exuberance, in the sheer delight of handling words, of touching them, of rolling them around in the mouth, almost as if they were globules of sperm. . . ." (11-12). Such a maneuver resurrects the phallus as signifier of a new masculinity while displacing men's cultural domination of women onto a structure supposedly outside the masculine. As Melville's bachelors indicate, nonaggressive masculinity does not disrupt their participation in the hierarchical structures of Paradise. Within the economy of the seen, fluctuations of masculinity confirm instead of deny the dominance of the masculine position by reiterating it as an order "from which nothing escapes" (Irigaray, 88). Any reliance on the phallic signifier to challenge patriarchy will easily be recuperated into the masculine, for it is from such a position that the male body is already represented as universalized meaning.

<sup>8</sup> Sandberg supports such contentions of castration anxiety but in a curiously un insightful manner. He writes, "since children of both sexes often regard the absence of the penis in the female as proof of punishment for past bad behavior, [the narrator's] hesitancy is psychologically comprehensible . . . Not only is the vagina a literal Dantean Hell for punishment, a forbidden sight, it is also connected with feelings of disgust" (5). See also Rowland, 403.

<sup>9</sup> Numerous critics have viewed Tartarus as a condemnation of the biological roles of women in a male dominated society but without focusing on the heterosexual implications of such a role. See Fisher, Rogin, and Rosenberry.

<sup>10</sup> While Jeffords discusses the repression of reproduction in the bonding scenarios of Vietnam narration--"The story of Vietnam cannot tolerate even the appearance of a woman giving birth, except when mediated by men"--this repression accompanies depictions of the male bond not only in war and at particular historical junctures but generally, suggesting that one of the structural features of the male bond is a denial of reproduction.

<sup>11</sup> A great deal of critical attention has been paid to unraveling Melville's personal attitude toward slavery and slave revolt; indeed, the bulk of the criticism on *Benito Cereno* in the past twenty years revolves around the question of whether or not Melville was in favor of slave insurrection and to what extent he was

complicit in his era's racial--and racist--ideologies. On this, Karcher seems most accurate: "I do not believe that "Benito Cereno" is primarily a dramatization of slave revolt, let alone a psychological study of the slave rebel, but rather an exploration of the white racist mind and how it reacts in the face of a slave insurrection" (*Shadow*, 128).

<sup>12</sup> Delano's method here of reading race through the inscription of sexual difference reproduces the broader tendency in American cultural production to graft the paradigm of gender onto all other power relations. But as his wistfulness makes clear, such an inscription of gender as a natural order merely mystifies the construction of race as a category of difference. In the mythos of the male bond, gender thus functions as the veil through which the hierarchies that exist among men can be superficially settled, the sight of the African women allowing Delano to reaffirm all cultural hierarchies.

<sup>13</sup> Of course, Francesco's demeanor is all a masquerade; Delano's interpretation is fully undermined by the fallacy of blood superiority. As Allan Moore Emery writes, "the case of Francesco suggests that the intermingling of races does not always produce results favorable to the notion of white preeminence" (324).

<sup>14</sup> As Karcher writes, "Melville's portrayal of Babo as an almost disembodied brain . . . reverses the conventional racist stereotype of the Negro as all brawn and no brain. More subversively, perhaps, it also reverses the conventional appraisal of the black and white races' respective fortes. . ." ("Melville and Racial Prejudice," 299).

<sup>15</sup> The final image of Babo does not imply, as Bickley asserts, "that Babo, even after death, remains the master of man's spirit and fate. His dead head looks out over the world and his inhumanity somehow still arranges the events of the universe" (108). Instead, this disembodied head ironically reflects on Delano's invocation of the relationship between master and servant as "confidence" and "fidelity" by deconstructing the illusion of the interracial male bond.

<sup>16</sup> In her first chapter, Harris describes how earlier nineteenth-century use of the term "lynching" referred simply to illegal forms of "justice." It is only when lynching became a tool for the continued suppression of blacks that it meant a ritualistic slaying.

<sup>17</sup> The representation of the white woman as symbol of privilege dominates twentieth century texts by black male writers, including James Baldwin's *Another Country*, Imamu Amiri Baraka's *Home*, David Bradley's *The Chaneyville Incident*, Cecil Brown's *The Life and Loves of Mister Jiveass Nigger*, Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice*, Chester

Himes's *If He Hollers Let Him Go* and *The Primitive*, and John A. Williams's *The Man Who Cried I Am*. In a number of these texts, as Press's work demonstrates, the white woman is cast as a depraved, willing party to the black man's "rape." Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* is indicative of this tradition, the white woman literally pleading for her own violation by the black man. Even in *Native Son*, we see Bigger and his friends inventing their own mythology about the white woman, a mythology that constructs her as whore: "them rich white women'll go to bed with anybody, from a poodle on up" (33).

<sup>18</sup> This burning ritual is depicted in Wright's earlier story "Big Boy Leaves Home" where four young boys are caught swimming naked in a white man's pond by a white woman. Their very presence before the white woman constitutes rape. The execution of Bobo, witnessed by the protagonist Big Boy, characterizes other historical and literary lynching even though Wright does not specifically depict castration:

Big Boy could see the barrel surrounded by flames. The mob fell back, forming a dark circle . . . He smelt the scent of tar. . . .

"LES GIT SOURVINEERS!"

He saw the mob close in around the fire. Their faces were hard and sharp in the light of the flames. . . .

"Everybody git back!"

"Look! Hes gotta finger!"

"C MON! GIT THE GALS BACK FROM THE FIRE!"

"He's got one of his ears, see?" . . .

The stench of tar permeated the hillside. The sky was black and the wind was blowing hard.

HURRY UP N BURN THE NIGGER FO IT RAINS!"

Big Boy saw the mob fall back, leaving a small knot of men about the fire. Then, for the first time, he had a full glimpse of Bobo. A black body flashed in the light. Bobo was struggling, twisting; they were binding his arms and legs.

When he saw them tilt the barrel he stiffened. A scream quivered. He knew the tar was on Bobo. The mob fell back. He saw a tar-drenched body glistening and turning.

"THE BASTARDS GOT IT!"

. . .The flames leaped tall as the trees. The scream came again . . . Then he saw a writhing white mass cradled in yellow flame, and heard scream, one on top of the other, each shriller and shorter than the last. The mob was quiet now, standing still, looking up the slopes at the writhing white mass gradually growing black, growing black in a cradle of yellow flame. (48-49)



<sup>19</sup> While Harris's work is invaluable to any study of burning and lynching rituals in American literature and culture, she does not work through the gender structures that underlie the black man-white woman nexus. In particular she reaffirms the equation of masculinity with power, seeing the symbolic emasculation of black men as symptomatic of black people's oppression in American culture. In a discussion of two black male characters (Bledsoe from Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Tyree from Wright's *The Long Dream*) who have in essence sold out to white power, Harris reinscribes the visibility of masculine genitalia as symbols of power; she writes, "the games each man must play to stay where he is are tied together by history: both have given their balls to white men and should not be surprised if they are handed back on something less than a silver platter" (49).

<sup>20</sup> Ralph Ellison's little-known short story, "The Birthmark," captures the intent of castration rituals to demonstrate white male superiority by foregrounding the phallic war embodied in such acts. In his story, the birthmark is literally a mark on a black man, Willie's, stomach by which his sister and brother try to identify him after he purportedly has been hit by a car. But in fact, Willie has been lynched by white men and deposited on the side of the road. Not only is Willie's face mauled beyond recognition, but he has also been castrated, the remedy for the symbolic birthmark that "flaws" black men. When his brother, Matt, "lowered his eye he noticed the ribs had been caved in. The flesh was bruised and torn. [The birthmark] was just below [Willie's] navel, he thought. Then he gave a start: where it should have been was only a bloody mound of torn flesh and hair" (16). Willie's penis becomes his symbolic birthmark; when, at the end of the story Ellison writes that Matt "swallowed hard and pulled [his sister] tightly to him, catching sight of Willie between the white man's legs" (17), it is no accident that the image is one of a castrated black man functioning as the proud penis of his white assailants. This image is the representative symbol of the castration ritual itself, where the black man's sexuality becomes an emblem of white male power. As Kengdon notes, "[c]astration is obviously sex revenge. Sex resentment is usually the passion which keeps lynch mobs at the emotional heat required for carrying out their violence" (899).

<sup>21</sup> Even in the terms of this argument, the black woman's status as a negation is reinscribed because of the foregrounding of the white woman as the mediation between men. This is problematical and part of the difficulty in accounting for the numerous levels of interaction between race and gender in American culture. Future studies need to begin here in exploring the use of the black woman as cultural currency in ways that more thoroughly make visible her particular form of victimization in American cultural productions.

<sup>22</sup> The dissolution of difference between men via gender is particularly apparent in the late 1950s film, *The Defiant Ones*, where the black and white escapees from a chain gang, played by Sidney

Poitier and Tony Curtis, are fully united in their common struggle after the betrayal by a white woman who seeks to send the black man in the wrong direction to protect his white comrade. Indeed, the movie is itself a reenactment of the mythology of the male bond, casting the men as fully outside society, renegades who ultimately realize that they are chained together in their common heritage as Americans. Unlike *Native Son*, this text fails to, in some sense, problematize the mythology or to offer a vision that speaks to the great gulfs separating black and white men.

<sup>23</sup> Examples of critical idealizations of *Cuckoo's Nest* radicalism include Barsness, Baurecht, Boardman, McGrath, Scally and Yonce. In an interesting turn, Fred Madden argues that the stalemate involved in arguing whether or not Kesey is sexist and racist can be bypassed by looking at Chief Bromden as the novel's central character, for "the narrative records his own movement toward self-reliance and sanity. But, second, this seemingly positive narrative reveals the ward members' and Big Chief's manipulation and destruction of McMurphy" (204). Ironically, Madden reinscribes the image of McMurphy as the cultural victim.

<sup>24</sup> I am not the first to suggest that *Cuckoo's Nest* relies on hegemonic configurations of race and gender though other critics do not view these problems as part of the negotiation of white masculine power via the interracial male bond. See Beidler, Bross, Falk, Forrey, Horst, Leeds, McMahan, Tanner, and Widmer.

<sup>25</sup> Kesey's novel, in fact, suggests that our contemporary attempts to theoretically separate the penis from the phallus, to remove power from the circuit of the visible, constitute a kind of "splitting of hairs" that results only in a reconstructed notion of power, one that recuperates the sight/site of the penis as somehow distinct from the articulation of patriarchal power.

<sup>26</sup> Death by looking is demonstrated best by the case of Emmett Till, a 14 year old black boy who reportedly came on suggestively to a white woman in the south and was promptly lynched--shot through the head and strung up--for it. His case became a national incident crucial to the growing Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s when his mother insisted on an open casket funeral to demonstrate to the world what white men had done to her child. The men, who later sold their story to a national magazine for profit, were acquitted. See *Eyes on the Prize* where the story of Till is told through actual film footage of both his open casket funeral and the trial of his slayers.

"It was never for the nigger":  
 Recuperating Race in Contemporary America

In the prologue of the 1980 bestseller *The Lords of Discipline*, Will McLean, the narrator, presents the ideological project of his story: "I want to tell you how it was. I want precision. I want a murderous, stunning truthfulness. I want to find my own singular voice for the first time" (6). The articulation of his own "singular voice," a voice which, by implication, has been denied, characterizes the recuperatory gesture of the present decade where the white masculine point of view poses as the truth-teller, origin of that "singular voice" that can provide the precision missing in other versions of the "story."<sup>1</sup> This truth, as both the novel and the 1983 film version demonstrate, concerns "the making of men" (6), specifically how the military academy performs a "grotesque artistry" in turning its plebes from soft youths to warrior men. Echoing lines from the novel, General Durrell, played by G.D. Spradlin in the film, outlines the need for a military-tough masculinity:

Life here is hard but the rigors of this system produce a superior breed of man, something this country needs now more than ever because America is fat . . . sloppy, immoral and she needs men of iron to set her on the right path

again. She needs Institute men . . . the men you shall become.

Entrance into this superior breed, this rugged masculinity that can right the effeminate ways of America, is marked by the wearing of a ring, "the sacred symbol of the Institute and its ideals."

While the novel and its film version both explore this world of "the brotherhood of the ring, the fellowship of the line," particularly the internal corruption wrought by a secret society, *The Ten*, the differences in their narrative structures highlight the recuperatory project--and its changing construction--in the 1980s, specifically the way the male bond's reinscription of gender has given way to a racial regeneration. In the novel, the narrative of the sacred ring, of honor and masculinity, is interwoven with the narrative of the ring's more traditional association, matrimony. Here, McLean's struggle as a rebel in the institution and his subsequent role as the protector of the first black cadet, Tom Pearce, is juxtaposed with his affair with Annie Kate Gervais, a woman from a poor Southern family who is impregnated by Tradd St. Croix, Will's best friend and academy roommate. This decidedly secondary plot line diffuses the role of race, establishing gender--the sight of the body of woman--as the primary site of mediation between the white men. In the film, however, this entire narrative is omitted, allowing the recuperation of a masculine voice as already raced to gain greater visibility. This visibility is, in fact, an essential part of the process of re-masculinization of this decade; by casting the black man as the central figure of the Other, racial

difference can simultaneously be foregrounded and denied through the spectacle--the superficial representation--of blackness.<sup>2</sup>

This shift--from the intersection of gender and race to a more overt racial paradigm--signifies the changing shape of the recuperatory project in the latter days of the "Reagan Era." While the reconstruction of a masculine point of view is central to this project, such a shift allows for a strategic recuperation of racial difference, a recuperation that works its way through the "re-masculinization" process in the context of an already-rejuvenated masculinity. While gender is still an important element in the male bonding scenario, the predominance of interracial configurations points to a second layer of hegemonic recuperation, one that becomes more pronounced as the masculine reestablishes itself as voice for American wholeness. Because such a recuperation of the masculine enables multiple masculine points of view to enter the cultural economy--because the re-masculinization project has the potential for rehabilitating all masculine voices--the making of difference within the economy of the same becomes crucial. And thus the interracial male bond becomes the privileged site of the reconstruction of the masculine, for it is here that the white masculine point of view can craft itself as that "singular voice," becoming the central term in the cultural negotiation among men.

In *Lords of Discipline*, set in Charleston, South Carolina in 1964, the entrance of the first black cadet into the Institute threatens the sacred circle of the ring, for the ethos of this

masculinity rests on an assumption of white racial superiority.<sup>3</sup> Even Bear, the officer who assigns McLean to look after Pearce admits, "Yeah, I'm a racist. I'd like nothing better than to see Mr. Pearce move his black ass right out of here . . . [but] Pearce is one of my lambs and all of my lambs get an even break." Bear's attitude paradoxically affirms racism at the same time it establishes a seemingly democratic perspective, one that promises fair treatment in the face of gross bigotry. This paradox, and the rehabilitation of the white masculine point of view through it, governs the film, allowing McLean to ascribe to a code of honor greater than that professed by the Institute, but one in which the role of the white man as cultural hero outweighs the struggle against racism. When asked, after he has lost his ring, "Was it worth it, Will, four years down the drain for a nigger?", McLean replies: "It wasn't for the nigger. It was never for the nigger." This phrase reverberates not only throughout the film but across the many cultural texts that feature the interracial male bond, for the inculcation of the black man into the sacred circle of the masculine has never been "for the nigger" but for the white man so that, as Tradd St. Croix says to McLean, "you could be a hero."

The ideological project of the *Lords of Discipline* is evinced even more strongly when we look at Pearce, the black cadet whose desire for "democratic" opportunity brings upon him the wrath of "The Ten," a secret group of cadets who through terrorism drive out all those who don't fulfill their notion of Institute men. Their terrorization of Poitette, who eventually commits suicide in fear of

being taken to "the hole" (where the Ten perform their most extreme punishments), foreshadows the power of this group to control the fates of individuals and to affect the internal functioning of the institution. While The Ten hate all weak-willed males, the full extent of their secret power is directed at Pearce, whose role in the film is so superficial he becomes merely the territory over which the battle between a fascist white regime and a heroic white brotherhood--led by McLean--wage war. While the novel casts Pearce as a tough-minded hot-head, the film shows him as a passively strong individual, one who holds his own but does not verbally or physically fight back. The film thus presents, in a more obvious fashion, the black man's struggle for racial equality as contingent on the white man's intercession, allowing the white man to expose the illnesses of the same cultural order that can then cast him as hero. Indeed, the final words spoken by Pearce reinforce this representation of the white man, for he must pay homage to McLean, his savior: "Thank you, sir."

Through the specter of the black male, the white masculine point of view renegotiates its own "singular voice," establishing a newly constructed patriarchal culture in which the question of race and racial equality can only be answered through a struggle posed between white men. While Will is the central figure "for the good guys," he is aided by his roommates during the penultimate rescue scene when Pearce is down in "the hole" being tortured with electrodes and the threat of having his genitals set on fire. Although Will's friends are initially uneasy about endangering their lives and their status

at the Institute for "a nigger," he invokes their bond, "I'm putting our friendship on the line. Now, how about it?" In pitting a renegade white male group against the Klan-like society of *The Ten*, *Lords of Discipline* constructs the black man, the entire issue of race, as the mediation not only between white men but between a white supremacist cultural order and its reconstitution as democratic possibility--a reconstruction that, significantly, enables a new tradition of white masculine power and authority to exert itself. In this sense, the "brotherhood of the ring" remains a white construct, one through which the struggle for racial equality is made, a struggle that was--and is indeed--"never for the nigger."

As a crucial construction site for the negotiation of relations among men in patriarchy, the interracial male bond achieves its greatest power and visibility when hegemonic structures have been most threatened by the presence of racial difference. In the decade of the 1980s, configurations of the interracial bond--*48 Hours* (Walter Hill, dir, 1982), *Lords of Discipline* (Frank Roddam, dir, 1983), *White Nights* (Taylor Hackford, dir, 1985), *Enemy Mine* (Wolfgang Petersen, dir, 1985), *Streets of Gold* (Joe Roth, dir, 1986), *Lethal Weapon* (Richard Donner, dir, 1987), *Trading Places* (John Landis, dir, 1982), *Hamburger Hill* (John Irvin, dir, 1987), *Shoot to Kill* (Robert Spottiswoode, dir, 1988), *Cry Freedom* (Richard Attenborough, dir, 1988), *Off Limits* (Christopher Crowe, dir, 1988), *Miami Vice*, *Sonny Spoon*, *The A Team*, *J.J. Starbuck*, the remake of the



*Defiant Ones* (1987), *Magnum P.I.* and *Hill Street Blues*<sup>4</sup>--demonstrate the recuperatory practices of a culture in need of negotiating the threat to white masculine hegemony posed by black power and civil rights discourses spawned in the 1950s and 1960s. It is no accident that the two "classic" interracial male bonding films--*The Defiant Ones* (Stanley Kramer, dir, 1958) and *In the Heat of the Night* (Norman Jewison, dir, 1967)--straddle the most turbulent years of racial protest and violence in American history, interpreting that history in ways that say a great deal about American race relations: on one hand, the hopeful Huck Finn dream of two men on the run from white civilization and white women and on the other, the integration narrative that links black and white across the discourse of cultural law and order.

These two images of the black man as convict and officer are, of course, still with us, not because they haunt our imaginations--as a Fiedleresque critic might phrase it--but because they are essential to the negotiation process of the present decades. While Robin Wood claims that in the 1980s the "buddy" film "virtually disappeared" (229), he spoke too soon--or at least not precisely enough, for the male bonding narrative is central to contemporary cultural production. In 1987, in fact, films with significant bonding themes rapidly appeared--from the various Vietnam narratives to successful comedies such as *Three Men and a Baby* (Leonard Nimoy, dir, 1987). While not all of these films feature the interracial configuration, the emphasis on a newly articulated masculine image--as either "transcending" gender or establishing the masculine player as social

victim--necessitates a similar retelling of the relations among black and white men. Through such representations, the specter of masculine difference can be both constructed and contained within the scene of interracial fraternity; inculcated into the patriarchal economy, the image of the masculine other offers visible "proof" of the "classless, raceless possibility" (Baker, 65) of American culture by appearing to settle racial difference in a "balance" of masculine power. The appearance of equilibrium, of an undifferentiated masculine economy, veils the recuperation process by inscribing a "natural" masculine order, one in which all men are established as seemingly equal performers in patriarchal relations.

But beneath the surface representation of gender solidarity, the interracial male bond functions as a crucial site for the negotiation of racial differences among men. Contrary to the many representational attempts to enforce the paradigm of sexual difference--as in castration rituals which cast relations between black and white men as a replication of masculine/feminine, whole/lack--the masculine other is not a symbolic woman nor is he simply a feminized man; if lack must be consigned, if the black man must be physically, psychologically, or symbolically castrated, then what one has is not lack at all, but sameness, a sameness so terrifying that cultural production uses the discourse of sexual difference to mask the underlying threat of masculine sameness that structures relations between black and white men. This economy of the same, discussed in more detail in the following chapter, functions as the primary tension of the bond, a tension grown more

acute during the twentieth century as black male claims to power have increasingly entered the cultural realm. Thus, while gender functions through the threat of difference, the interracial male bond operates on a paradigm of sameness, a sameness which, according to the ethos of patriarchal culture, grants each masculine subject access to power unless--and this is key--difference is reconstructed. This reconstruction takes place at the site of the interracial male bond where masculine sameness is simultaneously asserted and disavowed.

Because patriarchal culture is integrally bound to multiple enunciations of difference and not simply to the reiteration of gender, feminist theory, in its assertion of the primacy of gender, has been complicit in the negotiation of patriarchal relations by reproducing a seamless masculine economy--a representation that replicates the framework of the male bond and its cultural denouncement of an internal racial hierarchy.<sup>5</sup> This complicity is a product of American strategies of production where gender, as the primary category through which masculine sameness can be asserted ("We're all men here"), is often grafted onto racial difference. In the classic American scenario, for instance, the method by which black men are disempowered of their patriarchal "rights" as men is through castration which ensures their lack, and establishes, indeed literalizes, an affinity with the feminine symbolic space of (phallic) absence.<sup>6</sup> But, while castration is here a way of engendering race, the representation of black men in the cultural economy cannot be collapsed into the gender paradigm--the binary

structure of One/Not All--because it is through gender that hierarchical constructions of difference among men are simultaneously defined and denied. In settling masculine difference by reasserting gender, the cultural economy "heals" itself through a miraculous feat of masculine overdetermination--a feat often reinscribed by feminist theory's problematical erasure of race as a category of difference among men.

Through its own vampiristic process of constructing and devouring difference, the interracial male bond depicts a strategy for racial containment--and significantly, for the rejuvenation of white masculine power--that is the particular mark of the recuperation process of the contemporary period. By offering the visibility of racial difference, black partners in the male bond inscribe the scene of men together as one void of hierarchies, beyond racist, patriarchal paradigms. But this visibility is itself part of the strategic recuperation of black male challenge to the patriarchal program as it has been known in the twentieth century. In response to this threat, hegemonic processes have forged the articulation of a new system of containment, one that paradoxically foregrounds the image of masculine difference as it consumes that difference, transforming the historically marginalized subject into a pure spectacle of difference. In this way, the image of the black male functions as a renegotiation of the problematical terrain of the patriarchal economy; by presenting the specter of the marginalized other, the white masculine point of view can be reasserted anew, cast as an inclusive structure--as the articulation site of democratic

possibility--but based ever more firmly on the enunciation of difference.<sup>7</sup>

This process of specularizing difference results not simply from American strategies of marking the body as the site of difference but because of contemporary modes of production--primarily television and cinema--which, as apparatus of the visible, are crucial to the negotiation of patriarchal relations.<sup>8</sup> By privileging visibility, these modes of production inscribe the voyeuristic gaze and the fetishization of difference through the construction of subject (of the look) and object. While feminist film theory has concentrated on how this relations replicates gender structures--masculine spectator/feminine spectacle--this dichotomizationn does not account for the structural relation between men encountered, for instance, in white male spectatorship/black male spectacle, for the look here is not synonymous with the two positions of gender difference. Rather, what initially appears to be a gender construct--the black male being the object of the look--indicates instead the role of gender as a "decoy"<sup>9</sup> in the process of diffusing and constructing differences within the space of the masculine itself.

For this reason, we need to view the representation of race not as a replication of gender but as a negotiation *across the body of gender*<sup>10</sup>--a body so stridently masculine it can easily appropriate the feminine to itself in a strategic recuperation of *all* difference. In her work on Vietnam narration, Susan Jeffords describes this ability of the masculine to "occupy" the feminine as a crucial aspect of contemporary cultural production, the image of the vet becoming

"an emblem for a fallen and emasculated American male, one who had been falsely scorned by society and unjustly victimized by his own government."<sup>11</sup> Linking this image to existing patterns of cultural empathy for the victimized--patterns ironically forged by blacks, women, the disabled and other marginalized groups--the masculine casts itself as the oppressed, moving across binary boundaries to appropriate the space of the other; but, as Jeffords writes, this apparent transcendence of boundaries is

not an exchange of gender roles, but an elimination of them, so that all that exists, all that speaks . . . is the voice of the masculine point of view, that voice that has succeeded in occupying [in Robin Wood's words] "with ease, and without inhibition, the position of the female."

As Jeffords defines it, such an inscription of the masculine characterizes the cultural process of the past twenty years, a process she calls the "re-masculinization of American culture" which is distinguished by the use of "gender difference . . . as a spectacle to divert attention and tension away from racial difference."

But as numerous representations of the interracial male bond in the 1980s make clear, race functions as its own spectacle, and gender structures, while always inscribed in the very nature of the bonding scenario, have been so successfully recuperated that the male bond no longer relies solely on the representation of woman's difference. Indeed, in several films, the space of the feminine is wholly occupied by the masculine, creating the appearance of heterogeneity

within a scene of masculine sameness, but functioning as signifier of a now diversified masculine. For these reasons, the crisis in masculinity evinced by the loss of the war,<sup>12</sup> as Jeffords makes clear, is not the sole source of the re-masculinization project nor is the reconstruction of gender its solitary goal. At *this* moment in cultural production, the rehabilitation of the Vietnam war is perhaps less essential to the larger process of cultural recuperation than the image of the interracial male bond, that representational space that can use various cultural narratives for the resurrection of the hegemony--including but not limited to the war. Because the reassertion of white dominance is crucial to the recuperation project of the 1980s--is, indeed, the repressed assumption of this project--the interracial male bond explodes on the American scene in a variety of cultural texts to offer the spectacle of fraternity; an elaborate tool in the negotiation of white masculine power, the bonding scenario provides a performance of racial stability, a post-civil rights egalitarianism so insistent one marvels at American culture's fascination with its own dark-faced masquerade.

The image of the white man negotiating his own cultural voice across the discourse of race constructs a new mythology of origins, one in which the white masculine point of view both inscribes itself as the originary term in the eradication of racism and casts all potential for democracy wholly within the masculine. Such a reconstruction of origins--of both the civil rights movement and of

cultural relations--demonstrates the interracial male bond's affinity with colonial discourses where the site of origin--usually the origin of white conquest--must be recuperated by the agent of colonization. Homi K. Bhabba's analysis of colonial discourse is interesting in this respect: "what is being dramatised is a separation--*between* races, cultures, histories, *within* histories--a separation between *before* and *after* that repeats obsessively the mythical moment of disjunction" (34). What Bhabba cites as a distinctive mark of colonial discourse--its attempt to reiterate and naturalize difference through a replay of separation--is the opposite strategy at work in the interracial male bond which seeks to deny the moment of disjunction, to reconstruct a story of origins that features no separation, no loss of masculine wholeness--even as they all assume disjunction as their starting points. Such a denial of separation allows the male bond to cloak its originary fear, not of difference but of sameness, through a frantic reassertion of masculine oneness.

The process of reconstructing the origins of the interracial male bond entails simultaneously acknowledging masculine sameness and denying it through the inculcation of the black partner into the white masculine point of view. Where *Lords of Discipline* plays out its strategic game of presentation and negation across the discourse of equal rights, *Enemy Mine*, appearing two years later, nostalgically narrates the struggle to overcome difference through a mythic return to origins, to masculine sameness. This notion of sameness is defined by the white masculine point of view, the voice of authority that opens the film, the voice that, in telling the story of the



"enemy," transforms that enemy into "mine." The film takes place in the latter part of the 21st century when, the voiceover of Willis Davidge (played by Dennis Quaid) tells us,

the nations of the Earth were finally at peace working together to explore and colonize the distant reaches of space. Unfortunately we weren't alone out there. A race of nonhuman aliens called the Dracs were claiming squatter's rights to some of the richest star systems in the galaxy. Well, they weren't going to get it without a fight.

In establishing the narrative context, Davidge simultaneously asserts an Earthly transcendence of its struggles over difference and power while reconstructing space as the new battlefield for the exertion of colonial control. This representation of a "healed" human culture merely displaces earthly tensions onto "space" where the battle between self and other can be fought anew.

In this struggle, the narrative recreates the traditional interracial male bonding scenario on an intergalactic--and thus seemingly universal--level: Davidge and a Drac (who is later called Jerry) become stranded on an uncolonized planet where they are forced to learn to overcome their races' untamed hostility toward one another for the sake of mutual survival. While on the surface the film appears to present a confrontation with new, unknown life--the fantasy of science fiction--the illusion of complete alterity breaks down as the mythology of the interracial male bond is weaved through the space world of the 21st century; the human is a white man and the

alien, though clothed in reptilian fashion, is played by black actor Louis Gossett, Jr., the "dark brother" in the interracial paradigm. In a film that posits the black actor as alien and the white actor as his human, heroic counterpart, the image of Gossett as reptile conjures up a long tradition of black stereotypes in American culture where blacks have been cast in the role of the white man's nonhuman other, the dark beast, the alien outsider who threatens cultural wholeness.<sup>13</sup> Beneath the ideological illusion of pure, nonhuman difference, the film both highlights the dream of bonding across (an always-already constructed) difference while recreating, in a very visible manner, the image of the Other as entirely nonhuman, fully animal, alien--a pure spectacle of difference.

The resolution of the tension between these two effects can only be made when the human (read: white man) enters the alien (read: black) discourse, making himself both its hero and its "forefather." Davidge does this through the fulfillment of a sacred vow with "Jerry," who, as an androgynous figure, dies in childbirth. Immediately before death, however, he makes Davidge promise to take the child, Zammis, back to its home planet: "You must take my place when I am gone. You must agree to take Zammis back home. You must stand beside Zammis before the Holy Council of Dracon and recite its lineage." Davidge's pledge to "Jerry" becomes the center of his life; during their subsequent years on the planet, Davidge teaches Zammis the song of its lineage and the sacred book of Dracon.<sup>14</sup> When other life appears, Davidge is forced to protect Zammis from humans--scavengers who use Dracs as slaves. Eventually, Zammis is caught and

Davidge launches a final battle to liberate all the Dracs from the labor camp. In his success, Davidge earns his place among the lineage of Zammis, and as the voiceover at the conclusion states:

And so Davidge brought Zammis and the Dracs home. He fulfilled his vow and recited the line of Zammis' forefathers before the holy council on Dracon. And when, in the fullness of time, Zammis brought its own child before the Holy Council the name of Willis Davidge was added to the line."

This narrative coup for the white masculine point of view, negotiated across the body of the alien creature, subsumes the androgynous into a masculine economy of "forefathers" where the white man's name becomes an important part of Draconian history and his role in the drama of slavery guarantees noncomplicity with the white slavers. While the representation of the alien as androgynous is a decoy--a displacement of what is, ultimately, a narrative about the masculine and its internal struggle with sameness and difference--Gossett's character functions as the site for the white masculine point of view to appropriate the feminine to itself, colonizing it without disrupting its (masculine) space of enunciation. During the childbirth scene where, as one would expect, the issue of gender is addressed, the disavowal of the feminine is asserted.

Drac: Something is wrong.

Human: On no. . . you're going to be alright. Women always get nervous before labor.

Drac: I AM NOT A WOMAN.

While the feminine is strenuously denounced here, the opposite claim--that neither is he man--is never made; in the "feminine" scene of birth, the disavowal forces the paradigm of the 'bisexual'<sup>15</sup> to collapse into an economy of the Same, the denial allowing "Jerry" to avoid castration. In this way, *he* can maintain the feminine without it becoming the "gap" that threatens masculine unity.

Closing the "gap" of the feminine, housing it within a masculine economy, is the stitch necessary to the full recuperation of the white masculine point of view. Before "Jerry" dies, with the child kicking beneath the scaly folds of his belly, he instructs Davidge: "You must open me. Don't be afraid, my friend." While Davidge is initially horrified at both the instructions and "Jerry's" death, he tears open the pregnant womb with his fingers, pulling the baby from the dead body. His birthing of Zammis allows him to appropriate the feminine to himself without any question of gender confusion, for here the feminine has no link to the female body--or even an androgynous body--birth is simply redefined as a masculine activity of tearing. The denial of reproduction as a feminine process functions to fully eradicate the possibility of castration posed by the site of birth, of gaps and holes, while allowing the masculine the appearance of structural change. "Such boundary crossings," as Jeffords writes,

are not transgressions but confirmations: the masculine can move into the "female position" by occupying that position, not altering its own. Conversely, women do not exchange positions with the masculine but are excused from exchange

altogether.

As the film depicts, "women" do not exist at all, for the masculine has now overcome the threat of sexual difference by completely "occupying" the female position.<sup>16</sup>

In *Enemy Mine*, as in other configurations of the interracial male bond, it is the white masculine point of view that most benefits from this transcendence of gender, for it is the white man who, through the body of the alien, gives birth to a masculine Other (Zammis), confirming his own status as the savior of alien discourses and confirming those discourses as themselves not alien to the masculine. In such a scenario, gender as a transitory state functions to veil the underlying struggle *within* the masculine by positing difference in sexual terms and obscuring the alien's own affinity not to the feminine but to the masculine itself. In this way, the dual repressions of the film--that the alien is both black and masculine--become pivotal for the recuperation of the white masculine position, for they help to disguise the reconstruction of the struggle of difference *within* the masculine.<sup>17</sup> In other words, the illusion of gender transcendence negotiates a doubling of the masculine, a rehabilitation of all difference onto the side of the Same: as the feminine is eradicated in the masculine occupation of reproduction, so too is racial difference recuperated by the image of the white male as father and guardian of the "alien" history and culture.

This rehabilitation of both racial and gender difference reinscribes dominant ideology by presenting the white masculine

economy as the site for the full enunciation of cultural freedoms, freedoms that signify a movement across previously oppressive gender and racial boundaries. The height of this renegotiation of the white masculine is depicted in the white man's revolt against the enslavement of the Dracs for, by casting himself as the liberator and enforcer of democratic equality, Davidge is able to colonize the alien discourse, becoming its "forefather," his name forever inscribed in the Draconian song of ancestry. The white masculine point of view thus takes unto itself the "androgynous" culture of the Dracs, "transcending" binary oppositions and inserting himself into the Other's myth of origins. While the film encourages us to read the opposite strategy--that Davidge is himself colonized and changed by his contact with "that love [that] might unite them"--its narrative frame privileges the white masculine point of view, closure coming only when the white man has succeeded not simply in spurning his culture's racism but in reestablishing himself in the context of that racism as a renegade against cultural constructs of dis/empowerment.

Such a recuperation is made possible only by the death of the other, whose words, "You must take my place," ironically foreshadow white masculine occupation of the spaces of both the feminine and the masculine racial "other." In this way, the narrative constructs the white male body as the site of a universalized "totality" where all difference can be synthesized in the representation of the white masculine "one"--it is he who claims the space of difference, transforming it from alterity to sameness, from a part to the whole.

The binary structures of gender and race--masculine/ feminine, white/alien--are thus seemingly transcended in the reiteration of the white masculine position as an always all-encompassing perspective; only at the site of the white male body can all forms of difference be occupied and overcome.

In this way, *Enemy Mine* seeks to displace--in fact to repress the representation of--the initial moment of separation by reconstructing a mythology of origins that ostensibly features no separation, no difference, a mythology that recedes beyond the few generations of any particular inter-species (read: interracial) strife to a narrative of "the fullness of time" when the white masculine voice itself recites "the line of . . . forefathers." Such a narrative guarantees that the fear of masculine sameness can be addressed through the simultaneous reassertion of difference and the colonization of that difference by a shifting--should we call it "postmodern"?--masculine economy. The Drac's physical difference--his reptilian features and bisexual reproductive capacities--prove to be decoys in this intergalactic bonding scenario between black and white men, for what is really at stake is the construction of the white masculine point of view which, recuperating gender difference through the alien, can proceed to subsume all difference within itself. Where *Lords of Discipline* fully disposes of the narrative of gender and inscribes the white man as the leader in the struggle for civil rights, *Enemy Mine* occupies all positions of difference, the white man "fulfill[ing] his vow" in a sweeping recuperation that is the mark of the contemporary period.

In the nostalgic quest for a mythology of origins that simultaneously eradicates or appropriates the feminine and rehabilitates the white masculine point of view, the male bond functions as the site for multiple negotiations within the masculine, the space that, in the paradigm of sexual difference, presents itself--and is often accepted--as monolithic, internally cohesive. The bond's enunciation of a self-enclosed, racially undifferentiated masculine space functions as the ideological trope necessary to the articulation of AMERICA, necessary to such an extent that American cultural production is caught in its own ideological contradiction, forced to continually oscillate between the assertion of masculine sameness and the (re)construction of difference in the face of that sameness. This oscillation is itself the process of American culture, constructing on one hand the ideological dream of cohesion, of an essential "American" identity, while forging, on the other, discriminations that qualify and specify the boundaries of that identity.

The tension produced through this oscillation allows for marginalized groups and discourses to gain visibility in American culture--the inculcation of their voices acting as the necessary "proof" of democratic possibility and progress. This process, what Sacvan Bercovitch calls "the American form," results in a transformation of "what might have been a confrontation of alternatives into an alternation of opposites" (*Ideology*, 438). This



description characterizes the internal dynamic of American cultural production which tends to conflate all differences into binary oppositions--in Bercovitch's terms, fusion or fragmentation, myth or material existence--enabling the apparent opposition to be absorbed and transformed into its antithesis. Through this binary (re)construction of all difference, heterogenous elements can be homogenized in the enunciation of a seemingly larger cultural identity, one that incorporates the radical multiplicity inherent in the disparate cultural identities that have converged on the Native Indian soil of North America. As Bercovitch writes, "[t]echnology and religion, individualism and social progress, spiritual, political and economic values--all the fragmented aspects of life and thought . . . flowed into "America," the symbol of cultural consensus" ("Rites," 27). In this sense, multiplicity and fragmentation are not opposite to hegemony, but intrinsic to its cultural production.

Counterhegemonic forces can thus be reined into the ideological apparatus of American culture because, at their base, they are constructed by--and forever in relation to--the hegemonic structures they act to contradict. Feminist ideology, in its function as the binary opposition to patriarchal culture, is thus linked, through its very existence and resistance, to the ideological structure it so stridently questions and condemns, and discourses of civil rights embody their own recuperatory potential by representing American culture as a failure of its own noble democratic ideals. "Every ideology," in the words of Bercovitch, "breeds its own opposition, every culture its own counterculture. The same ideals that at one

point nourish [or challenge] the system may later become the basis of a new revolutionary [or conservative] consensus, one that invokes those ideas on behalf of an entirely different way of life" (*Ideology*, 430). In its oscillation from consensus to revolution to a reconstructed revolutionary consensus, American culture continually (re)produces the tension between unity (sameness) and fragmentation (difference), a tension that is ultimately the vehicle for both resistance and hegemonic recuperation. For this reason, Stokely Carmichael's notion that "[f]or racism to die, a totally different America must be born" (505) needs to be amended: for racism to die, something *other* than America must be born.

The current proliferation of interracial male bonding scenarios facilitates the process of reiterating AMERICA by manipulating the tensions produced by the burgeoning radical discourses of the 1960s. In this manipulation--this transformation of margin into center--images of a completed social revolution are offered, creating a post-60s egalitarianism that absorbs the threat of racial dissonance into a reconstructed mythology of American cultural relations, a mythology that is itself enacted through marginalized appeals to the ideological ideal of America. In articulating protest as a measure between cultural rhetoric (of unity and equality) and material existence, which every significant movement in American history has done, in "adopt[ing] their culture's *controlling* metaphor--"America" as synonym for human possibility--and having made this the ground of radical dissent, [radical discourses] effectually redefine radicalism as an affirmation of cultural values" (Bercovitch, *Ideology*, 434).

Because of this appeal to the actualization of "America," hegemonic response to challenge can be measured through gains--economic, social, political--that themselves reaffirm cultural values, redistributing certain components of cultural power--enhancing the size of the black middle class, for instance--without fundamentally changing the social contract through which that power is articulated.

For this reason, the contemporary visibility of interracial male bonding scenarios, with their pretense to equality among black and white men, represents not a fundamental shift in the construction of American patriarchal culture but another manifestation of the process of negotiation where hegemonic structures respond to challenge by recreating the dissonant voice in the context of already established cultural values and images. In this way, the visibility of the black player in a narrative evincing egalitarian possibility works to seemingly redistribute masculine power--reaffirming all along the masculine basis of cultural power and paving the way for the recuperation of race as a category of difference. The re-masculinization process functions, in other words, to disrupt racial challenges to white supremacy by negotiating that difference through an appeal to masculinity and gender solidarity, making race itself appear to be a settled site on the cultural "frontier." In seeming to confront racial difference, these narratives are able to work through the crisis in American culture by positing a solution to the "problem" of race, a solution that, significantly, takes place through a reconstruction of the masculine itself.

The cultural production of a healed racial economy does not

mean, however, that these narratives evince little or no racial tension; like the relationship between the central characters in *Enemy Mine*, the interracial bond is almost always articulated as the site of cultural contestation, of difference and hostility, where the need for mutual survival comes to outweigh the previously (and seemingly) insurmountable differences between the two men. The interracial male bonding scenario thus casts itself continually in a confrontational frame but one which will transform that confrontation into a "love [that] might unite them," a union that seemingly recovers the lost masculine oneness, that "essential" irrefutable sameness. This sameness, in several contemporary films, is posited within the context of Cold War politics, enabling American culture to disavow its own internal racial hierarchies through the representation of a more extreme communist racism and oppression. By establishing the Soviet Union as the site for hostility and discrimination, the interracial male bond, particularly--as we shall see--in *White Nights*, draws upon the rhetoric of democratic possibility to negotiate America's racial history, interpreting it no longer as a struggle between black and white but as a choice between the political systems of communism and capitalism. Not surprisingly, capitalism is envisioned as the true articulation of cultural freedom.<sup>18</sup>

In *White Nights* (1985) the displacement of American racial politics is conducted through the figures of Nikolai Rodchenko (Mikhail Baryshnikov) and Raymond Greenwood (Gregory Hines) who, as exiles in one another's homelands, become linked when an electrical

failure forces Nikolai's plane--bound for Tokyo from London--to land in Siberia. Although he tries to destroy his identification papers, Nikolai is discovered by the KGB and sent to Talmyr where Greenwood acts as his informal guard--and, eventually, as his partner in escape to America. Set entirely in the Soviet Union, *White Nights* depicts Greenwood's alienation from American culture, an alienation borne of the racism and disillusionment of the 1960s which can only be overcome through his nostalgic return "home." This desire to go home, which counters the character's growing isolation and depression in the "prison" of Russia, is motivated by his Russian wife's pregnancy: "[escape is] the chance for the baby to have a real life, to be free." Greenwood's imprisonment in the Soviet system is evinced by his physical isolation in Siberia where he performs *Porgy and Bess* to peasant Russian audiences and by the tactics of Soviet officials who threaten him with physical labor unless he cooperates. To emphasize Greenwood's new, deeper and more humiliating cultural alienation, the film juxtaposes contemporary American music--sung most often by black artists--with slow shots of haunting Siberian landscapes and austere city scenes.

The music is, in fact, a very crucial aspect of the film's rehabilitation of America as a racially integrated and hence "settled" society; through it, Greenwood realizes not only what possibilities for dance have developed during his years of exile but, more importantly, what possibilities now exist for black artists and musicians in the "liberated" world of the 1980s where, as the title song by Lionel Richie proclaims, "Say you, say me, say it together

naturally." The soundtrack thus works as an audio counter to Greenwood's own complaints about American culture--"they don't even think you're human and they want you to die for them." As Nikolai tells him, "Things have changed . . . It's a wonderful country." The voice of the Russian defector, the man who has cast away his citizenship in the Communist regime in favor of capitalism and its "freedoms," becomes, then, the witness to a seemingly new cultural economy, one in which race and ethnicity do not figure significantly in the possibilities for individual achievement. Such a reconstructed vision of American culture is bolstered by Baryshnikov's own story of defection and subsequent American citizenship; through this affinity to "real life," the film provides the necessary illusion to "truth," allowing Nikolai's difference, both ethnic and national, to collapse into the white masculine point of view, the construction site for this representation of a perfected America.

In his role as the embodiment of capitalist ideals, Nikolai's valorization of America enhances, both inter-diegetically and extra-diegetically, the shame of the black man who has spurned his country. In a long monologue, Greenwood explains his disillusionment to Rodchenko:

I used to feel the way you do about America. I was a patriot . . . I was also . . . cute, cute little colored kid--they called us colored in those days--cute little colored kid tapping away . . . Of course, by the time I

grew up it was a different story. He's an adult black man now. . . . Give him a broom . . . So I'm 18, I can't get a job . . . My mother says . . . "don't worry, this is your year, something good's coming" . . . [S]he was right. Somebody did want me. Uncle Sam. Uncle Sam wanted the whole ghetto . . . I said, "ma, this is it . . . I'm going to get myself a real career . . . Defend my country against communism." But . . . nobody said you gonna become a murderer . . . a rapist, you gonna maim and rob people. I kept saying to myself this war has got to be about something. . . . This little voice in my head said Ray, you're being used. They're trying to kill you. They don't even think you're human and they want you to die for them, make them richer. It was all very clear.

Greenwood's reading of American culture's use of the black man in Vietnam connects his narrative to the larger cultural disillusionment presented by that war, replicating the pattern of disassociation between government and soldier that Jeffords defines as necessary to contemporary representations of Vietnam narration.<sup>19</sup> By casting the soldier as victim of an inept and discriminatory government, Greenwood's monologue begins to separate ideals from actual practices--the defense of democracy from the insane methods of murder and rape. Even in the face of the obviously racist procedures of the government and military--"Uncle Sam wanted the whole ghetto"--the betrayal of the black man by a system ostensibly fighting for democracy can become, in the context of the film's Cold War politics,

an ironic simulation of the more deadly Soviet system, a system that similarly sacrifices people for ideals, using and discarding individuals in a maniacal quest for domination. But, while the United States's betrayal is local and historically specific--"It's different there now"--the Soviet betrayal of its people and of Greenwood is the universal condition of communism, the underlying reason for the black man's need to return home. As Greenwood says to Rodchenko, "I was big news while they needed me," but now "[w]e're like rats in a cage . . . We can't live like this."

The representation of the Soviet system as inherently corrupt, worse even than the racist policies of a pre-Civil Rights America,<sup>20</sup> reaches its zenith in the characterization of Colonel Chaiko, from whose mouth the classic words of American racism are uttered. As the KGB agent assigned to make Rodchenko's capture look like choice, Chaiko uses Greenwood to "encourage" Rodchenko to agree to dance again. But Greenwood's relationship with Rodchenko grows into real friendship and the two men forge plans to escape, with Greenwood's wife, Darya, from Russia. To create the illusion of discord between them, Greenwood accuses Nikolai of being attracted to his wife, a smokescreen that sets up a later conversation between Rodchenko and Chaiko where cultural taboos against interracial sexuality enhance the fiction of the dancers's hatred for one another. Nikolai baits Chaiko:

"It's fine for one night as a curiosity or cheap thrill  
but how could she have married that. I can't believe it."

"I don't know. I find it myself completely



unappetizing."

"She regrets it. I can feel it. She's wasting herself on this--"

"Nigger."

In speaking the word signifying the American system of racial oppression--in falling, as Rodchenko says afterward, "for the racist bit"--Chaiko embodies the very racism that initially forced Greenwood to seek solace in another country.<sup>21</sup> This displacement of American ideologies about miscegenation onto the Soviet system stands within the narrative as the ultimate proof of Greenwood's error and of the healed economy awaiting him at home where "[t]hings have changed."<sup>22</sup>

The necessary ingredient to this rehabilitation of American cultural relations is the image of the interracial, inter-ethnic male bond; through it, all masculine differences can be set aside in the affirmation of an America where there exists the "chance for the baby to have a real life, to be free." The narrative's construction of Greenwood's impending fatherhood as the "first thing in a long time that's given me some hope" and his consequent awareness of responsibility to others signals a rejuvenation of the masculine role, propelling his desire to return to origins and drawing him from his passive, bitter acceptance of an "inhumane" life. Greenwood's own fatherlessness, the denial of self as "son"--since his defection, his father "won't even say my name"--evinces the fragmentation of the masculine and the necessity for its reconstitution through a return home. More than metaphorically, then, Greenwood's own fatherhood and his decision to seek reconciliation as son rejuvenate the masculine

role, allowing him a new sense of masculinity through his connection to the masculine line. In the resolution of the film, this masculine line reveals itself as racially constructed, for it is the white Russian citizen who symbolically serves as father, rescuing both Greenwood and his wife. In this way, the black man, cast as biological father, is effectively castrated, disempowered of his masculine potential to fulfill the role of cultural father, a position significantly occupied by Rodchenko, the white non-American American hero.

The racial reconstruction of American culture is thus negotiated through not only the biological processes of the female body but the culturally constructed roles of gender where the opposition of the biological and cultural father simultaneously establishes the masculine as necessary to cultural rejuvenation while hierarchizing it along racial lines. Although some viewers might emphasize the representation of the black man as father as a counter to his traditional American stereotype as a renegade man and deserter of the family, such a concentration on the "positive image," as Robert Stam and Louise Spence note, "lead[s] both to the privileging of characterological concerns . . . and also to a kind of essentialism" (10) where the presence of the racial other in a non-stereotypical role is seen to signal a departure from the hegemonic inscriptions of a racist culture. In *White Nights*--as in other contemporary narration--however, the image of the black man as father maintains the law of the masculine and of heterosexuality, serving as the specular representation of an integrated America.<sup>23</sup> The

restoration of the black man in the role of the father--which in *White Nights* significantly takes place not in America but elsewhere--serves as a primary vehicle for the rejuvenation of the image of the white male, who can now be cast as guardian and preserver of American racial egalitarianism.

The role of the father also functions to channel the eroticism of the many dance scenes into its "proper" heterosexual context, narratively closing off the possibility of the homosexual from entering the scene between men. By subverting the eroticism present in the display of male bodies in dance--a display which establishes these bodies as objects of the look--*White Nights* approaches the problem of masculine desire and the male body rather differently than the more typical display of contest and combat in which, as Steve Neale depicts, "male struggle becomes pure spectacle" (12). Indeed, Neale's analysis of masculinity as spectacle--which links "[t]he repression of any explicit avowal of eroticism in the act of looking at the male . . . to a narrative content marked by sado-masochism phantasies and scenes" (12)--can only partially account for the representation of the male body here. The sado-masochistic, present in the opening dance sequence featuring Nikolai in "La Jeune Homme et La Mort," is constructed through a narrative of gender which posits Death as female, linking the desire for the dancer/male body to the feminine act of looking which becomes explicitly castrating--the final images of the sequence feature the male dancer, seduced by Death, hanging himself, his body transformed from the turgid geography of muscles and lines to a limpid figure.<sup>24</sup> While Neale's

notion of the sado-masochistic as the strategic device for containing the eroticism of the male body explains the opening sequence, it does not allow us to understand the relationship between masculinity as spectacle and race in the film.

Later dance scenes between Greenwood and Rodchenko, in fact, are devoid of the sado-masochistic narrative of gender-as-woman, requiring a different process of erotic presentation and disavowal. Where sado-masochism functions to reassert the heterosexual, to specularize difference between masculine and feminine, the dance scenes between Greenwood and Rodchenko--which serve as the primary scenes for the articulation of their bond--signal a recuperation of masculine difference into the spectacle produced by the athleticism and artistry of the male body. The camera's look at the men dancing is designed to highlight their masculine contours--"[t]he 'naturalness' of muscles," as Richard Dyer writes, "legitimis[ing] male power and domination" ("Don't Look," 71)--and the continual disruption of any look at *one another* frustrates the potential for the homosexual to present itself in a scene of desire for the male body. And yet, as Neale writes, "male homosexuality is constantly present as an undercurrent . . . but one that is dealt with obliquely, symptomatically, and that has to be repressed" (15). The camera's perspective on Greenwood and Rodchenko is designed for this repression, their bodies being displayed in such a way as to subdue interaction between the men. In fact, the camera lingers over their separate images, shooting the full panorama of the dance only from the distance. The isolation, the individualization of their

movements contain the eroticism within the space of each dancer, forging a doubling of the masculine that denies desire for the other.

In this way, the film constructs the masculine body within a scene of interracial male bonding but channels that bonding through a heterosexual paradigm of desire. The apparent contradiction between the representation of unity within the masculine and the denial of that unity as signifier of masculine desire for the other is the necessary sleight-of-hand for the reiteration of the white masculine point of view which must simultaneously contain the specter of the black partner within the scene of sameness while distancing him through the visual presentation of his difference. It is specifically the use of the spectacle of masculinity that can override this contradiction by appearing to collapse the difference between men into the exultation and specularization of their bodies. In other words, because the eroticism of their bodies functions within an interracial narrative and representational paradigm, the specularization of masculinity is used to signal masculine sameness, the presence of racial difference negotiating the distance between a hegemonic masculine point of view and the black man's own alienation from its sacred construction. Through such a representation, the site of masculine sameness can be cleansed of all potentially disrupting difference--the threatening black male, the subtext of homosexuality--inscribing the male body and its evocation of power and muscularity as a trope of American wholeness.

The images of dance are thus crucial to the negotiation of the masculine in *White Nights*, for it is within such scenes that the male

body can be represented as the site of strength and the power imbalance between men seemingly overcome. While such a representation appears to counter the Ramboesque imagery of the male body that is part of contemporary American narrations, within the re-masculinization project of the 1970s and 1980s, this seeming shift from the spectacle of the male body in combat and conflict to its presentation in studied artistry signals another manifestation of the multiple ways the masculine is negotiated. The artistry of the male body in dance becomes, then, another method for the privileging of the male body, signifying a more "feminine" mode of cultural construction, but one through which the masculine can still evince its own mastery and self containment. This mastery is not contradicted but complemented by the narrative of heterosexual romance--Greenwood's relationship with his wife, Darya, and Rodchenko's reunion with his former lover, Galina--which, inserted in the space between the two men, functions to ward off the possibility of an erotic desire by constructing that desire elsewhere (at the sight of the female body). As the concluding scene of the film indicates--with Greenwood first embracing his wife and then the camera freezing on his embrace of Rodchenko--the heterosexual is imposed, inserted, between the two men, all homosexual desire repressed in the affirmation of a "deeper" masculine bond.

In this movement across the body of heterosexuality (signified by woman), the interracial male bond is strengthened not only in its gendered but in its racial construction, for the heterosexual allows the black man to be cast as caring father, his image seemingly

signaling how much "[t]hings have changed." This inscription of change is evinced further by Rodchenko who, as neither a biological father nor an American by birth, can claim the status of cultural hero, suggesting in his very presence that the oppressed "victims" of communism are themselves potential sons of the American ideal. Through the image of the Russian citizen, Greenwood--his name itself symbolizing his innocence--can reclaim, and be reclaimed by America; as the dissident "son," his return home "for better or for worse," as he says at film's end, repairs the cultural fragmentation wrought by racial segregation, oppression, and the Vietnam war. Through this image of the black man returning home, cleansed of anger, America is reconstituted as a purified culture, its sacred vow upheld in a representation of cultural wholeness that, significantly, takes place not on American but on Russian soil. There in the land of our Cold War fears, we can transform, in the imagery of the film's title, all of our own dark moments into an unending spectacle of white.

The shift in *White Nights* from the image of the black man as cultural traitor and outsider to citizen and father is obviously not a new narrative strategy within scenarios of the interracial male bond. Its more traditional configuration--the black man as cop, symbolic father of the cultural order--is a major trope in American narration of the past twenty years. In what was perhaps the first of its kind, *In the Heat of the Night* (1967), for instance, the black man is a homicide detective, his knowledge and training essential to

the restoration of order in a small Mississippi town.<sup>25</sup> While the film undoubtedly challenged racial ideology, its construction of the black officer as someone who fights not with brawn or guns but with his intelligence helps to settle that era's fear of black male violence by depicting black masculinity within the governing ethic of hegemonic structures. The difference between this early representation and contemporary versions--where the black man participates in the spectacle of the male body and the technology of combat--demonstrates the growing cultural emphasis on the male body as itself the site of cultural negotiations, an emphasis that reasserts the masculine in the face of feminist discourses, constructing the male body as the supposedly natural symbol of cultural power.

The contemporary black cop figure, with his emanations of a strident masculinity--*Lethal Weapon*, *Shoot to Kill*, *Off Limits*, *Miami Vice*, *Hill Street Blues*, *J.J. Starbuck*--functions within this masculinization of American culture to not only stress masculinity as the necessary force for the protection of the social order but to contain the specter of the black phallus within the ideological framework of that order. Through the reassertion of the primacy of the masculine, the black man seemingly gains power by becoming a symbol of its authority, but it is in this way that he can be simultaneously controlled, for his image as law enforcer not only averts the threat of his own individual insurrection but acts to squelch all potential racial challenge to cultural power. In short, he becomes the reining image of hegemonic structures, working within



contemporary race relations to negotiate the white masculine point of view--a perspective that actually *requires* this image of the black man for the full recuperation of its power. Only in this way can the image of egalitarianism be both posited and renegotiated into the terms of the hegemony--the black man acting as the vehicle for the representation of equality but continually framing that equality in the context of cultural law.

This representation of the black man as Law-keeper has proliferated since the late days of the Civil Rights Movement when the impact of open black rebellion necessitated hegemonic rearticulations around the sight of black men. This, combined with the growing numbers of black men being inducted into the armed forces, paved the way for the black cop figure to enter American cultural production in a significant way, for without some seemingly "positive" representation of the black man on the side of the law and social morals, American culture would be arming its own potential internal foes without opening an avenue for entrance back into the system. In this sense, the black cop figure provides a safety valve for hegemonic structures; through it, a strenuous masculinity can be extended to black men who, in representation and in their material existence, are historically castrated by a culture terrified of black male claims to traditional manhood. At the same time, such a representation fixes the masculine other in the role of defender of American life, transforming his potential subversion of that life into affirmation, protection, and an appeal--through presence and visibility--to democratic enunciations. This transformation is best

facilitated within configurations of the interracial male bond where the loyalty between black and white men can outweigh the cultural power imbalances between them, where "the love [that] might unite them" can evince an America where "things have changed."

As guardian of law and order, the black police figure plays out the role of cultural father, a role crucial to the "re-masculinization" project of contemporary decades where, in the face of a cultural economy that had been radically disrupted, the resurrection of the father in his many cultural guises is essential to the reestablishment of the masculine as the site for healing and wholeness. Through the black father figure, the "youth" decade of the 1960s--and the presence of black leaders providing their own images of the father (King, for instance)--can be recuperated into the "progressive" plans of an accommodating hegemony. Such "positive" images of the black man as father of either the family and/or the cultural order provide representations of individual blacks that *appear* to shift the dynamics of American cultural relations. But, while this shift can be witnessed in actual social practices as a gesture of inclusion--affirmative action and the often tokenistic use of blacks as visible presences in otherwise all-white institutions--American race relations are not altered, merely disguised and repressed in the presentation of a post-Civil Rights society. In this totally integrated landscape, the family setting acts--for the black man--as the great cultural equalizer, diffusing any potential challenge to hegemonic inscriptions by flattening out racial difference in middle class achievement.<sup>26</sup> Through the image

of a domesticated black masculinity, the white masculine can elevate itself to the role of cultural patriarch, the hierarchies within the masculine newly articulated but racially maintained.

For this reason, while images of the interracial male bond and its rhetoric of democracy allow greater visibility for some black male actors and politicians, the same is not true for black women whose only substantial cultural visibility is being forged within--and in the margins of--feminist discourses.<sup>27</sup> While some might argue that the representation of black men, particularly in roles of cultural authority, aids the larger struggle of people of color in America, the inscription of such images in narratives that rejuvenate the masculine guarantees that the claims of *all* blacks will be subsumed in the representation of the middle class black man. Therefore, any applause for the seemingly increasing representation of black men is made at the expense of black women and, to a certain extent, white women as well--those whose images have most frequently been banned from the interracial male scenario in order to avert potential political affiliations between black men and black (and white) women against white male power. As the threat of racial difference is worked through the remasculinization project, the status of black women--political, economic, legal and social--will pay the heaviest price in the cultural rehabilitation of the white masculine point of view--even though her image may now be transmuted through the seemingly progressive narrative of race relations in American culture.

Where her exiled image haunts most interracial bonding

narratives--*The Defiant Ones*, *In the Heat of the Night*, *Shoot to Kill*--the popular 1987 film, *Lethal Weapon*, uses the black woman's presence as evidence of American cultural achievement; no longer the traditional stereotypes of mammie or whore, here, in a film featuring the black man as both father and police officer, she is offered the seemingly egalitarian roles of wife and daughter. In a grand reversal of cultural stereotypes, the black woman now occupies the traditional images of the white woman; tied completely to the bourgeois family, she exists as the wife whose "bad cooking" becomes a joke between men and as the virginal daughter who must be saved by them. Either way, gender is the definitive category of difference and the masculine retains the power to restore order just when, in the words of the film's villain, there are "no more heroes in the world." In the film's aim to deny all but superficial differences between the major male players, Roger Murtaugh (Danny Glover) and Martin Riggs (Mel Gibson), the black woman's homogenization into categories traditionally occupied by white women is part of the film's evocation of a progressive society where the fact of race does not affect one's ability to achieve the ideal of the bourgeois family. It is in this sense--that black women are now tied to the representational space previously reserved for white women--that the film pointedly seeks to inculcate black women into the democratic ethos of American cultural production even when that space "exists" clearly through their exclusion.<sup>28</sup>

In casting the black man, Murtaugh, as police officer and father, *Lethal Weapon* works within the ideological reconstruction

that marks much contemporary American cultural production where the specter of individual bourgeois success becomes the reigning sign of a world beyond difference. Like other interracial cop scenarios, *Lethal Weapon* is modelled on a basic pattern: the film opens by depicting the separate and contrary lives of its two main protagonists, Murtaugh and Martin Riggs, who are thrown together as partners--against their wishes--but who, in facing combat and death together, learn to value and respect both themselves and one another. Through their liaison, the villains--drug traffickers who threaten not simply to earn illegal money but to destroy, in their kidnapping of the daughter, the family--are thwarted, the film hovering over the spectacle of their demise. Unlike *Lords of Discipline*, which depicts the white man as hero in a narrative overtly recuperating racial difference--or even *White Nights* which purposely foregrounds it--*Lethal Weapon* manipulates race through its absence, "purifying" the scene of interracial bonding by wholly excluding one of its basic assumptions; displacing difference into less volatile formations--such as age, lifestyle and mental health--the film posits a scene of cultural origin that depicts no racial fragmentation, no potential disruption of the bond because of imbalances in racial power.

In the film's introduction of the leading men, the contrasts in their lives are highlighted and the sexuality of the white man foregrounded while the black man's is denied. Murtaugh is initially seen enjoying a bath in his very well decorated home when his wife and three children barge in, armed with a candle-lit cake, singing happy 50th birthday. The perfect picture of the cohesive family, the

Murtaughs have achieved the American ideal of bourgeois living, providing a representation of the black family that reaffirms the commodified, heterosexual norm governing American culture. The camera then cuts away to a dog running across a beach toward a trailer where an insomniatic Riggs is lying in bed coughing and smoking a cigarette, food and debris scattered everywhere. Slowly he stumbles, naked, to the refrigerator, grabbing a beer and spilling it as he runs his hand through his disheveled hair. The antithesis of Murtaugh, Riggs is obviously a man living on the edge of breakdown, suicidal because of the recent death of his wife of eleven years. It is Riggs's life here that represents total loss, the squalor of his environment indicative of his alienation from society and the potential for that alienation to fully consume him. In a significant reversal of paternalistic ideology, it is now the white man, debilitated by grief, who can be restored to life only through the aid of the black "father"--the figure responsible, in the film's resolution, for drawing the alienated white man back into the folds of sanity and the bourgeois family. As Riggs tells Murtaugh, "you've got a hell of a nice family there."

The family thus functions as the site for the rejuvenation of both the white character within the narrative and the white masculine point of view from which the narrative is articulated. Through it, the white figure, the social outsider who has himself been denied the traditional benefits of American cultural life (a family), can rejoin society, cleansed of his angst, his anger, and his isolation. It is no accident that such a narrative design appears in the cultural

moment of the late 1980s, simultaneously positing a fully egalitarian society--where blacks can achieve our culture's idealized middle class scenario--and depicting that society as necessary to the rehabilitation of the white man who is now the tortured, unintegrated figure; he is the one in need of cultural healing. Earlier versions of the black male as the alienated outsider have now been fully recuperated in the narrative economy of *Lethal Weapon*, providing a representation that shifts the terms of American racial structures through which the white man is both victimized--by fate (his wife's death), by his peers (who think he's crazy), and by himself (his suicidal tendencies)--and rehabilitated from such victimization. At its deepest level, then, *Lethal Weapon's* evocation of a world beyond race is not "for the nigger" but for the white man who regains identity and psychological wholeness across a seemingly egalitarian representation of the black bourgeoisie.

The initial meeting between the men plays off the cultural reversals at work in the film and subsequently recuperates them in the image of the physically powerful Riggs, the white man whose body is itself the "lethal weapon," a construction significantly in contrast to fears of the black male as weapon in the 1960s. As Riggs, waiting in the police station for his new assignment, inspects his gun, Murtaugh mistakes him for a criminal and attacks. Swiftly, Riggs uses his martial arts training from Special Forces in Vietnam to nail Murtaugh to the floor. Standing with his foot on Murtaugh's chest, the Police Chief introduces the two new partners and the interracial male bond is born.<sup>29</sup> Although race as a construct of

difference is carefully avoided throughout the film--never once do the two men evince any racial disjunction--the image of Riggs straddled above Murtaugh evokes the more traditional ideological configuration of the interracial male bond: the white man achieves physical superiority in the clash of masculine forces. As the two men unravel the case of a young white woman who seemingly committed suicide, the significance of Riggs's marksmanship and martial arts ability is heightened, for they confront a gang of heroin smuggling, ex-mercenary veterans, "hired killers" who ran Special Forces when Riggs was himself on the payroll, men who can only be stopped by someone "like them." As Riggs tells Murtaugh when his daughter, Rianne, has been abducted, "We do this my way. You shoot, you shoot to kill. You get as many as you can . . . We're going to get bloody on this, Roger."<sup>30</sup>

Riggs's stand--"we do this my way"--and Murtaugh's acceptance of it, are important to the articulation of the interracial male bond in the film, for here Murtaugh's previous injunction to Riggs, "you make it through . . . without killing anybody," is overridden in the need to rescue Rianne, to reunite the black family at whatever cost. As the lethal weapon, Riggs's role is crucial to the ultimate restoration of Murtaugh's family; in an interesting turn, the narrative structure of the film thus allows the white figure to be culturally healed by the same familial unit that he himself is responsible for preserving. Against a background of seemingly stable race relations, then, *Lethal Weapon* reconstructs the image of the white man by casting him first as alien outsider and then as the



source necessary for the reconstitution of black family life. In this sense, the representation of blacks in a mode that denies race as a significant category of difference enables the white figure to move rather easily between the status of victim to that of hero, from outsider to insider, from suicidal maniac to cultural preserver. The film's conclusion, with Riggs joining the Murtaughs for Christmas dinner, evinces this movement as the now healthy Riggs gives his partner the special gold bullet that he had been reserving for his own death; "I won't be needing it anymore," Riggs says.

Where the film begins by positing a total equality between the men, playing off their various differences in a rather comic way-- "God hates me, that's what it is," Murtaugh says after meeting Riggs, who replies, "Hate him back. It works for me"--its narrative economy is predicated on the privileging of the white male body, a body that is represented as its own kind of technology, its own warring machine. The specularization of the white male body begins in the film's initial scene featuring Riggs, where the camera, in the first full bodied shot, follows his naked figure from the bedroom to the kitchen. In viewing the male body from behind, the camera avoids not simply an X rating but castration created by the voyeuristic Look at genitalia outside a scene of sexual activity, that is, outside erection and the displacement of desire onto the presence of the female body. In denying the sight of the penis, the film both represses the construction of the spectator's gaze within a homosexual economy of desire and reinscribes the penis as the

phallus--Riggs's entire body, in its muscularity and strength, continually evoking the absent penis. Because, as Neale writes, "there is no cultural or cinematic convention which would allow the male body to be presented" (14), the penis itself becomes unrepresentable except in its absence--except as the phallus; its only presentation comes in displacement.

In this representational process, "male" sexuality--the sighting of sex/genitalia--is transformed into a culturally-constructed "masculine" sexuality where the white male body achieves power and privilege in its reconstruction as stand-in for the absent penis. White masculine sexuality thus presents itself within an economy of desire greater than its parts, a desire whereby the overdetermined evocation of parts--the phallus that proliferates in the penis's absence--wards off castration by reconstructing itself everywhere. In the specularization of Riggs's body, the white masculine, in effect, multiplies itself, the missing penis finding its way back into the scene as the much sought-after phallus. The film's various moments of looking at Riggs--reclining, running, falling, fighting, shooting--are affirmations that the threat of castration has not simply been averted but that the body has now become the phallus, literalizing itself in various displays of phallic authority as the "lethal weapon." In a key scene, Riggs hangs by rope from the ceiling, seemingly unconscious from being tortured with electricity and water when suddenly he comes back to life, attacking his captor and strangling the man with his legs. In a symbolic denouncement of castration, Riggs's body evinces his own phallicism, the villain's

neck being literally snapped in the powerful crotch of the hero.

This construction of the white masculine body depends, for its full articulation, on the intersecting paradigms of sexual difference and race. The film's opening sequence, against which the credits are run, establishes sexual difference--and the voyeuristic gaze at the white female body--as the landscape across which the interracial male bond will form. From an aerial view of downtown San Francisco, the camera gradually focuses in on Amanda Hunsaker in her plush apartment where, clad as the fetish of masculine desire--lace stockings, lingerie, high heels--she runs her finger along her ruby lips, smiling seductively in what is a clear suggestion of auto-eroticism. In a classic cinematic construction of the female body, Amanda is represented as pure sexuality, her body the fetish object of the camera's gaze. The camera watches her move, with breasts fully exposed, to the balcony where she teeters on the railing briefly and then jumps. Here, the voyeuristic gaze is so insistent that even as her body crashes on top of a parked car, we look at her body exposed, spread out *facing* the camera, her femininity--and hence her castration/lack--forever open to view. Such a representation of the female body stands in stark contrast to the construction of Rigg's nude body two scenes later where the denial of looking actually enables the masculine body and its power before the gaze of the camera to not simply remain intact but to exceed itself.

The Look at Amanda's purely sexualized body, combined with the later narrative of Murtaugh's daughter, Rianne, whose chastity is threatened, establish what Teresa de Lauretis calls "obstacle-

boundary-space" (121), that "landscape, stage, or portion of plot-space [where] the female character . . . represent[s] and literally mark[s] out the place (to) which the hero will cross" (139). These women's bodies--as virgin (Rianne) and, as we find out later, as whore (Amanda)--evoke the classic construction of female sexuality in patriarchal culture; together they bear the mark of the heterosexual paradigm where, as Irigaray discusses, the female body exists "as an occasion for mediation, transaction, transition, transference, between man and his fellow man, indeed between man and himself" (193). As the necessary pre-condition for the evocation of the interracial male bond, the heterosexual paradigm maintains a disavowal not only of homosexuality--the sexual desire for the same--but of homosexuality--the patriarchal economy of sameness that is the paradigmatic structure of the masculine bond in all of its configurations. So insistent is *Lethal Weapon*, like most male bonding narratives, of its own heterosexual desire that several scenes are structured around its affirmation.<sup>31</sup> The most pointed is when Riggs's jacket catches on fire from an explosion and Murtaugh spontaneously begins ripping it off. As the men are intertwined, Riggs asks, "What are you, a fag?" Murtaugh's explanation--"Your coat's on fire"--provides the necessary disavowal.

To complete the emphasis on the heterosexual and to transfer it from the site of the female to the male body, Amanda is revealed not only as whore but as lesbian, a revelation that displaces all homosexual tension between the men onto female sexuality. Significantly, the assertion of Amanda's lesbianism is made during a

conversation between Riggs and Murtaugh at the police firing range--the woman's lesbianism being framed by images of the men firing their weapons. In this overdetermined phallic setting, Amanda's sexuality reaffirms the masculine as itself the site of heterosexual wholeness; in this way, female sexuality, while initially charting a heterosexual space, is fully negated as the masculine comes to stand for all culturally accepted sexuality. The narrative of Amanda's sexuality and the images of her body thus function in two ways and, importantly, in this order: first to assert heterosexuality at the film's beginning so that the ensuing scenes of Riggs and Murtaugh naked are read as heterosexual and not homosexual, and second, to assume the sexual tensions between the men entirely to herself, to the female and not the male body. In her dual function, the representational paradigm governing the female is resexualised as virgin--lesbian/whore, all sites of unproductive female sexuality that leaves the space of production entirely to the masculine.

In establishing the body of woman as the frame of the film, masculine sexuality can appear to be constructed rather homogeneously, with no internal hierarchies or imbalances of power. This illusion is provided by the text of sexual difference which diffuses and renders secondary the bond's reconstruction of racial difference; through the discourse of gender, the interracial male bond can seal over the frisson of its own construction--its simultaneous articulation of sameness and difference--enabling the white masculine point of view to present itself as the universal masculine position. Significantly, in the final confrontation

between the police and the drug smugglers, it is Riggs who does battle with the most hardened criminal, Joshua, while Murtaugh looks on. While the ability to look is often equated in film theory with the position of power, in this scenario, the black man's spectatorship actually confirms his exclusion from the primary scene of phallic activity. By looking at the body of Riggs, Murtaugh participates in the camera's phallicizing gesture of the white male body. Such a construction of the white body as spectacle and the black man as spectator, activator of the look that empowers the white body, demonstrates the underlying representational paradigm of the interracial male bond. In this construction, the white masculine body retains its privilege as the primary site of power while the black masculine role is forced to the margins of the scene; Murtaugh's plea, "Let me take him. Please," and Riggs's response, "No, back off," evince the narrative's inflection of this economy where the lethal weapon of the white masculine body articulates itself as the central term.

Because such an articulation poses a threat to the democratic enunciations of the interracial bond, the white masculine point of view must recuperate its own site of privilege by allowing the black man to symbolically take on the power of the white phallus, to appropriate its evocation of a masculine sexuality and power. In a scene recalling, through inversion, Ralph Ellison's "The Birthmark," the white man, at the conclusion of the fight, leans against Murtaugh in a configuration of bodies that constructs them as one--the white man significantly posed in front of Murtaugh, functioning as his

symbolic phallus. When Joshua wrests a gun from another officer and prepares to shoot, Murtaugh and Riggs respond by drawing their guns. Positioned together, the black man sheltering the white with his raincoat and his body, they appear to shoot Joshua simultaneously, but, through the technology of slow motion, a second look demonstrates that Riggs has fired both shots. In this way, the scene charts the mastery of the white body, its ultimate phallic authority, while trying to displace it in the fusion of an interracial configuration. Ellison's image of the castrated black man functioning as the phallus of his white assailant is thus reconstructed in the cultural production of the 1980s as the black man drawing his own phallic power through the appropriation of the white phallus, an inversion that is symptomatic of contemporary strategies of race recuperation in American culture.

In characterizing the white male body as the lethal weapon, the film renegotiates its presentation of a world beyond racial difference, evincing within the re-masculinization project that marks *Lethal Weapon* an internal hierarchy much more subtle than in other configurations of the interracial male bond. Indeed, Riggs's rehabilitation within the space of the black family is countered by his numerous acts of preserving it. In an early scene in the film, it is Riggs who saves Murtaugh's life, forcing the black man to apologize: "Look, sorry about all that shit I said out there. You saved my life. Thank you." The privileging of Riggs is inscribed again when he is the first to escape from his captor, breaking into Murtaugh's torture chamber where the drug dealers are threatening to

rape Rianne. Seconds before Riggs's entrance, the leader, General Peter McAllister, tries to silence the irate Murtaugh: "Spare me, son. There're no more heroes in the world." But, of course, there are heroes again, as Riggs's immediate appearance evinces, and it is no accident that the hero who comes bursting through the door, the hero who throws the body of his captor on top of an onrushing villain, the hero whose body is the lethal weapon that restores order to this post-60s world, is white.

In positing a racially healed cultural economy, *Lethal Weapon* and similar male bonding narratives of this decade demonstrate the recuperatory practices of American cultural production, practices that simultaneously present the spectacle of black inclusion while denying that inclusion through the reiteration of the white masculine point of view. This is no less true of the 1988 film, *Cry Freedom*, which tells the story of the struggle against Apartheid in South Africa by recounting white journalist Donald Woods's relationship with black rebel Steve Biko. Here, as in *White Nights*, "the West" is upheld as the site of freedom and egalitarianism--an image linked to America through the use of popular American actors, Kevin Kline (Woods) and Denzel Washington (Biko)--and reinforced through scenes depicting the terror of the South African regime. While the film overtly critiques Apartheid, its narrative affinities to interracial bonding scenarios, no less than its emergence at this historical moment, connect it to the recuperatory project of the contemporary



period, depicting a troubling reliance on images of the white masculine to "transcend" racial difference--righting the wrong of white supremacy and racial slavery by ironically casting itself as hero.

Although the film powerfully recreates the 1976 Soweto student uprising--which resulted in the deaths of over 700 school children--the narrative is sustained and framed by the white man's struggle, a struggle that tells us more about contemporary American racial configurations than about the life of Biko.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, as reviewers have pointed out, Biko's death mid-way through the film--and his political homogenization into a noticeably "palatable" reimagining of King--clear the narrative space for Woods who can now both write and deliver the story of black South Africa to the world.<sup>33</sup> In a reenactment of all the films under discussion here, *Cry Freedom* casts the white man as the defender of black liberty who risks his life for the salvation of the other: it is Woods who must escape South Africa with the manuscript he has been writing about Biko's life and political leadership; it is the white family that remains intact soaring through billowing white clouds to freedom in the final scene, a scene that is followed by a list of names, dates, and official reasons for the deaths of blacks held in detention by South African officials. The disparity between the narrative resolution of the white family's odyssey and that of the real victims of Apartheid ironically demonstrates the ideological politics governing the representation of the interracial bond.

There are those who, no doubt, will find the film's depiction of

whites as integrally involved in the struggle to end Apartheid a refreshing perspective, particularly in the context of American national policy which tacitly sanctions the South African government. But even the film's advertising campaign highlights its participation in the broader pattern of cultural narration: as billboards affirm, "Two men. Two different worlds. The dramatic true story of a nation's struggle for freedom." But the "two" here is eclipsed by the narrative structure, making *Cry Freedom*, in the words of the cover jacket of its novel version, "A story that is so controversial, the South African government tried to suppress it . . . Police officials tried to deny it . . . And one man and his family risked their lives to expose it" (see Briley). This reiteration of the "one" disturbingly recuperates the multiplicity of the "two," collapsing the "different worlds" into a narrative privileging of one significantly white man and his family. This paradigm of recuperation governs the representation of the interracial male bond, that narrative quest that has sustained American culture through its various periods of racial tension and disruption. In the telling of this story, the singular voice that emerges is always that of the white masculine point of view which, in the end, has spoken itself not "for the nigger" but for himself, so that he "could be [the] hero."

## Notes to Chapter Three

<sup>1</sup> This representation of the masculine as a privileged site for cultural regeneration is a fundamental mark of Vietnam narration. What Jeffords writes of the veteran--that, "reborn and purified [he] takes his place as an experienced leader and spokesperson for a conjointly revived morality and social politics that will regenerate American itself"--can be clarified along racial lines, for this masculine recuperation is decidedly white.

<sup>2</sup> I do not mean to imply an essential "blackness" here but to point out the way the visibility of race functions as spectacle in American cultural production.

<sup>3</sup> As Pearce is told, during his final torture by the mysterious group The Ten (a dialogue significantly omitted from the film version): "I'm gonna make you suck my cock, nigger. That's the only thing niggers are good for. To suck a white man's cock. To suck their master's dick. You want to suck my sweet white cock, nigger?" (387).

<sup>4</sup> The emphasis here on film and television is not intended to imply that this recuperation is only a "mass cultural" phenomenon of the 1980s; because I am concerned with how the visibility of racial difference--made most visible in cinematic and televisual texts--is used to forge the recuperatory process, I concentrate in this chapter on such cultural texts. But one can see the process at all discursive levels of American culture, from traditionally cast "high" theory to literature and the problematically-termed "popular" arts.

<sup>5</sup> Jeffords writes that, through a persistent foregrounding of gender, feminist discourse "is in many ways complicit with the programs set out in Vietnam representations" which use gender as the primary structure through which differences between men are rendered invalid.

<sup>6</sup> Significantly, it is through the structure of the male bond that this affinity is elided and a strident masculinity affirmed, thereby disrupting any potential bondings between women and black men against the white male hegemony. Indeed, the mythology of the male bond guarantees that all masculine difference will be subsumed into a governing ethic of masculinity that achieves signification only in opposition to the feminine.

<sup>7</sup> This process of using the representation of difference to assuage cultural disruptions over marginalization is obviously one used to contain the threat of women. Cinema and television of the 1970s were quite adept at offering the visibility of women in new

cultural roles; such visibility is now the mark of the recuperation process, indicating the discomfiting ease to which the patriarchal economy can capitalize--in a very capitalist fashion--on its own internal dissention.

<sup>8</sup> Because there is considerable debate about the accuracy of applying film theory to television--and specifically about the similarity between the "looks" constructed by each--I want to emphasize my focus here on the fetishization of difference, the way both television and film rely on the visibility of difference (the circulation of narratives that feature blacks and women, for example) as part of the cultural process of negotiation. Visibility--in essence, the ability to "see" the difference--is crucial to both apparatus in contemporary cultural production.

<sup>9</sup> According to Judith Roof, the decoy "is able to function precisely because it looks like what you think you're looking for." Because the male bond is predicated on a gender exclusion, we become absorbed--taken in by the decoy--through the masculine's clear opposition to the feminine when in fact the representation of the bond is caught in a paradigm of doubled masculine presence.

<sup>10</sup> In referring to "the body of gender," I do not mean simply the bodies of women that often function, as discussed earlier, as the representational terrain across which the interracial male bond is negotiated but, more broadly, as the entire discourse of sexual difference that situates both the masculine and the feminine via the (re)construction of the white masculine point of view.

<sup>11</sup> It is no accident that numerous representations of the interracial male bond are linked to this image of the Vietnam vet or that the actors in popular Vietnam movies reappear in other bonding films--for instance, the central actors of the "classic" Vietnam war movie *Platoon* (Oliver Stone, dir), Tom Berenger and William Defoe, are recycled into two recent interracial bonding pictures, *Shoot to Kill* and *Off Limits* with Sidney Poitier and Gregory Hines, two black actors who have appeared in a number of bonding films. Such reinscriptions foster a collapse-into-"reality" as the various narratives rework themselves through the specter of the black actor, providing an internal overdeterminancy that assuages American cultural fears of the racial other.

<sup>12</sup> The issue of the war, in addition to feminism, provided key challenges to cultural notions of the masculine in the 1960s and 1970s; indeed, as Jeffords reports, to some observers of the war, American inefficiency in dealing with the "Vietnam problem" signified a national feminization, one that the Reagan era---with its "hard ball" politics, Oliver North patriotism, and Cold War propaganda--has strenuously sought to counter.

<sup>13</sup> See in particular Thomas Cripps, *Slow Fade to Black*; Daniel

Leab, *From Sambo to Superspade*; and Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattos, Mammies and Bucks*.

<sup>14</sup> This book is the equivalent to the Christian Bible. Even its teachings are the same: as Davidge translate at one point "If one receives evil from another let one not do evil in return, rather let him extend love to the enemy that love might unite them." Davidge points out the similarity in such teachings to what "I've heard . . . before." The Drac's response is a mimic of the white masculine point of view governing this film; he says, "Of course you have. Truth is truth."

<sup>15</sup> The term here "bisexual" is problematic but given the narrative scenario I am looking at, its problematics seem to be revealed; that is, the bisexual always collapses back into a paradigm governed by the masculine--the very construction of sexual difference, of the two "poles" of gender, being an articulation of the masculine.

<sup>16</sup> A different but related incident in such masculine occupations of the feminine occurred in a recent episode of the popular television program *A Different World*. Dwayne Wayne, the male side-kick to Denise Huxtable (Lisa Bonet), enters the Miss Hillman College competition on a lark and soon finds himself the butt of everyone's joke--he is barked at, thrown mock kisses, pinched, etc. But while it appears that Dwayne's occupation of a "feminine" role will make him rethink his own relationship to the masculine and to gender, the masculine is itself not questioned nor are the politics of the competition. Instead, Dwayne ultimately becomes the symbol for a transcendence of gender in the Miss Hillman contest, making his peers consider not the ideology behind such a contest but why men have been excluded. In this way, the space of the feminine is occupied without the masculine actually relinquishing any cultural power--in fact, Dwayne becomes admired for his courage; significantly, this occupation of the feminine by a black man takes place in a narrative scenario that is already vacated by white men.

<sup>17</sup> Through such a displacement, the alien can become the voice of the Same, speaking the words that naturalize human reproduction in the romance of heterosexual union: "you humans have separated your sexes into two separate halves for the joy of that bridged union."

<sup>18</sup> While my analysis of this strategy of "proving" American cultural equality through the displacement of racism onto the Soviet system will focus on *White Nights*, *Streets of Gold*, emerging a year later, operates in a similar way. The story of two poor boxers--one black, the other white--*Streets of Gold* depicts the beginning of their careers, their mutual hostility toward one another and their ultimate friendship as it is articulated through their Russian-born coach, who was forced to leave the Soviet Union after being banned from international competition because he was a Jew. In this way,

the racism of the communist world is depicted as anti-Semitism, the resolution of the narrative coming when the two American boxers make the national team and can fight the Soviets, winning for their coach. But the film does not allow the black boxer, who is clearly presented as the best, to fight; being injured, he can only be an onlooker when the less-talented white boy confronts the Soviets. In a three-round fight scene that evokes *Rocky* with its brutality and specularization of the male body in combat, the white boxer finally wins, bringing glory to his team, his coach, and his nation. The white American is thus cast as the cultural hero--even in the face of his obviously inferior physical strength. The title comes to represent American possibility, a possibility that--while extended to all--is embodied by the white fighter.

<sup>19</sup> Jeffords writes that the "association of the loss of the war with the government and the honor of the war with the soldier re-constitutes one of the principle thematics of American culture, in which individual interests exist in tension with those of the society itself." While Greenwood's analysis of American cultural relations in the context of the Vietnam war does not rely on the image of the soldier as honorable, it casts his own intentions in such a frame that the government becomes the primary force in the debacle of Vietnam, not the men who fought the war.

<sup>20</sup> It is interesting too that the representation of the 1960s hinges on the war and not on the radical disruption of the Civil Rights movement of the same period.

<sup>21</sup> At the end of the film, Chaiko also calls Greenwood a "black bastard" and a "black ass," comments that only heighten his portrayal as the incarnation of racism.

<sup>22</sup> Such a turn also counters what, in the leftist movements of the 1930s and 1940s, was the classic communist reading of American culture: its predication not only on a class hierarchy but on race. Susan Brownmiller discusses the Communist Party's response to cases of interracial rape and sexuality, highlighting its strategic questioning of capitalism through the public hysteria surrounding such famous cases as Scottsboro. While Brownmiller's analysis, as Angela Davis points out, is predicated on a privileging of gender over race--focusing on the victimization of the white woman in interracial rape scenarios while reinscribing the mythology of the black man as rapist--her work depicts the American Communist Party's investment in challenging certain cultural attitudes toward interracial sexuality and violence. In light of *White Nights*, such an investment is overturned in the representation of the Soviet Union, of communism, as a racist entity.

<sup>23</sup> Representation in the post-Civil Rights world has used "positive images"--particularly of the black father (*The Cosby Show*, *Lethal Weapon*, *Roots*)--to inscribe a representation of a changed

American economy. But, as Stam and Spence write of *Roots*, "The television series . . . exploited positive images in what was ultimately a cooptive version of Afro-American history. The series' subtitle, 'the saga of an American family', reflects an emphasis on the European-style nuclear family . . . in a film which casts blacks as just another immigrant group making its way toward freedom and prosperity in democratic America" (9).

<sup>24</sup> Going a step further, one could argue here that the figure of Death as woman is a decoy, her femininity, as Shoshana Felman writes, "thus turns out to be a metaphor of the phallus . . . [femininity] is but a . . . figurative substitute" (25). While Felman describes this process as the feminine "*inhabit[ing]* masculinity, *inhabit[ing]* it as otherness" (41), there is the sense that femininity can really inhabit nothing for it is an empty space until the masculine colonizes and constructs itself.

<sup>25</sup> In a timely move, NBC has made a movie sequel to *In the Heat of the Night*, starring Carroll O'Connor and Howard Rollins Jr., which kicks off a mid-season series. The 1988 version depicts Virgil Tubbs returning to town because of his mother's death where he is offered a position as detective by the town's politically savvy mayor who has his sights on the state capitol. Quickly Tubbs becomes involved in the investigation of a white woman's murder, a murder conveniently--and stereotypically--pinned on a black man who is also conveniently and stereotypically lynched in his cell. In unraveling the murder, Tubbs must confront the racist echelon of the town and, indeed, the murderer turns out to be the son of the oldest, finest, and wealthiest family in Sparta. The major difference between this and the earlier version is not the depiction of Tubbs but of his white counterpart who now, in the ethos of the 80s, is no longer a bigot but a man who himself picked cotton alongside blacks as a child--a man whose fondest war buddy is black. This "humanization" of the white southern racist evinces the strategy under examination here where the interracial male bond is necessary to the recuperation of the white man who must see himself transformed from victimizer/oppressor to partner--even if hesitant--in cultural and racial change.

<sup>26</sup> This is particularly true of *The Cosby Show* which diffuses all racial threats to American hegemonic structures through the representation of materialistic achievement. While not an interracial male bonding narrative, *Cosby* is quite adept at recuperating, through the evocation of class, the kinds of disruptions posed by Civil Rights discourses. Such a strategy allows the black figure to reproduce the cultural rehabilitation of the white masculine point of view without the presence of the white player.

<sup>27</sup> This is not to suggest that the visibility black women have gained in certain areas of American cultural production has been

produced by the feminist movement per se--such a representation would negate the politics of a movement that has been as hostile to black inclusion as other factions of American culture (see Davis). But within feminist discourses--and in opposition to them--black feminists such as Barbara Christian, Angela Davis, Bell Hooks, Gloria Hull and Patricia Bell Scott, Deborah McDowell, Audre Lorde, Barbara Smith, and Alice Walker have created the cultural space for the visibility of black women writers and, to some extent, the concern for issues of race and black women's dual oppression both within feminism and American culture at large.

<sup>28</sup> As the narrative of the film evinces, it is the relationship between black and white men that is the pivotal site for cultural wholeness, the black woman achieving her status only through the black man's connection to, and reaffirmation of, the masculine. In the contemporary project of strengthening that masculine space, the black woman is forced to complete the heterosexual narrative, functioning in the manner now traditional for woman in configurations of the male bond; as wife, the black woman provides, from her kitchen, the plot space for homosexual disavowal while the daughter, as virgin, functions almost literally as the landscape across which the interracial male bond solidifies itself.

<sup>29</sup> This image of the white man with his foot on the body of the prostrate black man significantly replicates the image of Delano and Babo in *Benito Cereno*. In both cases, the white man's superiority is evinced by his ability to render the black man defenseless.

<sup>30</sup> It is significant here that only through the white man's injunction is the black man drawn from his "passivity."

<sup>31</sup> In the recent film *Shoot to Kill*, the male protagonists, Warren Stantin (Sidney Poitier) and Jonathon Knox (Tom Berenger), become trapped on a snow-packed mountain at dusk. Knox creates an igloo in the snow and the men spend the night there, Stantin nearly catching frostbite. To help his body warm up, Knox removes his own shirt and crawls on top of Stantin; in doing so, he cracks a joke about "country boys," the audience laughs and the threat of homosexuality is averted.

<sup>32</sup> Although the film is set in South Africa and directed by the British-born Richard Attenborough, it is in every way an American movie, not simply because of its use of American actors but more importantly because of how it relies on the representational trope common to American cultural production, that of the interracial male bond.

<sup>33</sup> It is important here to separate the original story--that of Woods's own experience--and the cinematic representation; I am not suggesting that Woods, in his escape from South Africa, was promoting himself as hero or that his actions were some kind of betrayal of his



radical ideologies. Rather, I want to emphasize the place of this story--and its method of representation--in contemporary cultural production, for it is no accident that the narrative of a white man's escape and battle against racism is privileged in the retelling. One wonders, in fact, why *Biko's* story was not considered sufficient enough for a film about Apartheid.

"To Be the Strongest of God":  
Bodies, Bonding and the Masculine Structure

In negotiating the black male's potential threat to white masculine power by constructing his image across the discourse of sexual difference, the interracial male bond demonstrates the broader strategy employed in American cultural production for reining the black male subject into the ideological orbit of patriarchal relations. Offering an image of the black male that stands in contrast to the traditional stereotypes of the passively feminine (the Uncle Tom) or wildly savage and sexual (the black beast), contemporary configurations of the interracial male bond often assert, at least superficially, a normative masculine sameness, an assertion gauged to demonstrate not only that "things have changed" (*White Nights*) but to place the black man within the re-masculinization project presently working its way through all levels of American culture. In this process, the image of a rejuvenated black masculine--frequently symbolized by a "return" of the black man to his previously disinherited role as father and husband--acts as emblem of a racially healed economy, providing the necessary spectacle to support the cultural rhetoric of a post-Civil Rights egalitarianism.

By foregrounding the image of the black male, American cultural production is responding, in particular, to the threat posed by the discourse of Black Power which, in its contrast to the integrationist politics of "civil rights"<sup>1</sup>, was unrelentingly strident in its evocation of a new, wholly masculine black man. In "Initial Reactions on the Assassination of Malcolm X," Eldridge Cleaver epitomizes the rhetorical method of depicting the struggle for black power: "We shall have our manhood. We shall have it or the earth will be leveled by our attempts to gain it" (*Soul on Ice*, 66). Such attempts to "heal the wound of my Castration," as Cleaver writes in an open letter "To All Black Women, From All Black Men," are necessary to right the deep wrong inflicted on black men through slavery and cultural dispossession, where "[a]cross the naked abyss of negated masculinity, of four hundred years minus my Balls. . . . I feel a deep, terrifying hurt, the pain of humiliation of a vanquished warrior . . . and a compelling challenge to redeem my conquered manhood" (*Soul on Ice*, 188-89). Through the posture of a black nationalist militancy--through the image of black men arming themselves in order to take down the white power structure--it is manhood itself that is on the line: the rights of black men to reap the benefits of a patriarchal economy that has denied them traditional access to masculine power.<sup>2</sup>

The militancy of Black Power was, in this sense, a way of asserting the black phallus as a threat not simply against the sanctity of white womanhood but more importantly, against the closed circuit of white masculine relations--an assertion of black masculine

power that challenged, most significantly, the hierarchical construction of power relations between black and white men. By adopting the language of warfare, Black Power represented itself as a growing army of angry black men who would no longer wait passively for the white man to confer the equal rights of patriarchal power: "the Black Man's way back to the racial integrity of the captured African," writes Imamu Amiri Baraka, "is where we must take ourselves . . . to be truly the warriors we propose to be . . . To see the white man as separate and as enemy. To make a fight according to the absolute realities of the world. . ." (*Home*, 256). In this fight, as Malcolm X said, "it's time for Negroes to defend themselves . . . this doesn't mean forming rifle clubs and going out looking for people, but it is time, in 1964, if you are a man, to let that man know" (496).

It is this masculinization of the discourse of black power that concerns Michele Wallace in her once-controversial study, *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*, a feminist reading of the consequences of such a gendering of the black struggle on not only black men but, more specifically, black women. Published in 1979, *Black Macho* analyzes the sexism at the heart of the black power movement where, in the now infamous phrasing of Stokely Carmichael, black women were told to lie prone for the revolution. Arguing that this macho originated in white culture, the black man, in Wallace's view, "lost [his] grip on a black perspective, [and] as he lost track of his original intentions, and adopted a white perspective, a perspective from which he was seen as helpless, dependent,

animalistic, he began to think the things he had done indicated that he was not a man" (77). Because they accepted the dominant representation of black men as less than men, Wallace criticizes leaders and thinkers of the Black Power movement whose capitulation to patriarchal notions of masculinity consequently reinscribed the mythology of the black woman as matriarch, willing helpmate to the black man's cultural castration.

In particular, Wallace refutes cultural historians who have viewed the black man's role in slavery as a completely "unmanly" one--unmanly precisely because black men did not have traditional patriarchal rights over black women; Robert Staples's analysis of the slave economy epitomizes such a reading:

The black man's only crucial function within the family was that of siring the children. The mother's role was far more important than the father's . . . The husband was at most his wife's assistant, her companion and her sex partner. He was often thought of as her possession, as was the cabin in which they lived. It was common for a mother and her children to be considered a family without reference to the father. (qtd in Wallace, 18)

But according to Wallace, "[t]o suggest that the black man was emasculated by slavery is to suggest that the black man and the black woman were creatures without will. Slave men and women formed a coherent . . . way of seeing and dealing with life . . . based upon the amalgamation of their African past and . . . their American experience. . ." (22).<sup>3</sup> Black Power's obviation of the particular

cultural beliefs and mores of the Afro-American results, Wallace argues, in an implicit lament "that the black woman, [the black man's] woman, was not *his* slave, that his right to expect her complete service and devotion was usurped[, that] [s]he was, after all, the white man's slave" (23).

By casting the disenfranchisement of blacks in America in terms of a denied masculinity--"[i]t was the pursuit of manhood that stirred the collective imagination of the masses of blacks in this country" (Wallace, 33)--the black power movement was, to some extent, torn apart through gender stratification, for black women came to be seen as themselves one more player in the black man's lynching. As Wallace writes, black women

had a hell of a history to live down. We had been rolling around in bed with the slave master while the black man was having his penis cut off; we had never been able to close our legs to a white man nor deny our breasts to a white child; we had been too eagerly loyal to our white male employer, taking the job he offered when he would give none to our man, cleaning his house . . . while our man was being lynched. . . . We had not allowed the black man to be a man in his own house. We had . . . questioned his masculinity . . . driven him to alcohol, to drugs, to crime . . . because our eyes had not reflected his manhood. (92)

In constructing the black woman as complicit in the larger project of black male oppression, Black Power dispersed all potential unity to confront white masculine hegemony by accepting "a definition of

manhood that [was] destructive to [the black male] and that negate[d] the best efforts of his past" (79). By equating freedom with white masculine power, movement leaders thus ironically reaffirmed the very ideology that had seemingly castrated the black man.

In this way, Wallace's work depicts how black male writers of the Black Power movement negotiated their relation to the white masculine structure through the discourse of sexual difference, transferring the problem inherent in the disjunction between masculine sameness and racial difference to the site of gender. But in seeing this writing of race across the body of sexual difference as, simply, the black man's adoption of white masculine ideals--as opposed to "his own black-centered definition of manhood [where] his sense of himself was not endangered" (79)--Wallace inscribes an essential, natural black masculinity that seems to exist outside the very structure of sexual difference. The growing antagonism between black men and women in the twentieth century becomes, then, not an indication of an increasing cultural reliance on gender to construct the black male (both by himself and American culture at large) but, rather, the black man's "choice" (81) between a white perspective and a black one, between a seemingly destructive masculinity and a constructive counterpart. Defining the relationship between black men and the patriarchal structure in this way, Wallace sees the discourse of Black Power as willfully negating the black woman in its reiteration of patriarchy's privileging of "manhood [as] more valuable than anything else" (79), rather than as the structural consequence of the cultural positioning of the black male via race

and sexual difference.<sup>4</sup>

It is precisely this elision between broader representational structures and individual wills that undermines what is in other ways a crucial study of the discourse of Black Power, for Wallace settles on leveling charges of sexism against the main writers of the movement instead of exploring their relation to the larger cultural processes of constructing and maintaining race and gender--processes that represent no simple choice but that are instead the very means through which cultural hegemony negotiates its power. Kobena Mercer and Isaac Julien's meditation on black masculinity is instructive in this regard, providing an important caveat to Wallace's argument:

Our social definitions of what it is to be a 'man', about what constitutes 'manliness', are not "natural" but are historically constructed. . . . The dominant definitions of masculinity, accepted as the social norm, are neither the products of a false consciousness imposed by patriarchal ideology. Patriarchal systems of male power and privilege constantly have to negotiate the meaning of gender roles with a variety of economic, social and political factors. . . . So, its [sic] not as if we could strip away the negative stereotypes of black men, created by western patriarchy, and discover some 'natural' black masculinity which is good, pure and wholesome. ("True Confessions," 6)

Because masculinity is itself an idea in the discourse of patriarchy, black masculinity cannot be posited as outside the historical



construction of gender relations--as Wallace asserts in citing a completely nonhegemonic, slave-era manhood--for black masculinity in the land of the "free" has always been a negotiation across the various categories of difference structuring American culture.

I have concentrated here at length on Wallace's work because of its importance in charting the relationship between sexual difference and the particular positioning of black men in the white patriarchal economy; as a reflection on the turbulent sixties, *Black Macho* illustrates the use of the discourse of gender to construct an image of the militant black male who, in Wallace's words, armed himself with "[a] big Afro, a rifle, and a penis in good working order" (69) as a way to challenge and avenge the exclusionary realm of white masculine power, a realm perhaps best imaged as a white male bond. In the decade of the eighties, the response to this challenge has been a frantic assertion of interracial male fraternity, a representation culturally designed to assuage not only the threatening image of nonviolent black rage but more crucially, the nightmare visage of black macho terror.

But in tracing the gender codes used in Black Power back to Richard Wright's *Native Son*--"the starting point of the black writer's love affair with Black Macho" (55)--Wallace constructs a misleading image of the collusion between race and gender in the positioning of the black male by establishing this relationship as not only a recent development but one that marks a radical disjunction with the past. While this serves her purposes for constructing a pre-patriarchal black masculine identity, it has the

force of obscuring the historical development of black male imaging via race and gender, a development that evinces a long and complicated intersection of race and gender at the site of the black male body in both dominant and marginalized discourses of American cultural production.<sup>5</sup> In this sense, Black Power's construction of the black male across the body of gender is no cultural anachronism but a broader representational strategy that has operated with increasing force since the early nineteenth century. While Wallace is indeed correct to see Black Power's evocation of this representational strategy as a highly misogynistic formation, the frame for such imaging of the black male body was at work before the emergence of the mythology of the black male rapist--and, to some extent, as we shall see, laid the groundwork for that mythology.

In order to more fully explore this intersection between race and gender in black male writing, the following discussion looks at three significant representations of the black male body; the movement from Frederick Douglass's 1853 "The Heroic Slave"--the first known short story by a black man in America--through Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) to Baraka's 1966 play *Madheart* indicates the processes charted in the previous chapters where race differences between black and white men are negotiated through gender. But in their historical dimension--as representations articulated in very different cultural contexts but ones equally disrupted by changing configurations of race and gender--these texts demonstrate a transformation of the imaging of the black male body from the site of that body to a displacement--through the discourse of sexual

difference--to the bodies of both white and black women. This transformation, occurring during the post-emancipation era, depicts the growing threat of black masculine sameness to white patriarchal power, a sameness brought into crisis with the destruction of slavery and the broad emergence of black men into the American economy. By the cultural era of the 1960s, this empowerment of the black male body is a stridently masculine construction, one that, as *Black Macho* evinces, wholly opposes itself to the feminine, thus rendering itself complicit in the very processes of masculine negotiation that most strenuously victimize not only women but the black male himself.

In "The Heroic Slave," the black male protagonist enters the narrative scene not as a physical presence but as a disembodied voice of "rich and mellow accents," a voice whose soliloquy against the injustice of slavery is the reader's first introduction to Madison Washington, Douglass's heroic slave. As Washington speaks of his place in the social hierarchy--"I am a *slave*,--born a slave, an abject slave,--even before I made part of this breathing world, the scourge was platted for my back; the fetters were forged for my limbs" (177)--he is overheard by a white Northern traveller, Listwell, whose appearance in the same forest where Washington philosophizes aloud initiates their friendship, a bond that will culminate not only in Washington's successful flight to freedom but that of other African and Afro-American slaves as well. In presenting its hero through speech instead of physique, "The Heroic

Slave" foregrounds the problematics of the black body, a body whose visible difference from the white norm has functioned, historically, as the means for cultural disempowerment. By prolonging the revelation of his speaker's black body, Douglass seeks to disrupt the representational economy, denying the sight of the body in order to circumvent the economy of visibility which marks the body as signifier of natural, essential and, in the case of blacks, inferior difference.

Before his protagonist begins his soliloquy, in fact, Douglass discusses his hero's inability to be fully revealed through the vehicle of sight: "Glimpses of this great character are all that can now be presented. He is brought to view only by a few transient incidents. . . . Like a guiding star on a stormy night, he is seen through the parted clouds . . . and he again disappears covered with mystery" (175). While Douglass surely intended this "mystery" to connote the difficulty of any black characterization to transcend stereotypes, to find illumination in the racist discourses of American culture, it also ironically suggests the impossibility of the visible itself to satisfactorily present the black self: all sightings are interrupted and dispersed by the environmental storm of American race relations. Trapped in the representational quagmire of race, Douglass's hero must remain veiled in order to be "seen," for the visible in effect only shrouds, only veils the full nature of the black character. For this reason, the story opens "[s]peaking of marks, traces, possibles, and probabilities" (176), the discursive remnants of the black body in representational paradigms of race.

Through this denial of the visible, Douglass can construct his protagonist first as intellect, highlighting Washington's ability not simply to reason but to render the ideological promises of the New World credo as his own:

"*Liberty* I will have, or die in the attempt to gain it . . . I have nothing to lose. If I am caught, I shall only be a slave. If I am shot, I shall only lose a life which is a burden and a curse. If I get clear, (as something tells me I shall,) liberty, the inalienable birth-right of every man, precious and priceless, will be mine. My resolution is fixed. *I shall be free.*" (178)

His invocation of the American ideal of inalienable freedom--no less than his name Madison Washington--casts this heroic slave in the mold of American revolutionaries, inculcating him into the tradition of freedom fighters that serves as a predominant historical narrative of our culture, one that was particularly foregrounded during the pre-Civil War years. In the opening paragraph of the story, Douglass is most explicit about this connection, describing Washington as "a man who loved liberty as well as did Patrick Henry,--who deserved it as much as Thomas Jefferson,--and who fought for it . . . against odds as great, as he who led all the armies of the American colonies through the great war for freedom. . ." (175). By initiating the narrative through an appeal to American revolutionary history, Douglass not only prepares his reader to accept his hero's later actions--violent slave revolt<sup>6</sup>--but he links Washington to a discourse of cultural power which, as it works to negotiate racial

difference, rejuvenates the black man's masculine role by situating him in relation to a tradition of heroic forefathers.<sup>7</sup>

This rejuvenation of the black man via a masculine discourse of power is made explicit late in the story when the sole white survivor of the revolting *Creole*, Tom Grant, offers a testimony to Washington's character, connecting the hero to a lineage of masculine American heroics:

The leader of the mutiny in question was just as shrewd a fellow as ever I met in my life, and was as well fitted to lead in a dangerous enterprise as any one white man in ten thousand . . . I forgot his blackness in the dignity of his manner, and the eloquence of his speech. It seemed as if the souls of both the great dead men (whose names he bore) had entered him . . . I felt myself in the presence of a superior man; one who, had he been a white man, I would have followed willingly and gladly in any honorable enterprise. (232, 235, 237)

Here, Grant's admiration of Washington's noble character is couched in a telling forgetfulness; in order to be represented in white discourse as truly worthy of admiration, his blackness must be denied in favor of connecting him to a cultural history that itself evinces the power of the white masculine point of view--symbolized not only by the narrative reliance on Grant's retelling as the vehicle for Washington's empowerment but, more significantly, by the metaphoric conquest of the black male body by "the great dead men."

Through this conquest, Douglass is able to displace the

visibility of his hero's blackness into the realm of white masculine power, capitulating to a hegemonic perspective in order to negotiate the threat of racial difference, thereby enabling white consideration of the "thoughts and feelings, or, it might be, high aspirations, [that] guided [Madison's] rich and mellow accents" (176). By repressing Washington's blackness, the white reader is thus encouraged to perceive of Madison Washington not in the stereotypic images of a racist culture--not as pure alterity but as humanly the same:<sup>8</sup>

Madison was of manly form. Tall, symmetrical, round, and strong . . . His torn sleeves disclosed arms like polished iron . . . His whole appearance betokened Herculean strength; yet there was nothing savage or forbidding in his aspect . . . His broad mouth and nose spoke only of good nature and kindness. But his voice, that unfailing index of the soul . . . had that in it which could terrify as well as charm. He was . . . intelligent and brave. He had the head to conceive, and the hand to execute. (179)

Neither completely dependent on brawn nor needing the paternalistic care of the master, Washington is instead imaged as a multifaceted character, the ideological dimensions of his human "sameness" designed to repress his color in the affirmation of his noble American character.<sup>9</sup> The by-product of such a negotiation of race, as the above description evinces, is the foregrounding of an able masculinity that draws its power not from savagery but from the loftier--and culturally coded "white"--ideals of intelligence and

bravery.

This method of displacing cultural inscriptions of blackness with their representational oppositions serves as the narrative strategy of "The Heroic Slave," enabling Douglass to negotiate his protagonist's problematic position in a racist economy. In the unveiling of Washington's body, in fact, Douglass significantly invokes an aesthetic ideal, referring to his character's blackness only in the poetic language of the Euro-American literary tradition; quoting Shakespeare, Douglass writes, "[h]is face was 'black but comely'" while "[h]is eye, lit with emotion, kept guard under a brow as dark and as glossy as the raven's wing" (179). Through such a description, racial difference--the "blackness" of his representation--can be aestheticized into a frozen image of artistic objectification, the power evoked through the sighting of his "manly form" and "Herculean strength" thereby redirected and the potential for a specifically black masculine body recuperated by the ideological colonization of the white masculine point of view.

The inscription of a white literary tradition at the site of the black male body thus functions to erase race as a signifier of specific historical relations, reworking the image of the black male into the realm of total aesthetic objectification (see Mercer, "Imaging"), an objectification that ironically serves in Douglass's mid-nineteenth century text to mediate the threat of difference through a discourse of cultural homogenization. Once race has been banished from sight--the only remnant of difference being its embodiment in aesthetic ideal--the black man's body as a masculine



frame can be empowered, functioning as the repository for white cultural ideals. It is important to recognize, however--particularly in light of later configurations of race and gender at the site of the black male body--that this rejuvenation of the masculine is accomplished outside the framework of a threatening feminine or castrating female body--and in this sense is contingent not on a discourse of sexual difference but rather on one of "racial" sameness, a sameness here produced through the invocation of white cultural traditions and aesthetic values.

By appealing to literary and revolutionary heroic ideals, Douglass thus reconstructs Madison Washington in the discourses of power at work in American culture, discourses that simultaneously situate his hero in relation to race and gender structures. By initially veiling the black body--and subsequently aestheticizing it--Douglass is able to empower his hero through an inscription of white cultural ideals that rehabilitate the masculine in the process of negotiating cultural stereotypes of black inferiority. In this way, a white masculine discourse recuperates the inherent disempowerment characteristic of slave status, allowing Douglass to fashion his protagonist in a tradition that implicitly hierarchicalizes the space of the heroic along race lines. For this reason, the "heroic," as a category culturally linked to the masculine, must take precedence over the visibility of "slave," a distinctly racial signification.<sup>10</sup> Douglass's narrative strategy thus allows his black protagonist to achieve the heroic--ironically, the heroics of violent slave revolt against white supremacy--through a simultaneous denial

of race and the rejuvenation of (white) masculine power.

Douglass's negotiation of racial difference and its consequent reinscription of a discourse of masculine power thus work to recuperate the various layers of hegemonic ideology that his story most pointedly sets out to confront. By casting its black hero as the embodiment of revolutionary ideals, ideals that are themselves indicative of a white masculine tradition, "The Heroic Slave" ironically relies on the narrative of AMERICA as democratic possibility even as its resolution--the attainment of black freedom in the Bahamas--belies the validity of such an inscription. It is equally ironic that part of Grant's homage to the character of Washington is couched in terms of the slave's speech, for it is actually Washington's mastering of the master's discourse that engenders his heroic status, connecting him to the rhetorical tradition of American culture in a way that purposely disconnects him from his black, Afro-American slave heritage. Recast representationally in the ideological constructs of the white masculine point of view, the characterization of Madison Washington depicts the contradictory processes involved in negotiating the black male body in the pre-war period, tensions not fully overcome but paradoxically alleviated through the complete denial of blackness.

While *Native Son* and other literary responses to the cultural imaging of the black male as rapist displace the tensions inherent in the black male body onto the representational bodies of women, "The Heroic Slave" records a period that reproduces a masculine economy by narratively fashioning the black male body in the ideological mold of

white cultural power, a narrative strategy that seeks to suspend a plethora of cultural stereotypes of black inferiority. This is not evidence of the pre-patriarchal black masculinity that Wallace nostalgically posits but is indicative instead of the particular, historically based paradigms governing the imaging of black men in nineteenth century cultural production. As late as 1900, in fact, Charles Chesnutt could construct an alliance (of sorts) between his black male character, Uncle Julius, and the white mistress of the old plantation--the two of them sharing a deeper understanding of the nature of race and world than the white man.<sup>11</sup> But Chesnutt is a kind of last word, posed significantly in the transitory stages that marked the movement from governmental reconstruction to vigilante retaliation--a transition that evinced new representational strategies for the construction and recuperation of white masculine power, specifically the articulation of the mythology of the black male rapist and its attendant cult of sacred white womanhood.

Douglass's narrative strategy for the negotiation of racial difference thus constitutes the earliest phase in the ideological collusion between race and gender structures in black male fiction. The consequences of such an intersection of hierarchical structures is a reassertion of the masculine at the site of the black male body, a reassertion that posits the black man in the heroic, revolutionary discourse of white American patriarchal culture while displacing racial difference into the realm of an aestheticized ideal. In this way, the problematical inscriptions of a "raced" body in the racist economy of American cultural production are diffused in the

recuperation of the masculine--a recuperation epitomized by the narrative reliance on white male characters (Tom Grant and Listwell) to affirm the humanity of Douglass's black hero; Douglass thus depicts the seeming impossibility of portraying his hero apart from the legitimizing force of the white masculine itself. Through the rejection of the economy of the visible as it inscribes an essentializing "racial" difference on the black body and a subsequent capitulation to white cultural traditions, Douglass's work demonstrates the legacy that slavery and imperialism have wrought in the New World: an intersecting collusion between various hierarchies of difference, creating not affinities between the socially disenfranchised groups but discontinuities that ironically prepare the way for a white hegemony--even in the face of slave revolt--to recuperate its cultural power.

Given the representational strategies operating in Douglass's day, it is not surprising that with the emergence of black men into the cultural economy--an economy significantly structured for the first time by a legal discourse of equality--that masculine sameness would become the underlying threat governing relations between black and white men. In the popularization of the mythology of black male sexual prowess, the tensions of a patriarchal economy no longer institutionally hierarchicalized along racial lines can be foregrounded and newly articulated strategies for containment developed in the reconstruction of cultural hegemony. The

representation of black men as sexual beasts thus served to rationalize physical brutality and dismemberment of the black male body, displacing the sexual fear posed by black men into the realm of a sexually constructed difference--the realm not only where the bodies of white women must be protected from the irrational lust of black male sexuality but, more significantly, where the black male body itself is conceived of in terms of a sexual difference articulated against the images of both women and white men. In this way, the image of the sexually potent black male functions within a racially coded paradigm of sexual difference, the positioning of the black male body in relation to gender differences constructing the cultural image of the black male.

The classic image of the sexual beast is of course *Native Son's* Bigger Thomas who, in being denied the traditional avenues of patriarchal power--the ability not only to dominate all women but to act out the masculine role of provider and protector--sees his life as one of impotence, a metaphoric castration that governs his relation to the white world. This psychological castration is the product of cultural practices of disempowerment, practices that had been specifically articulated during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century to recuperate the threat of black men as they entered the cultural economy following emancipation. As a historically constructed narrative, the mythology of the black male rapist is intricately connected to the cult of white womanhood--the cultural representation that ensconced the white woman on a pedestal where her sexuality and purity could not only be worshipped but

seemingly protected by white men from the threat of the ravishing black sexual beast. Tied together by the needs of the white masculine hegemony, the mythos of the rapist and the white virgin simultaneously construct black male and white female sexuality across a raced discourse of sexual difference.

In creating the necessary narrative for the (re)enforcement of the white masculine position, these cultural mythologies set into circulation the bodies of white women as the tokens for cultural power--as Bob Jones says in Chester Himes's *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (1945), "I was going to have to [have the white woman] so I could keep looking white folks in the face" (116). In her study, *The Black Man White Woman Thing: Images of An American Taboo* Marcia Press analyzes how black male writers in the twentieth century have almost obsessively responded to the rape mythology by depicting interracial sexual relations as an usurpation of white masculine power. Press explains the cathartic scenario often depicted in works by black men:

The black man, we are told, acts out his anger toward white society and asserts his manhood, which he can assert nowhere else, in the bed of the white woman. Through his possession of [her], and through his demonstration of superior sexual prowess, the black man shows that he is the equal of the white man; through his sexual domination and psychological manipulation of the white woman, the black man retaliates against his own oppression at the hands of white society.

This sentiment, echoed in various degrees of seriousness by writers

as diverse as David Bradley, Cecil Brown, Ralph Ellison, Eldridge Cleaver and John A. Williams, is most pointedly expressed by French psychologist Franz Fanon: "[b]y loving me [the white woman] proves that I am worthy of white love. I am loved like a white man. I am a white man . . . When my restless hands caress those white breasts, they grasp white civilization and dignity and make them mine" (63).

While the attainment of the white woman carries symbolic weight as a retaliation against white masculine power, black male writers--particularly, as the above list demonstrates, those writing in the second half of the twentieth century--have often purposely reconstructed her image, creating her as the living representation of the destructive powers of white culture. As Press writes, "[r]elying heavily on traditional images of woman as the cause of man's downfall, the white woman is routinely depicted as being not only symbolic of, but responsible for the black man's victimization and emasculation." In *Soul on Ice*, for instance, Cleaver's poem, "To a White Girl," captures the dual symbolic layers--prize and trap--of the white woman's representation:

I love you  
 Because you're white,  
 Not because you're charming  
 Or bright.  
 Your whiteness  
 Is a silky thread  
 Snaking through my thoughts  
 In redhot patterns

Of lust and desire.

I hate you

Because you're white,

Your white meat

Is nightmare food.

White is

The skin of Evil.

You're my Moby Dick,

White Witch,

Symbol of the rope and hanging tree,

Of the burning cross.

Loving you thus

And hating you so,

My heart is torn in two.

Crucified.

(25-6)

Significantly, this poem is printed in Cleaver's infamous chapter on rape where he declares the rape of a white woman an insurrectionary act, the ultimate violation of white masculine power.

In the adoption of the image of the white woman as emblem of black emasculation, black male writers manipulate the discourse of sexual difference to yield an indictment against the construction of race hierarchies in American culture-- but the protest, levied primarily across the body of the white woman, is less a look at the consequences of racism on all black people than it is an assault on the structural impossibility of America's black native sons to gain



full manhood in the patriarchal context of a white society. As in *Native Son* and numerous other texts articulated around the myth of the rapist, the negation of the black woman by both white society and black men is indicative of her broader cultural status as a secondary commodity, a devaluation that is itself a symbol of the white woman's primary role as emblem of white cultural power in racial negotiations between men. What ultimately concerns me is not, however, that black male writing fails to speak for black or white women but how the obsessive reiteration of this particular configuration of race and gender simultaneously captures the threat posed by black men to the masculine economy of white rule while maintaining the very structures of sexual difference that underwrite that economy, ironically articulating in the same historical context as the most significant gains in black power in this country a coincident strengthening of gender.

An interesting construction of the image of the white woman as mediation between white and black men can be found in Ralph Ellison's 1952 novel *Invisible Man*, particularly the differences between an earlier and a later scene featuring the black man-white man liaison. While this work follows *Native Son*, *If He Hollers* and other classic renditions of the black rapist mythology, its description of the nexus of race and gender shows in microcosm the historical transformation under analysis here where the visible sighting of difference is transferred in the pre-Black Power discourse of the

twentieth century from the site of the black male to the white female body. Such a construction depicts the attempt of black male writers to extradite their cultural representation from the mythology of the black male rapist not by disrupting the entire system of gender structures that imbue that mythology with power but by displacing the tension of masculine sameness and racial difference onto the bodies of white women. This strategy, in light of Douglass's earlier narrative, captures the increasing use of the discourse of sexual difference to yield a critique of white hegemony but one that, as we shall see later, also constructs a gendered system of signification that, in the words of Mercer and Isaac Julien, "turns back on black women, black children and indeed on black men themselves" ("True Confessions," 7).

The first appearance of the white woman occurs as a prelude to the "Battle Royal" in Chapter One; here, Ellison's protagonist has been invited to present his previously successful graduation oration to "a gathering of the town's leading white citizens" (17), but upon arrival at the event, he discovers that the occasion is a "smoker," a rather wild white male bash that features for entertainment black men engaged in a blindfolded "battle royal," a fight that the protagonist himself will be forced to engage in. As the black men, clad in boxing shorts and gloves, are led into a "big mirrored hall" (18), the protagonist is aware that "up front the big shots were becoming increasingly excited over something we still could not see" (18).

Suddenly I heard the school superintendent, who had told me to come, yell, "Bring up the shines, gentlemen! Bring up

the little shines!"

We were rushed up to the front of the ballroom . . .  
[and] pushed into place. I almost wet my pants. A sea of  
faces, some hostile, some amused, ringed around us, and in  
the center, facing us, stood a magnificent blonde--stark  
naked. There was dead silence. (18)

The sight of the white woman drives "a wave of irrational guilt and fear" through the invisible man, the historical weight of the taboo against his looking at a white woman serving as the ultimate entertainment for the white men.

It is this positioning of bodies that is illustrative of the broader representational strategies under examination here, for through the specularization of both the white woman and the black man, the white man is empowered to "look," his look constructing the scene as a distinctly white masculine desire, a system that uses the body of the white woman as the mechanism for hierarchicalizing the space of looking among men. More importantly perhaps, such a configuration of bodies enables the white masculine spectator to displace his own desire for the black male body into a heterosexual frame, allowing the white men, for instance, to gaze at a young black man's erection (20) without an accompanying threat of a specifically homosexual desire. Desire, power, and dread between black and white men are thus circulated in an asymmetrical paradigm of looking across the body of the naked woman. By orchestrating this scene of desire, the white men are able to fetishize both the female and the black male body, allowing each to ultimately function as the signifier of

white phallic authority.

In articulating his own relation to this scene, the invisible man is initially poised between two possibilities: either seeing the white woman as similarly exploited by the white men or invoking the structure of gender to empower himself in the face of the white man's manipulation. In the initial unveiling of the white woman to the black men, the protagonist admits that his guilt and fear are mixed with a strong desire--"[h]ad the price of looking been blindness," he says, "I would have looked" (19). In looking he feels, on the one hand, a desire forged through the recognition of similar roles in the circuit of white masculine desire ("I wanted . . . to go to her and cover her from my eyes and the eyes of the others with my body" (19)) and, on the other hand, a desire formed by hate, by the need "to spit upon her," on her yellow hair "like that of a circus kewpie doll, the face heavily powdered and rouged, as though to form an abstract mask, the eyes hollow and smeared a cool blue, the color of a baboon's butt" (19). Detached, empty, a crass portrait of the white man's symbol of civilization--a "small American flag tattooed upon her belly" (19)--the white woman elicits ambivalence: "I wanted . . . to caress and destroy her, to love and murder her, to hide from her, and yet to stroke where . . . her thighs formed a capital V" (19).

Significantly, Invisible's commentary on this scene focuses on his response to the white woman and not on his relation to the white men or his feelings about their construction of the scene; while Ellison's larger narrative purpose here is to depict Invisible's early naivete in his relations to white men--he ends up, after the

Battle Royal, giving his speech, mumbling the words as his mouth fills symbolically with blood--the protagonist's response is telling in reference to a later scene in the novel when he once again encounters a white woman. While the ambivalence of the early scene results in a moment of recognition: "I saw the terror and disgust in her eyes almost like my own terror and that which I saw in some of the other boys" (20)--an evocation of similarity in their positioning in the white masculine economy that is a rare occurrence in the literature of race--this recognition is obviated in his "post-naive" imaging of the white woman who wants him to enact the myth of the black rapist. "Threaten to kill me if I don't give in. You know, talk rough to me, beautiful" (507), she coos, confessing that "ever since I first heard about it, even when I was a very little girl, I've wanted it to happen to me" (508).

In depicting here the white woman's own identification with the cultural roles surrounding the mythology of the black male rapist, the invisible man sees her sexual desire as indicative not only of her adoption of a particular way of looking at him but also of a generic attitude toward rape itself: "some are bound to want to try it out for themselves. The conquerors conquered. Maybe a great number secretly want it; maybe that's why they scream when it's farthest from possibility--" (509). By seeing the white woman now as "the conquerors," as someone for whom rape is an act of desire, the protagonist has overcome his earlier and momentary recognition of a disgust and terror similar to his own. Now it becomes the white woman who "had me on the ropes . . . she thinks [I'm] an entertainer"

(509), a metaphor that harkens back to the Battle Royal where "we stood with our backs against the ropes" (21), producing a spectacle of black bodies "as part of the entertainment" (17). But, significantly, the white man has been narratively removed from this later scene and it is the white woman who orchestrates desire: "Lie back and let me look at you against that white sheet. You're beautiful . . . [l]ike warm ebony against pure snow. . . . I feel so free with you" (509).

In describing the source of her feelings of freedom--"I can trust you . . . you're not like other men. We're kind of alike" (509)--the white woman reveals the structural importance of this re-framing of the scene of desire between black men and white women, a re-framing designed to simultaneously assert his difference from her and, ironically, his similarity to "other men." Across the perversion of her own sexual desire for rape and physical abuse, the white woman's contention that the black man differs from other men has the opposite symbolic effect: to affirm not masculine difference but sameness, constructing, as the most extreme form of difference, the white woman's sexual desire and gender difference. It is this reconstruction around difference and sameness that is pivotal in *Invisible Man*, necessitating, when the white woman intones, "Come on, beat me, daddy--you--you--you big black bruiser," that the black man responds by slapping her and writing with lipstick across the "earth-quaking land" of her stomach: "Sybil, you were raped by Santa Claus Surprise" (511). The joke of rape, the secret fantasy of the white woman, the actual source of her sexual desire, all construct her as

wholly alien to the black man, the earlier sense of a mutual terror and disgust averted in a reconstruction and reassertion of gender difference.<sup>22</sup>

As the crucial mark of a major twentieth century configuration of race and gender, this reconstruction around the image of the white woman-black man turns to the discourse of sexual difference for its full articulation, laying the groundwork for subsequent shifts in the negotiation of race difference between black and white men. As we will see in the work of Imamu Baraka, the reliance on a gender discourse enables the black man to be positioned in a masculine economy not only in relation to the alienating image of the white woman but also against a newly fashioned image of the white man as "fag" (a "symbolic" woman) and a seemingly "rejuvenated" image of the black woman as simultaneously political ally and gender subordinate to black men.

In the twentieth century, black male writers have been particularly attracted to the ultra-masculine image of the black male body--culturally foregrounded through the myth of the black rapist--precisely because of its ability to raise the specter of a *white* masculine feminization, an implicit metaphoric castration that inverts the representational economy that crafts the black man as either literally or metaphorically less than a man. The work of Baraka, like other writers operating under the aegis of black nationalist politics, is especially illustrative of this method of

reading race, which is obviously grounded in the discourse of sexual difference. His 1965 article, "american sexual reference: black male," begins with the assertion: "Most American white men are trained to be fags" (*Home*, 216).<sup>12</sup> As "fags," the feminized, culturally and procreatively unproductive white man is distinctly different not only from black men but from the males in other ethnic groups because white men have devoted "their energies to the non-physical, the nonrealistic, and become estranged from them" (*Home*, 216). This estrangement, Baraka writes, is epitomized by the softness of their bodies: "Can you . . . imagine the average middle-class white man able to do somebody harm? Alone? Without the technology that . . . has him rule the world? Do you understand the softness of the white man, the weakness, and again the estrangement from reality?" (*Home*, 217-18). Soft and weak, the white man has, in short, "become effeminate and perverted" (*Home*, 220), thus leaving the space of a "real" masculine for occupation by the black man.

Baraka's rendition of the struggle between black and white men as located primarily in the body enables him to invoke the same essentializing structures found in the dominant discourse's paradigms of both race and gender difference. Physical strength and power become the equivalent of a natural masculinity--the white man's inability to harm someone without any weapon but his body evinces his perversion of maleness; the black man, who is less connected to the weakening influences of commodity culture, is more "natural" than the white (*Home*, 221) while the white woman is "a dumpy, but somehow seductive, strongwhore who waddles around the house in expensive



cosmetics" (*Home*, 222), her sexuality purified into frigidity, as unnatural as the white man's. Significantly, his only description of the black woman is of her womb, which is the fertile ground for the planting of the black man's "seed": "[t]he black woman can bring forth nothing out of her womb but blackness, the black man can send out no other kind of seed. And that seed, anywhere [even in white wombs], makes black" (*Home*, 233). In a seeming inversion of earlier paradigms of difference governing the images of black and white women, the white woman is now the "whore" while the black woman occupies a revered position precisely because of her ability to bring forth the black man's seed. Both images are thus grounded in traditional ways of viewing women, though their racial difference is reconstructed from a distinctly black masculine point of view.

In constructing his analysis of the sexual/racial dynamics of American culture across a discourse of biology and nature, Baraka describes the white man's effeminization as a loss of the understanding of the connection between sex and reproduction:

for one thousand years the White Eye has killed people for his luxury; as the killing increased . . . and the possibility of reform (. . . that they get themselves together and try to be human beings) lessened, the withdrawal from sex as *creation* grew more extreme. Sex was *dirty*, because first of all it meant a nakedness that could not be supported, because men surrounded and grown fat on evil cannot envision themselves as *naked*. . . . Also there was/is in the white man's unconscious, in response to his

own evil, the desire not to create himself again, a definite anti-regenerative drive. (*Home*, 228)

Because of the white man's historical role as imperialist destroyer, Baraka contends that the ability to comprehend the nature of sex as creation is lost, the power of creation itself being perverted through the drive toward world-wide annihilation. The white man is thus seen to be metaphorically impotent in his relation to the processes of regeneration, estranged from the natural, biological role of the body, able only to spawn his own--and as long as he is in power, the world's--destruction.

The black man, on the other hand, "because he can enter into the sex act with less guilt as to its results, is freer" (*Home*, 228). It is because of this freedom, according to Baraka, that white men have been so obsessed with black male sexuality, resorting to castration in an attempt to destroy the natural, creative impulses of the black male body. "Life and creation (of life) are equally terrifying to [the white man]. ([Imagine] [t]he stuffing of the genitals into the mouth . . . making a man destroy his powers to create, destroying his seed, and his generations)" (*Home*, 232). While Baraka captures the sexual jealousy that underlies the psychological motives for the mutilation of black men's bodies by white men, it is his manipulation of the discourse of sexual difference that enables him to conceive of creation itself as a masculine production: future generations being contained in his "seed," the powers of creating life connected to the feminine only as a storehouse for this seed. What makes the sperm of the black man different--and superior--to the white is that "the

black shows through, and is genetically dominant. The white race will disappear . . . [because it is] genetically weaker. . ." (*Home*, 233). In an obvious reversal of white inscriptions of black biological inferiority, Baraka relies on an essentializing notion of racial difference; located in the body, these differences are products of blood, and their social configurations, the resulting decadence when the "morally weaker white element" (*Home*, 224) rules.

In inverting the various cultural arguments that have been used to represent black people as less than human, Baraka not only reiterates ideas based on the sighting of bodily difference, but he also constructs universalizing gestures that displace the gendered relations *among* blacks, enabling the black masculine to act as symbolic stand-in for black humanity itself. This is revealed in his description of the legacy of slavery:

the white man has tried to keep the black *man* hidden the whole time he has been in America. These were heathens that were brought over in the slave ships, or savages, or animals . . . definitely not men, not human. And when the possibility arose that these animals really might be men, then the ballcutting ceremony was trotted out immediately, just to make sure. . . .

So the white man has tried to cover black *people's* humanity. . . . (emphasis added, *Home*, 226)

The movement from "black man" to "black people's humanity" recreates the broader elision between the masculine and the universal that marks patriarchal culture, depicting a system in which the

feminization of the white man acts as a vehicle for the cultural empowerment of a black masculine point of view, one that--in the process of challenging white masculine power--ironically conceives of the "human" only in terms of the struggle of the masculine itself.

The consequences of Baraka's elaborate reading of cultural sexualities for both black and white women is most apparent in *Madheart*, one of four black revolutionary plays published under the tribute, "All praises to the black man." This piece, which is illustrative of the particularly virulent way the discourse of sexual difference has been increasingly manipulated in the twentieth century, features five players, designated not by name but, as in a morality play (which is its subtitle) by symbolic association: BLACK MAN, BLACK WOMAN, MOTHER, SISTER, and DEVIL LADY who, as the only white character, wears an "elaborately carved white devil mask" (67). Without a traditional narrative, the play is more a symbolic ritual exorcism of the white woman from the mind of BLACK MAN, a ritual necessary for his full assertion of black male identity. The trio of MOTHER, SISTER and BLACK WOMAN represent different responses to the cultural imaging of white female beauty, with only the natural BLACK WOMAN able to retain her own dignity and self-worth in the face of DEVIL LADY. MOTHER is a rather pathetic middle aged black woman who, clad in a red wig and business suit, is the walking emblem of defeated black womanhood but her defeat seems mild in comparison to SISTER, who, wearing a blond wig to symbolize her investment in white culture's standards of beauty, is completely estranged from herself,

adrift in her own nightmare of self-deprecation.

The play opens with the DEVIL LADY moving out of shadows with a neon torch--the perverted image of justice--murmuring to BLACK MAN, "You need pain, ol' nigger devil, pure pain, to clarify your desire" (69). His desire, his unconscious and unfronted desire for the white woman, forms the psychological center of the play, necessitating the ritual killing and mutilation of her body that acts not only as BLACK MAN's cathartic embrace of blackness but as his ultimate attainment of masculine power. Significantly, it is the white woman alone who is the symbol of the white world, the emblem of BLACK MAN's emasculation by a white society and the source of a cosmic filth--which is imaged as her body, her "stale pussy" (69), "an old punctured sore with the pus rolled out" (73). At one point, DEVIL LADY rolls on her back and reveals her genitals "to show a cardboard image of Christ pasted over her pussy space. A cross in the background" (70); she moans and pants, "My pussy rules the world through newspapers. My pussy radiates the great heat" (70). This ascription of white Christian culture to the feminine is quickly reinforced as a background of black voices is overtaken by "the high beautiful falsetto of a fag" (71). By constructing white culture as devoid of the masculine, as significantly the realm of putrified vaginas, Baraka is able to claim the masculine wholly for BLACK MAN; as he says at play's end, "I am the new man of the earth" (84).

The play's ritualistic destruction of DEVIL LADY is accomplished in three movements, the first occurring during a blackout in the initial moments of the action. When the lights are raised, DEVIL

LADY is revealed "l[ying] in the middle of the stage with a spear, or many arrows, stuck in her stomach and hole" (71); as BLACK MAN conjures over her body, "You will always and forever be dead" (71), he initiates the second action, "tak[ing] up a huge wooden stake and driv[ing] it suddenly into her heart, with a loud thud as it penetrates the body, and crashes deep in the floor" (71). Multiply pierced with the phallic images of BLACK MAN's thwarted manhood, the white woman is both voo-doo doll and vampire, the life-sucker of black identity. But as BLACK MAN prepares to strike her again with the stake, MOTHER and SISTER scream for him to stop, SISTER murmuring, "I wanted to be something like her" (73) while BLACK WOMAN, "her natural hair cushion[ing] her face in a soft remark" (72), admonishes them: "you have been taught to love her by background music of sentimental movies. A woman's mind must be stronger than that" (74). But still MOTHER and SISTER lament the loss, for as SISTER says later, "[she is] my body . . . my beautiful self" (85). Indeed, when BLACK MAN strikes DEVIL LADY for the third and final time, it is SISTER who screams, "Oh God, you've killed me, nigger" (77).

Through the use of traditional images of the female body as foul, Baraka depicts the damaging effects of the white woman's elevation on black men and women in American culture, an inscription that is clearly linked to earlier works by black male writers, such as Wright, who saw the white woman as the ultimate symbol of both white culture and black male victimization. What makes Baraka's work significantly different from earlier depictions of the white devil

motif, however, is his particular positioning of the black woman in these sexual/racial relations. In *Madheart*, BLACK WOMAN's role in the rejuvenation of black masculinity is central, as she is in other Black Power discourses of the 1960s.<sup>13</sup> Here, not only is she the one to provide the proper contrast to MOTHER and SISTER--as "black black and . . . the most beautiful thing on the planet" (74)--but she is also the one who can make BLACK MAN whole--"Touch me if you dare," she says. "I am your soul" (74). Transforming the Freudian question, "What does woman want?" into "What do you want, black man?" (75), she offers him herself: "I'm real and whole . . . And yours, only yours, but only as a man will you know that" (81).

This "only as a man" has curious implications in the play, for as soon as he vows "to get [her] back" he "wheels and suddenly slaps her crosswise, back and forth across the face" (81). In the taking of his patriarchal rights, BLACK MAN orders: "I want you, woman, as a woman. Go down. (*He slaps again.*) Go down, submit, submit . . . to love . . . and to man, now, forever" (81). Her response: "I . . . I submit . . . I am your woman, and you are the strongest of God. Fill me with your seed" (82-3). In his wielding of authority as a "man," BLACK MAN demands the traditional powers of domination over "his" woman. In an interesting replication of the gender ideology that underwrites the play, Charles D. Peavy justifies BLACK MAN's actions:

This scene might appear somewhat brutal, but the entire action is a symbolic ritual and the final phase in the achievement of BLACK MAN's identity. In the past, BLACK WOMAN has seen BLACK MAN humbled, has seen him crawl. He

could do nothing then, but . . . now . . . he must assert himself before MOTHER, SISTER, and BLACK WOMAN.

This final phase . . . is necessary. BLACK MAN discovers BLACK WOMAN, and finds that he loves her. But she . . . tries to dominate him just as the mother and sister and the white woman had done, for she tries to prescribe his behavior. He must symbolically (and physically) dominate her so that he can become her man, and the strongest of God. (172)

In this way, BLACK MAN can gain his place in the patriarchal order, BLACK WOMAN's disempowerment (in league with the death of DEVIL LADY) functioning as the symbolic castration that is necessary for the phallicization of BLACK MAN's self.

The discourse of sexual difference is obviously the means whereby Baraka negotiates the problematics of the black male in the white patriarchal economy, but while his work is crucial to an understanding of the Black Power period, it would be misleading to assume that all black male writers have or would lend themselves to such a deeply misogynist rendition of the gender-race nexus in American culture. And yet, his work does capture the increasing reliance in the twentieth century on sexual difference as the vehicle for the reconstruction of the black man's relation to cultural power--a reliance evident not only in the work of black men but in the broader cultural arena where dominant discourses use gender to



diffuse race, inscribing the white masculine point of view as the site for the achievement of egalitarian promise or eliding black male difference with the feminine; in response, black male writers often invoke sexual difference as a means of affirming masculine sameness (or, as in Baraka's case, of vacating the white man from the cultural position of the masculine), inverting without disrupting the cultural construction of gender.

Ironically, then, in both black and white male discourse, sexual difference serves a structural role in the construction and maintenance of masculine differences--a construction that has, as its by-product, the further entrenchment of gender. It is no accident, in this regard, that narratives of interracial male fraternity either posit an escape from women and the supposedly feminizing constraints of civilization or depict, as in *Native Son*, a bonding between men that is articulated across the bodies of both black and white women--sexual difference in both cases being a precondition for the negotiation of racial difference.

Given the nature of the recuperatory strategies of contemporary cultural production--where race differences among men are being worked through a rejuvenation of masculine power--it is ironic that a writer such as Baraka, working within the ideological framework of Black Power, would employ similar discursive structures in order to challenge the rule of white men. By seeing white men as somehow less than men, as desexualized "fags," Baraka wages a race war that reveals itself as a masculine struggle not simply for the rights to the patriarchal castle, but as BLACK MAN says, "to be the strongest

of God" (83). In this struggle for omnipotence, the cultural landscape is strewn with mutilated bodies, all of them thrown in some dark plot configured by race and gender.

## Notes to Chapter Four

<sup>1</sup> While all aspects of the mid-century black movement posed a threat to white hegemony, it is important here to distinguish between "Black Power" and "civil rights" not only because leaders of the black nationalist movement saw themselves as strenuously different from the project professed by King but also because it is specifically the militancy and rhetoric of violence of nationalist politics that contemporary cultural production is responding to in imaging a seemingly rejuvenated black masculine.

<sup>2</sup> In her analysis of representations of relations between black men and white women, Press argues that the white women functions as a pawn in the black man's struggle for manhood.

<sup>3</sup> In "The Legacy of Slavery: Standards for a New Womanhood," Davis similarly argues that twentieth century notions of slave life as matriarchal bear little resemblance to historical evidence, for the salient theme emerging from domestic life in the slave quarters is one of sexual equality . . . Black women were equal to their men in the oppression they suffered, they were their men's social equals within the slave community; and they resisted slavery with a passion equal to their men's. This was one of the greatest ironies of the slave system, for in subjecting women to the most ruthless exploitation conceivable, exploitation which knew no sex distinctions, the groundwork was created not only for Black women to assert their equality through their social relations, but also to express it through their acts of resistance. (*Women, Race and Class*, 18, 23).

<sup>4</sup> The theoretical problems in *Black Macho* reflect the shortcomings of an earlier era of feminist theory, one that had difficulty accounting not simply for the processes of producing patriarchal power but perhaps more to the point here, of the particular ways that hierarchies of difference intersect in the construction and maintenance of hegemony.

<sup>5</sup> By constructing her argument in terms of black male writers who had somehow become infatuated with patriarchal power, Wallace fails to recognize that the history of representing the black male body by both dominant culture and black male writers themselves depicts a collusion between race and gender structures that is the specific product of a racist patriarchal social order.

<sup>6</sup> Such actions, given the explosiveness of race relations in the 1850s when the very question of armed insurrection haunted the American landscape, are significant not simply for Douglass's

approval of black insurrection but because of his story's manipulation of the traditional features of the interracial male bond. On one hand, as is the case with bonding narratives throughout various periods of American cultural production, Douglass invokes the rhetoric of freedom and democracy, inscribing the cultural past as one of radical and justifiable revolution and reiterating a clearly hegemonic tradition of American patriotism through references to Henry and the slave-owning Jefferson; and yet, on the other hand, "The Heroic Slave" fends off to some extent the recuperation of its radical portent into the ideological dream of AMERICA both by denying the white partner the role of primary hero and by setting the narrative attainment of freedom not in America but in the Bahamas--freedom for blacks is thus not possible within the cultural confines of America and the white man, though he slips Washington a file to aid the black man's unfettering, is ultimately not responsible for the *Creole's* successful revolt.

Indeed, the northern white's name, Listwell, indicates his ideological role in the question of slavery: "Listen well" to the black voice and then act in light of that voice and not your own. As the symbolic white reader, Listwell's role as listener is contingent on the initial absence of the black body, an absence that allows the white reader/viewer to transcend the cultural inscriptions of that body as indicative either of passive simplicity or primitive violence, enabling white consideration of the "thoughts and feelings, or, it might be, high aspirations, [that] guided those rich and mellow accents" (176).

<sup>7</sup> In the conclusion of the story, this link between slave revolt and the ideals of the American revolution is clearly established as the ideological motive for black insurrection; in response to the charge that the slaves are murderers for killing their master when they seized control of the ship, Washington counters, "We have done that which you applaud your fathers for doing, and if we are murderers, so were they" (235). As a surviving white crewmember of the *Creole* asserts, Washington's "principles were [not] wrong in the abstract; for they are the principles of 1776" (238).

<sup>8</sup> In light of the Douglass's abolitionist work--and because reading and education for blacks was outlawed in the slave states and difficult to come by in the north--it is not ethnocentric to conceive of the intended readership of "The Heroic Slave" as white. Indeed, the story's very construction, with the white man overhearing and deciding to aid the black, is itself indicative of the cultural economy out of which Douglass wrote his story.

<sup>9</sup> This invocation of a human sameness, constructed in relation to nineteenth century discourses of black animality and genetic inferiority, stands in contrast to later post-emancipation representations of the black male body, for here the rehabilitation of gender is a consequence of the negotiation process and not its primary means of production. While a broader cultural elision

between human and masculine is certainly at work in the nineteenth century, we would be wrong to view Douglass's emphasis on Washington's "manly form" and "Herculean strength" as simply a reiteration of sexual difference. For Douglass, the negotiation of the black body is accomplished by a suspension of racial stereotypes to elicit a human as opposed to a stridently masculine sameness. While the heroic tradition allows Madison's masculinity to be rejuvenated, it is less the gendered than the racial parameters of that heroic tradition that function as the mediation for negotiation.

<sup>10</sup> Significantly, even when visibility of racial designation cannot be confirmed through sightings--when, for instance, a mulatto character enters the scene--the cultural category of "slave" in the pre-war period clarifies the difference. The function of the legal apparatus surrounding mixed birth is precisely this enforcement of cultural disenfranchisement even when racial difference from the "norm" of whiteness cannot be visually ascribed. The economy of the visible, as this chapter discusses, is always constructed around a supposedly obvious, bodily difference.

<sup>11</sup> It should be noted that Uncle Julius is quite a bit older than the white woman, a narrative construction that in itself functions to allay the fear of the black sexual threat.

<sup>12</sup> Baraka has often portrayed the white man and, significantly, black men who are pro-white, as effeminate or homosexual. See, for example, the white and black police in *Police*, the white father in *Home on the Range*, the white professor in *The Slave*, and Karolis and Foots in *The Toilet*.

<sup>13</sup> For example, in a letter entitled, "To All Black Women, From All Black Men," Eldridge Cleaver writes: "Let me drink from the river of your love at its source, let the lines of force of your love seize my soul by its core and heal the wound of my Castration . . . . [I]t is only through the liberating power of your re-love that my manhood can be redeemed" (*Soul on Ice*, 189).

## Coda

## Black Bodies/American Commodities

The process of reining the image of the black man into the ideological fold of American culture is accomplished both through representations of the interracial male bond and through the specularization of black difference, the fetishization and commodification of the black male body that contribute to the perpetuation and recuperation of the white masculine point of view. Contemporary cultural production, with its emphasis on television and cinema, is particularly implicated in these processes, for the very visibility of black male characters in the narrative functions to affirm the rhetoric of a post-Civil Rights egalitarianism, a recuperatory strategy that enables not only a reconstruction of AMERICA around the issue of racial difference but also a rehabilitation of the image of those previously (and briefly) held accountable for cultural inequalities. An especially seductive version of such strategies of negotiation is at work in *The Cosby*

*Show*, America's long-running number one favorite that, by foregrounding images of middle class ascendancy against the background of stable gender relations, offers the spectacle of a culture no longer internally disrupted by differing ideals.<sup>1</sup>

In particular, *The Cosby Show* depicts the way the ideology of a classless America can be manipulated to negotiate not only the threat of black cultural difference but more specifically, the threat of black masculine *sameness* to the functioning of hegemonic structures. By allowing its central black character, Cliff Huxtable, to roam rather unproblematically between the role of father and child--to be simultaneously an authority and the one in need of authority--the image of the black male can be sutured to the fairly unthreatening realm of the domestic, a realm that, according to the discourse of black power, was itself previously denied the black man; this domestication and its attendant imagery of a rejuvenated black father role, combined with the comedic format, Bill Cosby's fame as a "funny face," and the extravagant commodification of the characters' lives and bodies, provide the necessary ingredients for a culturally "successful" depiction of "black life." It is precisely this process of negotiating race through the bourgeois spectacle of the middle class family that concerns me here, for the program's clever foregrounding of the (racial) politics of the visible and its subsequent commodification of the black body point to the latest strategy of recuperating black male threats to white hegemony, providing a stable representation of a post-60s/post-difference world.

The use of class to diffuse race difference is illustrated best by *The Cosby Show's* opening credit sequences which have radically changed from the first season (1984-85) to the present (1987-88), a change that demonstrates the growing reliance in this decade on class negotiation to structure both the program's presentation of difference and American cultural production's recuperation of previous articulations of hegemonic challenge. In 1984, the credits were run against images of the Huxtable family engaging in a traditional family picnic, a scene complete with softball, jeans, and baseball caps. The sequence opens with stills of each of the cast members emerging from a new van, then presents, in order, a distance shot of the family walking away from the van, individual shots of each member playing softball, and finally, a group portrait. The Huxtables are thus represented in images that depict their enjoyment and participation in family activities, the final image of Cosby being framed by paste-up corners from an old fashioned photo album. Though Cosby's image both precedes and follows the still shots of the cast, he is not as prominent as in subsequent years. It is also significant that in this early segment, the cast is photographed primarily at close range--their full bodies featured only in the group stills--thereby creating an intimacy and individuality that denies the kind of specularization or fetishism of the body that we find in the later credit sequences.

In the show's second season, the family album motif was replaced



with a format that has remained stable since 1985 although the figures of the players within the format have changed over time in important ways. The sequence opens with a cropped frame of Cosby's face and then moves with him as he introduces through dance the other members of the cast. In each version, the camera remains stationary; all movement consists of Cosby ushering the members of the cast into the camera's view and off. This means that nearly every second of the sequence features him. In contrast to the earliest segment this is significant, for we see how later marketing of the program more overtly cashes in on Cosby's commercial persona, drawing all cast members into the commodification of self that now dominates the program. Indeed, it is difficult--as the televisual apparatus insures--for viewers to separate Heathcliff Huxtable from Cosby's own very visible presence in American advertising as a spokesperson for such products as Jello and EF Hutton. In all his public roles, Cosby's presence inscribes the masculine figure of father as central even while his avid attention to children and his often childlike behavior poses as subversion of such a role. As each of the cast members dances around the father--or as he dances around them--we have the masculine as the controlling force of every moment of address, a configuration typically replicated in the narrative of the program.

It is through this visage of the masculine that the menace of the black male can be situated in a nonthreatening realm, all potential challenge to hegemonic power negotiated through the rehabilitated image of the black man as father. This role is made

available to the black man, in part, because of the show's own refusal to present any substantial imaging of the white man; by vacating the masculine space of the father of its historical occupation by the white man, the show is able to simultaneously offer a seemingly progressive image of the black man while guaranteeing that his image as father is devoid of racial tension. Cosby's jokes and funny faces thus lessen the threat of the black male as competitor for traditionally white masculine power while paradoxically upholding the masculine as the figure that binds together all others, the glue that holds the cultural community and family together. Such a presentation of the black man relies on the representation of both race and gender difference as themselves "natural," hierarchically non-threatening and stable--representations that are significantly the consequences of the broader contemporary processes of recuperation outlined in previous chapters.

While the masculine is thus rejuvenated through the apparent stability of race and gender relations in the cultural moment of *The Cosby Show*, the opening sequence highlights the latest stage of the recuperatory project by depicting an increasing reliance on the commodification of the body--the visibility of its evolution functioning to foreground an intertext of class. In each of the last three years' openings, the camera shoots the cast members from a distance, highlighting their bodies as a display of surfaces, turning their representations into a fetishization. This fetishism in turn is heightened by the designer clothing, which insures that the body is represented as a commodity, its whole existence tied to the

advertisement of the clothing and of the capitalist/ materialist values that the clothing signifies; in this way, the entire cast becomes an extension of the commodification of self that is both Cosby and the show that represents him. (It is significant that a major expense for the series is its clothing and that the fashion world vies intensely for the Cosby contract.)

In this commodification of bodies, difference is transformed into an endless display of spectacles--representations that offer a "new" portrait of American culture, one that, while foregrounding the image of the black body, can simultaneously frame that body as commodified artifact, masking the historical and present position of black people in America. The ultimate expression of the commodification of the body and its simultaneous representation of blackness as spectacle is found in this year's opening scene where the cast is clad in the classical accoutrements of the class system: tux, tails and glamorous evening wear. Because the distance shots of the cast members already emphasize the body as a display of surfaces, the use of formal clothing reinforces the flattening out of racial difference through a capitulation to class. By thus couching blackness as spectacle and commodity, *The Cosby Show* collapses difference into an economy of the same, overriding the threat of black challenges to white hegemony by linking integration with commodification and bourgeois ideals. This inscription of class and *Cosby's* accompanying framework of gender thus enable racial difference to be negotiated and subsequently contained and neutralized in dominant discourses.

There are those viewers, of course, who consider *The Cosby Show*'s emphasis on black middle class achievement its most radical and culturally challenging aspect. Ralph Ellison, for instance, praises the program in a 1988 *TV Guide* interview for "cut[ting] across race and class" and thus depicting blacks as successful, well-cultured and wealthy. "If you think of all Afro-Americans as being poor, then you have a distorted view of the society," he says (Townley, 4). But the implicit assumption here, that television thus mirrors "reality," indicates not only the ease with which we collapse the fictive into the real but also the ability of the bourgeois ideal to negotiate racial hierarchies of difference--the image of well-cultured blacks seemingly cutting across more traditional and stereotypic notions of black difference. Perhaps the greatest indication of how easily the class status of the Huxtables can negotiate the potential threat of blackness to white hegemony is the popularity of *The Cosby Show* in South Africa where it has enjoyed ratings similar to those in America. The development from softball clothing to black tie apparel is paradigmatic of the way Cosby and his satellites have been incorporated into the corporate mentality of television--and have themselves become representations of that mentality, and hence spectacles within the very frame of their own representation--indeed, images of their own images.

Throughout its various levels of presentation, *The Cosby Show* thus depicts a new process of negotiating racial--and particularly black male--difference at this particular moment in cultural representation.<sup>2</sup> While it is not the only program to construct black

male difference as spectacle (think, for instance, of *Miami Vice* and *Sonny Spoon*), its images seductively reproduce our own nostalgic and utopian desire for a culture untouched by the dissent of the 1960s, a culture that has transcended its own nightmare images to emerge healed in the light of a nonthreatening, nonviolent black father. As the spectacle of difference is moved through the frame of the screen, its relation to an ideological past is consumed into the eternal present of the television image, the black body commodified and contained as a specular representation of a seemingly indifferently imaged difference. Just as The Cosby Show negotiates black radicalism and the threat of violent black protest through the spectacle of commodification, so too is each "threat" of the 1960s remarked in the mass culture of the 1980s. This negotiation is part of the reconstitution of the white masculine hegemony, for what we are seeing everywhere is the representation of a new America where a normative masculine perspective presents the only hope for the full realization--and global reconstruction--of American democratic possibility.

## Notes to Coda

<sup>1</sup> In the flow of television's nonstop presentation of items to consume--from advertisements to prime time serials to network newscasts and movies--the effort to look at the one program, let alone a single frame, is problematic. While I focus here on *The Cosby Show*, its ideological construction must be viewed within the framework of the televisual apparatus, which, even as it seeks to advertise itself as a cornucopia of diversified plenty, reiterates various versions of the Same. In this sense, it is useful to see configurations of difference not simply as elements of *The Cosby Show's* internal narrative but as part of the controlling dynamic of the apparatus--the mark of both postmodern technologies and American cultural production where differences move through the frame of the screen (much as they move through the frame of American culture) with a pretense of multiplicity and heterogeneity but functioning instead as one more alien discourse that finds itself transformed into (a) televisual spectacle. Providing representations of diversity, the visible presence of difference thus aids the commercial nature and function of television, linking contemporary ideology with technologies of production.

<sup>2</sup> It is too early to know whether the negotiation of race via class demonstrates a representational shift from a gender-based to a class-based economy or whether the strategy employed in *The Cosby Show* is simply another manifestation of the politics of negotiating the masculine.

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