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# Unthinking Whiteness, Rethinking Democracy: Or Farewell to the Blonde Beast; Towards a Revolutionary Multiculturalism

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## **Comments**

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**Peter L. McLaren** is a professor with the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles. He presented this article as the R. Freeman Butts Lecture at the annual meetings of the American Educational Studies Association on November 8, 1996, in Montréal, Québec, Canada. Sections of this lecture will appear in Enrique Trueba and Yali Zou (Editors) *Ethnic Identity and Power* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, in press); Peter McLaren, *Revolutionary Multiculturalism: Pedagogies of Dissent for the New Millennium* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, in press); Jim O'Donnell and Christine Clark, *Becoming White: Owning a Racial Identity* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, in press); Peter McLaren, "Decentering Whiteness," *Multicultural Education* (forthcoming); and Joe Kincheloe and Shirley Steinberg, *White Reign: Learning and Deploying Whiteness in America* (forthcoming). The author also thanks Bernardo Gallegos and Diane Alvarez for their reading of this paper and their helpful commentary.

## **Unthinking Whiteness, Rethinking Democracy: Or Farewell to the Blonde Beast; Towards a Revolutionary Multiculturalism**

Dedicated to the memory of Emiliano Zapata, *el líder campesino hecho martir en 1917* and *El Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional*.

**By Peter L. McLaren**

The Price of freedom is death.

—Malcolm X (El Hajj Malik El Shabazz)

We don't want to be around that ol' pale thing.

—Malcolm X (El Hajj Malik El Shabazz)

*El deber de cada revolucionario es hacer la revolución.*

—Che Guevara

As the millennium draws closer and my time on this earth stretches within a whisper of half a century, I look back at my twenty-five years as an educator and social activist with few regrets. Yet I must confess a world-weariness has overtaken much of what I thought

was my inviolate resolve, a feeling of anger and despair about living and dying in these new times, at this current and painful juncture in world history. I try to hide my despair and rage towards the system from my students, many of whom yearn to find in my writings and those of my colleagues some hard and fast ways to permanently dismantle structures of oppression that imprison the spirit and harden the hearts of so many of our brothers and sisters in struggle.

Despite the present social conditions that beset us, I am not in a perpetual state of dismay, forced to camouflage a secret despair. In my darkest hours I have on more than one occasion been graced by what could be described as a momentous shimmering of the human spirit, a slight breaking free from the deep inertia of this planetary soul. Occasionally light splinters the darkness in various shapes: a nascent social movement attempting to unite the barrios; a hip hop message that becomes a rallying cry for social justice in a community under siege; a million black men marching to Washington; a hundred thousand marchers striding down Cesar Chavez Avenue to protest Proposition 187 with a resolve so formidable that you could feel the sting of electricity in the air; hundreds of high school students in East Los Angeles defying their teachers and walking out of their classrooms to show their solidarity with the anti-Proposition 187 activists. Even a single pedagogical act, such as a group of students trying to undo the image of the Mexican as the demon poster-boy by confronting white racists in a seminar, is enough to drive a tiny wedge between despair and cynical resignation.

Spaces of hope do appear. But rarely by historical accident. Sometimes they occur in the momentary indecision of the marketplace; sometimes in a rare paralysis of hate in the menacing machine of capital; but whatever the reason, these spaces need to be strategically seized. Spaces of hope offer encouragement to the forces of justice but they are not sufficient in themselves. Spaces—often private—must be made public. They must be expanded from spaces into spheres—from personal, individual spaces and private epistemologies into public spheres of hope and struggle and collective identities.

The specific struggle that I wish to address is that of choosing against whiteness. Yet is it possible for us to choose against whiteness given that, historically, the practice of whiteness has brought about such a devastating denial, disassembly, and destruction of other races? One would think that such a choice against whiteness would be morally self-evident. However, precisely because whiteness is so pervasive, it remains difficult to identify, to challenge, and to separate from our daily lives. My message is that we must create a new public sphere where the practice of whiteness is not only identified and analyzed but also contested and destroyed. For choosing against whiteness is the hope and promise of the future.

Where do those of us, living in this vaunted western democracy, stand as a nation? Look around you, dear comrades; look inside as well as outside for the outside is really a mirror of who we are as a people. The Dickensianizing of post-modern megalopolises like Los Angeles (the enhancing of the personal wealth of

the few who live in places like Beverley Hills at the expense of the many who live in places like Compton or East L.A.) is not a natural historical event (there is nothing natural about history). It is a politically contrived dismemberment of the national conscience. And it is comfortably linked to global economic restructuring.

Sustaining a meager existence is becoming frighteningly more difficult with the passage of time for millions of Third World peoples as well as First World urban dwellers, including millions of inhabitants of the United States. Global capitalism is excluding large numbers from formal employment while the poor, trapped within post-Fordist arenas of global restructuring and systems of flexible specialization, appear to be less able to organize themselves into stable and homogeneous social movements. Standardized forms of mass production, in which companies retool and keep production costs down in order to keep competitive in the international marketplace, are now disappearing. Economies of global efficiency are side-stepping the ability of nation states to mediate the control of money and information.

Labor markets are growing more segmented as full-time workers are replaced with part-time workers who are unable to secure even meager health or dental benefits. The days of high-wage, high-benefit mass production manufacturing are receding into the horizon as the First World bids farewell to industrialized regimes. Yet manufacturing has not completely disappeared from the United States. In Los Angeles, where I live, you can witness the Latinization of the Southland's working-class, as Latino/as now make up 36 percent of Los Angeles County's labor force in manufacturing (the nation's largest manufacturing base). And the exploitation of these workers continues to increase.

Stock options go up in companies that downsize and lay off thousands of employees. It used to be a sign that a company was in trouble when it laid off large numbers of workers. Now it's an indication of strength, making stockholders proud. Cutting costs is everything, as business moves farther away from even a peripheral engagement with the world of ethics. In fact, capitalism has made ethics obsolete. The buying and selling of labor power is all about aesthetics, which does share a hinge with ethics, true, but the latter is subsumed by reification's terrible beauty.

The war on poverty has given way to the war on the poverty-stricken—a war that is about as mean-spirited as wars can get. The average worker has to do without the luxury of decent living standards because to improve conditions for the majority of the population would cut too deeply into the corporate profitability of the ruling elite. Rarely has such contempt for the poor and for disenfranchised people of color been so evident as in the hate-filled politics of the last several decades.

The greed and avarice of the United States ruling class is seemingly unparalleled in history. Yet its goals remain decidedly the same. Michael Parenti writes:

Throughout history there has been only one thing that ruling interests have ever wanted—and that is *everything*: all the choice lands, forest, game, herds,

harvests, mineral deposits, and precious metals of the earth; all the wealth, riches, and profitable returns; all the productive facilities, gainful inventiveness, and technologies; all the control positions of the state and other major institutions; all public supports and subsidies, privileges and immunities; all the protections of the law with none of its constraints; all the services, comforts, luxuries, and advantages of civil society with none of the taxes and costs. Every ruling class has wanted only this: all the rewards and none of the burdens. The operational code is: we have a lot; we can get more; we want it all. (1996, p. 46)

As long as the small business lobby and other interests tied to capital successfully derail health care reform whenever the issue raises its disease-ravaged face, as long as the bond market continues to destroy public investment, and as long as business continues to enjoy record-high profits, acquisitions, and mergers (with the aid of corporate welfare) at the expense of wages and labor, then prosperity in the United States, like its administration of social justice, will remain highly selective. And we all know who benefits from such selectivity. To remain in a state of political paralysis or inertia is to aid and abet the sickening suburbanization of the country—a suburbanization driven by a neo-liberal agenda designed to serve mainly Whites. Working under existing rules established by the National Labor Relations Act and the procedures carried out by the National Labor Relations Board, unions are being deprived of their right to organize, and this is contributing in no small way to wage decline. The situation reflects only too well what Parenti calls his “iron law of bourgeois politics”: When change threatens to rule, then rules are changed (1996, p. 248).

Residents of the United States do not have a natural disposition to swindle the gullible, to target the poor more forcefully than a F-16 fighter locks onto an enemy “hunkered down” in the sands of Iraq, to scapegoat immigrants and to fashion them into *los olvidados* (the forgotten ones). The current evisceration of public protection programs, shamefully absent enforcement of environmental standards, rising health insurance premiums, drastic declines in salaries for working people, erosion of the primary sector proletariat, and steady increase of the chronically unemployed have catapulted the United States onto a tragic course towards social decay and human misery—a course that is far from inevitable.

It is possible that a quarter century from now Whites might be a minority in the United States. As they continue to feel that their civil society is being despoiled and to blame immigrants for their increasing downward mobility and the disappearance of “traditional” American values, Whites fall prey to the appeal of a reactionary and fascist politics of authoritarian repression. This is especially true at a time when Whites continue to feel removed from their ethnic roots and undergo what Howard Winant (1994, p. 284) has called “a racializing panethnicity as ‘Euro-Americans.’”

The kindling of fascism lies in the furnace of United States democracy waiting for a spark to ignite a firestorm of state repression. Previous firestorms have

occurred in the Watts rebellion of August 1965, the civil rights movement, and the anti-war movement of the 1960s, but also in more current forms such as the Los Angeles uprising of April 29, 1992, and the East L.A. high school walk-outs of 1994 over Proposition 187. We don’t get many firestorms because, as Parenti (1996) has so presciently noted, fascism is already here on low-flame, which burns just fine with the occasional stoking from reactionary governors such as Pete Wilson.

The citizenry of the United States has been sold a damaged bill of goods in the Republican Contract with America. Parenti captures its ideology perfectly:

The GOP socio-economic agenda is not much different from the kind pushed by Mussolini and Hitler: break the labor unions, depress wages, impose a rightist ideological monopoly over the media, abolish taxes for the big corporations and the rich, eliminate government regulations designed for worker and consumer safety and environmental protection, plunder public lands, privatize public enterprises, wipe out most human services, and liberal-bait and race-bait all those opposed to such measures. (1996, p. 42)

In the United States we are living at a time of undeclared war. Each day we negotiate our way through mine-sown terrains of confrontation and uncertainty surrounding the meaning and purpose of identity. American democracy faces Janus-like in two simultaneous directions: into a horizon of hope and co-existence and into the burning eyes of klansmen in sheets soiled with blood. While on the one hand this current historical juncture is witnessing an unprecedented growth of white supremacist organizations living on the fringes of social life, on the other hand establishment conservatives are stridently asserting nativistic and populist sentiments that barely distinguish them ideologically from their counterparts in racist far right groups and citizen militias: The Ku Klux Klan, Posse Comitatus, The Order, White Aryan Resistance, Christian Identity, National Alliance, Aryan Nations, American Front, Gun Owners of America, United Citizens of Justice and militia groups have organizations in most, if not all, of the fifty states.

Young white males and females who may find these racist groups unappealing can still find solace in politicians such as Pete Wilson and Bob Dole whose anti-immigrant and Latinophobic policies and practices deflect their racializing sentiments through flag waving, jingoism, and triumphalist acts of self-aggrandizement—such as the disguising of Proposition 209 as a civil rights initiative—designed to appeal to frightened white voters who feel that growing numbers of Spanish-speaking immigrants will soon outnumber them. Politicians have become white warriors in blue suits and red ties dedicated to taking back the country from the infidel. Recently, amid headlines of Black churches in the south being razed by arson, a Los Angeles newspaper ran a photograph of Bob Dole at a Southland political rally. The magnetic allure of Dole’s head, its skin a translucent blue, tensile; its shiny yellow tongue as if dipped in kerosene, seemingly wagging,

appeared in metonymic relationship to his message: Anglos feel under siege from the most alien of alien nations—Mexico—and it is time that civilized white folks wrestle back the land from the barbarians.

Guillermo Gómez-Peña writes:

This identity crisis translates into an immense nostalgia for an (imaginary) era in which people of color didn't exist, or at least when we were invisible and silent. The political expression of this nostalgia is chilling: "Let's take our country back." The far right, like Pete Wilson, Newt Gingrich, Jesse Helms, and Pat Buchanan, along with many Democrats, are in agreement on the following: This country must be saved from chaos and collapse into Third-Worldization; "illegal" immigrants must be deported; the poor should be put in jail (three strikes, you're out); welfare, affirmative action, and bilingual education programs must be dismantled; and the cultural funding infrastructure that has been infiltrated by "liberals with leftist tendencies" (the National Endowment for the Arts and the Humanities and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting) must be decimated. In the euphemistic Contract with America, ethnic "minorities," independent artists and intellectuals, the homeless, the elderly, children, and especially immigrants from the South, are all under close watch. (1996, p. 173)

On the day of General Colin L. Powell's address to the 1996 Republican Convention in San Diego, former Education Secretary and current director of Empower America, William J. Bennett, published a commentary in the *Los Angeles Times* entitled "Civil Rights is the GOP's mission" (Monday, August 12, 1996, B5). Evoking the figure of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Bennett called for the end of racial discrimination through the abolition of affirmative action. Bemoaning the civil rights leaders of the past 30 years (with the exception of Dr. King, of course, whose symbolic power he seeks to conscript into his own agenda) whom he argued are a group of malcontents who have wielded a "racial branding iron," have "diminished the moral authority of the civil rights movement," have "fanned the flames of racial resentment," and have "helped Balkanize America," Bennett calls for the government to eliminate "race-based preferences" for people of color. He putatively wants African-Americans, Latino/as, and other ethnic minority groups to be judged by the "content of their character." He cites African-Americans such as Ward Connerly, chairman of the Civil Rights Initiative and General Powell as continuing "the great civil rights tradition of Dr. King."

However, Bennett's vision is perniciously short-sighted and malicious and effectively domesticates King's place in the Civil Rights struggle. And his logic is disturbingly flawed. It is similar to the conservative school board that abolishes school breakfast programs for hungry children because such programs are "anti-family." Since the children eat at school and not with their parents and siblings at home, they are apparently offending the values that made this country great. Supposedly, it is better to go hungry with your family than to be fed at school. Bennett's arguments are similarly confused. First, he appears to work under the

mistaken assumption that U.S. society has reached a point of relative economic justice and affirmative action is no longer necessary. Second, he appears either to be unable or unwilling to fathom the nearly intractable reality of white privilege and uncontested hegemony in the arena of the economy. Thirdly, he fails to realize that racist white people are going to be suspicious of African-Americans and Latino/as whether they are assisted by affirmative action initiatives or not. And fourthly, his vision is propelled by a nostalgic view of a United States as a middle-class suburban neighborhood in which people of color don't have so much "attitude" and where Whites are the uncontested caretakers of this prelapsarian nation of consensus and harmony. To be colorblind in Bennett's restricted use of the term is to be naive at best and ignorant at worst. Because not to see color in Bennett's view really amounts in ideological terms to be blind to the disproportionate advantage enjoyed by white people in nearly all sectors of society. Winant has argued:

In many ways no African American, however affluent, can feel as secure as even the average White: for example, in an encounter with the police... Yet the malevolent attentions of floor walkers in Bloomingdales cannot be compared with those of the Los Angeles Police Department. (1994, p. 283)

Bennett's view is akin to conservative politicians who bemoan critics of tax breaks for the rich (welfare for the rich) for engaging in "class warfare." You don't have to be an economist to realize that since the Reagan administration, money has been transferred from the ranks of the poor into the coffers of the rich in record proportions. Yet conservative politicians resent people who label these practices as "unjust." After all, if rich (mainly white) people can work the system to their advantage, then all the more power to them. Bennett has turned the logic of Martin Luther King, Jr. upside down. He has replaced social analysis with homilies about "character." That a former Secretary of Education would take a position like this is especially telling, given the state of critical self-reflection among politicians in this country.

Politicians of Bennett's ilk want to increase the role of charitable institutions in this country. If economically disenfranchised people of color are to be helped, then it should be done by private individuals or organizations and not the government—or so the conservatives maintain. But wealthy private organizations have benefited from the hegemony of white privilege in the government and the marketplace for centuries. Unbridled capitalism in our present post-Fordist service economy is ruthlessly uncharitable to the poverty-stricken. Never the less, transferring the challenge of economic justice from the government into the hands of philanthropists who feel "pity" for the poor is not the solution. Bennett misses the crucial point: that not to have affirmative action for people of color in the present social structure amounts to a hidden affirmative action for white people. Bennett's position tacitly seeks the incorporation of racialized groups into the

corporate ethics of consumption where white privilege increasingly holds sway. His ethics of racial tolerance can therefore work as a means of social control of populations of color. His motivated amnesia with respect to the history of capitalism causes him to ignore the macrostructures of inequality and injustice and the class-bound hierarchies and institutionalized racism of United States society and to act as if United States society already obtains on the issue of economic equality across diverse ethnic populations. There is a false assumption at work in Bennett's logic that views culture as essentially self-equilibrating, as providing similar sets of shared experiences to all social groups. The culture of diversity heralded by Bennett is a decidedly homogenized one, cut off from the contingencies of state power and economic practices. He fails to recognize the ideology of colonialism as a founding discourse of United States democracy and refuses to acknowledge that the skull and crossbones logic of imperial piracy that stole the land from its indigenous inhabitants is still largely with us both in domestic and foreign policy.

If Bennett is so intent on character building and fears that African Americans are now being viewed by white people as bearing the "stigma of questionable competence" because of affirmative action, why doesn't he, rather than dismantle affirmative action, place greater emphasis on improving the social practices of white people, by encouraging them not to stigmatize, demonize, and peripheralize people of color and women not only in the boardrooms but also in all walks of life.

It is precisely Bennett's stubborn unwillingness to recognize the asymmetrical allocation of resources and power that overwhelmingly favor white people as much now as during King's era, that effectively truncates Bennett's vision, fashioning it into a form of sound-byte histrionics.

In her article, "Whiteness as Property" (1993), Cheryl I. Harris makes the compelling case that within the legal system and within popular reasoning there exists an assumption that whiteness is a property interest entitled to legal protection. Whiteness as property is essentially the reification in law of expectations of white privilege. Not only has this assumption been supported by systematic white supremacy through the law of slavery and "Jim Crow" but also by recent decisions and rationales of the Supreme Court concerning affirmative action. Harris is correct in arguing that whiteness serves as the basis of racialized privilege in which white racial identity provides the basis for allocating societal benefits in both public and private spheres. Whiteness as a property of status continues to assist in the reproduction of the existing system of racial classification and stratification that protects the socially entrenched white power elite. According to Harris, rejecting race-conscious remedial measures as unconstitutional under the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment "is based on the Court's chronic refusal to dismantle the institutional protection of benefits for whites that have been based on white supremacy and maintained at the expense of Blacks" (1993, p. 1767).

Current legal definitions of race embrace the norm of colorblindness and thus disconnect race from social identity and race-consciousness. Within the discourse of colorblindness, blackness and whiteness are seen as neutral and apolitical descriptions reflecting skin color, and unrelated to social conditions of domination and subordination and to social attributes such as class, culture, language, and education. In other words, colorblindness is a concept that *symmetrizes* relations of power and privilege and flattens them out so that they appear symmetrical or equivalent. But blackness and whiteness are not symmetrical; rather, they exist in society within a dependent hierarchy, with whiteness constraining the social power of blackness: by colonizing the definition of what is normal; by institutionalizing a greater allocation of resources for white constituencies; and by maintaining laws that favor Whites. According to Harris:

To define race reductively as simply color, and therefore meaningless...is as subordinating as defining race to be scientifically determinative of inherent deficiency. The old definition creates a false linkage between race and inferiority, the new definition denies the real linkage between race and oppression under systematic white supremacy. Distorting and denying reality, both definitions support race subordination. As Neil Gotanda has argued, colorblindness is a form of race subordination in that it denies the historical context of white domination and Black subordination. (1993, p. 1768)

Affirmative action needs to be understood not through privatizing social inequality through claims of bipolar corrective justice between black and white competitors but rather as an issue of distributive social justice and rights that focuses not on guilt or innocence but on entitlement and fairness.

Bennett's faltering rhetoric and specious logic speak directly to the current crisis of democracy that has deported the hopes and dreams of growing numbers of minority populations across United States into an abyss of emptiness and despair. The crisis has exposed the infrastructure of American democracy to be made of Styrofoam, trembling spray-painted pillars of a Greek temple in an off-Broadway play. Democracy has been cut at the joints by events that are currently transpiring both locally and throughout the globe.

One of the tasks ahead for those of us who wish to reclaim the dignity offered by true justice, is to revivify democratic citizenship in an era of diminishing returns. It is to create critical citizens who are no longer content in occupying furtive spaces of private affirmation but who possess the will and the knowledge to turn these spaces into public spheres through the creation of new social movements and anti-capitalist struggle.

The struggle in these new times is a daunting one. Record numbers of disaffected white youth are joining citizen militias and white supremacist organizations at a time when black churches are burning in the South, and when cross-burnings are occurring at an alarming rate across the nation in Louisiana, Georgia, Pennsylvania, Oregon, Maine, Southern California, and elsewhere. As white

youth search for identity in their lives, many are able to find meaning only in relation to their capacity to hate non-whites. While some postmodernists adventurously assert that identities can be fluidly recomposed, rearranged, and reinvented towards a more progressive politics in these new "pluralistic" times, I maintain that this is a short-sighted and dangerous argument. It would take more than an army of Jacques Lacans to help us rearrange and suture the fusillade of interpolations and subject positions at play in our daily lives. My assertion that the contents of particular cultural differences and discourses are not as important as how such differences are embedded in and related to the larger social totality of economic, social, and political differences, may strike some listeners as extreme. Yet I think it is fundamentally necessary to stress this point.

We are not autonomous citizens that can fashionably choose whatever ethnic combinations we desire in order to reassemble our identity. While the borders of ethnicity overlap and shade into one another, it is dishonest to assert that pluralized, hybridized identities are options available to all citizens in the same way (Hicks, 1991). This is because class, race, and gender stratification and objective constraints and historical determinations restrict the choices of some groups over others. The division of labor linked to political organization and the politics of the marketplace regulate choices and often overdetermine their outcome (San Juan, 1996). Identity is more than the ideological trafficking between nationality and ethnicity, but rather the overlapping and mutual intereffectivity of discourses that are configured by the social relations of production. In other words, nationalism, ethnicity, and capitalist circuits of production can be seen moving into a shared orbit.

Rather than stressing the importance of diversity and inclusion, as do most multiculturalists, I think that significantly more emphasis should be placed on the social and political construction of white supremacy and the dispensation of white hegemony. The reality-distortion field known as "Whiteness" needs to be identified as a cultural disposition and ideology linked to specific political, social, and historical arrangements. This is a theme to which I shall return later in my talk.

A related theme that I would like to emphasize in the comments that follow is the need to incorporate, yet move beyond, the politics of diversity and inclusion when discussing multicultural education. The discourse of diversity and inclusion is often predicated on hidden assumptions of assimilation and consensus that serve as supports for neo-liberal democratic models of identity.

Neo-liberal democracy, performing under the banner of diversity yet actually in the hidden service of capital accumulation, often reconfirms the racist stereotypes already prescribed by Euro-American nationalist myths of supremacy—stereotypes that one would think democracy is ostensibly committed to challenge. In the pluralizing move to become a society of diverse voices, neo-liberal democracy has often succumbed to a recolonization of multiculturalism by failing to challenge ideological assumptions surrounding difference that are installed in

its current anti-affirmative action and welfare "reform" initiatives. In this sense people of color are still placed under the threshold of candidacy for inclusion into the universal right to self-determination, and interpolated as exiles from United States citizenship. After all, as a shrinking minority Whites are running scared, conscious of their own vulnerability, and erecting fortresses of social regulation while they still have the power to do so. Todd Gitlin declares:

The Republican tilt of white men is the most potent form of identity politics in our time: a huddling of men who resent (and exaggerate) their relative decline not only in parts of the labor movement but at home, in the bedroom and the kitchen, and in the culture. Their fear and loathing is, in part, a panic against the relative gains of women and minorities in an economy that people experience as a zero-sum game, in which the benefits accruing to one group seem to amount to subtractions from another. Talk about identity politics! These white men, claiming they deserve color-blind treatment, identify with their brethren more than their wives or sisters, or minorities. (1995, p. 233)

Of course, one of the most hated groups among the poor in the Southland where I live are the Mexican migrant workers. Stereotyped as *crimmigrants*, they have become the object of xenophobia par excellence. Ron Prince, one of the architects of Proposition 187, has remarked: "Illegal aliens are a category of criminal, not a category of ethnic group" (Gómez-Peña, 1996, p. 67). Gómez-Peña comments on the imbrication of borders as a perceived crisis-effect by white Americans:

For many Americans, the border has failed to stop chaos and crisis from creeping in (the origin of crisis and chaos is somehow always located outside). Their worst nightmare is finally coming true: The United States is no longer a fictional extension of Europe, or the wholesome suburb imagined by the screenwriter of *Lassie*. It is rapidly becoming a huge border zone, a hybrid society, a mestizo race, and worst of all, this process seems to be irreversible. America shrinks day by day, as the pungent smell of enchiladas fills the air and the volume of quebradita music rises. (1996, p. 67)

The process of "Mexicanization" has struck fear into the hearts of the Euro-American who views this inevitability as an obdurate political reality. And this fear is only exacerbated by the media and anti-immigration activists. As Gómez-Peña notes:

Now, it is the "illegal aliens" who are to take the blame for everything that American citizens and their incompetent politicians have been unable (or unwilling) to solve. Undocumented immigrants are being stripped of their humanity and individuality, becoming blank screens for the projection of Americans' fear, anxiety, and rage... Both the anti-immigration activists and the conservative media have utilized extremely charged metaphors to describe this process of "Mexicanization." It is described as a Christian nightmare ("hell at our doorsteps"); a natural disaster ("the brown wave"); a fatal disease or an



incurable virus; a form of demographic rape; a cultural invasion; or the scary beginning of a process of secession or "Quebequization" of the entire Southwest. (1996, pp. 66, 67-68)

I remember the bestial hate mongering among Whites after the anti-187 march in East Los Angeles in 1994. The size of the crowd—approximately one hundred thousand protesters by some estimates—instilled such a fear of a brown planet that many white Angelenos fervently took to the streets in anti-immigration demonstrations. Too much "difference-effect" resulting from the borderization phenomena has created among previously stable white constituencies a type of fibrillation of subjectivity—a discursive quivering that eventually leads to a state of identity collapse. Wreaking havoc on the social landscape by creating a spectacular demonology around African-American and Latino/a gang members, welfare queens, undocumented workers, and gays and lesbians, members of the professional-managerial class made up primarily of cosmopolitan Whites have tried to convince White America that its identity is threatened and that white people now constitute the "new" oppressed. Can anyone take this claim seriously coming as it is from the most privileged group in history?

I believe that an emphasis on the construction of whiteness will help put a different and important focus on the problems surrounding identity formation at this particular juncture in our history. When North Americans talk about race, they inevitably refer to African-Americans, Asians, Latino/as, Native Americans, to the consistent exclusion of Euro-Americans. I want to challenge the prevailing assumption that in order to defeat racism we need to put our initiatives behind the inclusions of minoritarian populations—in other words, of non-Whites. I want to argue instead that in addition to making an argument for diversity, we need to put more emphasis on the analysis of white ethnicity, and the destabilization of white identity, specifically white supremacist ideology and practice. As David Roediger notes:

Whiteness describes, from Little Big Horn to Simi Valley, not a culture but precisely the absence of culture. It is the empty and therefore terrifying attempt to build an identity based on what one isn't and on whom one can hold back. (1994, p. 137)

I am currently a citizen of a country who supplies the U.S. with a substantial group of undocumented workers—Canada. But you don't see the U.S. government militarizing its Northern border. I don't have to be too concerned about harassment from *la migrá* if California's Propositions 187 or 209 someday take effect. Consider the vehemently racist comments directed against Mexican and other immigrants of color by Patrick Buchanan, a recent Republican candidate for the U.S. Presidency:

If British subjects, fleeing a depression, were pouring into this country through Canada, there would be few alarms. The central objection to the present flood of illegals is they are not English-speaking white people from Western Europe; they

are Spanish-speaking brown and black people from Mexico, Latin America, and the Caribbean. (Bradlee Jr., 1996: 1 & 12)

I would ask you to consider Buchanan's remarks in light of United States history. I offer some comments made by Abraham Lincoln during a speech made in southern Illinois in 1858:

"I am not," he told his audience, "nor ever have been, in favor of bringing about in any way the social or political equality of the white and black races.... I will say in addition that there is a physical difference between the white and black races which, I suppose, will forever forbid the two races living together upon terms of social and political equality; and in as much as they cannot so live, that while they do remain together there must be a position of the superiors and the inferiors; and that I, as much as any other man, am in favor of the superior being assigned to the white man." (Zinn, 1970, p. 148)

Another United States hero, Benjamin Franklin, wrote:

"Why increase the Sons of Africa, by planting them in America, where we have so fair an Opportunity, by excluding all Blacks and Tawneys, of increasing the lovely White and Red?" (Cited in Perea, 1995, p. 973)

Or consider the views of Thomas Jefferson, who was concerned about the presence of Africans in America, whom he referred to as an impure "blot" on the purity of the land:

... it is impossible not to look forward to distant times, when our rapid multiplication will expand itself ... & cover the whole northern, if not the southern continent, with a people speaking the same language, governed in similar forms, & by similar laws; **nor can we contemplate with satisfaction either blot or mixture on that surface.** (Cited in Perea, 1995, p. 974)

Not only was Thomas Jefferson a mean-spirited racist and slave owner but he also can arguably be considered the central ideological founder of American Apartheid. He advocated an approach to democracy inspired by a mystical reading of the French Revolution, that justified mass slaughter in the name of liberty and justice for whites only. It's perhaps no coincidence that when Timothy McVeigh was arrested driving away from Oklahoma City on the day the Federal Building was bombed, he was wearing a T-shirt that bore the celebrated words of Jefferson: "the tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time by the blood of patriots and tyrants." While Jefferson was surely against the practice of slavery, he unhesitatingly called for the banishment of free blacks from the United States since he believed that "nature, habit, opinion has drawn indelible lines of distinction" between white people and black people such that they "cannot live in the same government" (O'Brien, p. 57).

Jefferson preached against racism yet he had one of his many slaves, James Hubbard, severely flogged for escaping. In addition, he proposed an amendment to the Virginia legal code which would ban free Blacks from coming to Virginia

of their own accord or taking up residence for more than a year. His amendment was rejected by his contemporaries as being too severe. Jefferson had even proposed that white women who had children by black fathers were to be ordered out of Virginia within a year of the child's birth. Failure to leave the state would place these women "out of the protection of the law" which meant, of course, that they could be lynched. Jefferson also suggested that the government purchase newborn slaves from their owners, and pay for their maintenance until the children could work off their debt up to their date of deportation to Santo Domingo (O'Brien, 1996). Fortunately, these other suggestions were also rejected by his contemporaries.

Not to be outdone in the racist department, we have Senator John Calhoun, speaking on the Senate floor in 1848, where he opposed annexation by the United States of land belonging to Mexico on the grounds of preserving a homogeneous white nation:

I know further, sir, that we have never dreamt of incorporating into our Union any but the Caucasian race—the free white race. To incorporate Mexico, would be the very first instance of the kind of incorporating an Indian race; ... I protest against such a union as that! **Ours, sir, is the Government of a white race.** (Cited in Perea, 1995, p. 976)

Compare the ideological logic behind California's Proposition 187 with the statements provided by Calhoun, Jefferson, Franklin, and Buchanan. Compare, too, Proposition 187's logic to its precursor—California's 1855 "Greaser Act." The "Greaser Act" was an antiloitering law that applied to "all persons who are commonly known as 'Greasers,' or the issue of Spanish and Indian blood...and who go armed and are not peaceable and quiet persons" (cited in López, p. 145).

This is the same racist logic that fueled David Duke's 1992 comments: "...that immigrants 'mongrelize' our culture and dilute our values" (Cited in Lopéz, p. 143). Recent comments made by Duke during an appearance in California in 1996, were in support of Proposition 209, an anti-affirmative action effort at creating a 'colorblind' society. This effort has been orchestrated by Ward Connerly, an African-American, who is a University of California Regent and chairman of the Proposition 209 initiative. In addition to accusing minority men of raping white women "by the thousands" and claiming that black New Orleans police officers rape and kill local citizens, Duke remarked:

I don't want California to look like Mexico...I don't want to have their pollution. I don't want the corruption. I don't want their disease. I don't want their superstition. I don't want us to look like that country. If we continue this alien invasion, we will be like Mexico. (Bernstein, 1996, A14)

Duke reflects a perspective that hasn't changed since the days of the Zoot Suit massacre, Operation Wetback, and when public Los Angeles swimming pools were frequently drained by Whites after they were used by Mexican-Americans.

It is a perspective also shared by the British extreme right, who sexualize racism in order to "generate fear among women and masculine protectiveness among men" in relation to the presence of black men in British inner-cities (Rattansi, 1994, p. 63). Such perspectives connote earlier ideas of the Empire as a dangerous place where white women need protection (Rattansi, p. 63). One example is a story that appeared in the National Front youth newspaper, *Bulldog*, which was titled: "Black pimps force White girls into prostitution" and which exhorted: "White Man! You have a Duty to Protect Your Race, Homeland and Family" (p. 63). Of course, this fear of the rape of the white woman is not projected solely onto the African-American male. Underwriting Duke's comments on Mexico, for instance, was the image of the Mexican as rapist and beast. In his discussion of the relationship between Dan Diegans and Tijuanaenses, Ramón Gutiérrez describes how Tijuana—"as a place of unruly and transgressive bodies" (1996, p. 256)—has become fixed in the American Psyche. He reports that "Tijuana first developed as an escape valve for the sexually repressed and regulated American Protestant social body of San Diego" (p. 255). He writes that "the international boundary between Mexico and the United States has long been imagined as a border that separates a pure from an impure body, a virtuous body from a sinful one, a monogamous conjugal body regulated by the law of marriage from a criminal body given to fornication, adultery, prostitution, bestiality, and sodomy" (p. 255-256).

While the United States is constructed as a country governed by nature and the law, such codes of civility that regulate kinship and the body are thought not to exist in Mexico, where only unregulated desire and criminality exist to menace all who come into contact with Mexicans. The image of the undocumented worker as an illegal alien, as a "migrant" living in squalor, spreading disease, raping white women, extorting lunch money from white school children, creating squatter communities, hanging out in shopping centers, forcing Anglo schools to adopt bilingual education programs in order to accommodate the offspring of criminals and to appease the foreigner living on U.S. soil, has served to identify Mexicans with dirt, filth, and unnatural acts, while symbolically constructing Euro-American citizens as pure, law-abiding, and living in harmony with God's natural law (Gutiérrez, 1996).

One of the nation's relatively unblemished heroes of history is Woodrow Wilson. Many U.S. Citizens have little, if any, knowledge about Wilson's Palmer Raids against left-wing unions, his segregation of the federal government, and his military interventions in Mexico (eleven times beginning in 1914), Haiti in 1915, the Dominican Republic in 1916, Cuba in 1917, and Panama in 1918. Wilson also maintained forces in Nicaragua. Wilson was an unrepentant white supremacist who believed that black people were inferior to white people. In fact, Wilson ordered that black and white workers in federal government jobs be segregated. Wilson vetoed a clause on racial equality in the Covenant of the League of Nations. Wilson's wife told "darky" stories in cabinet meetings while Wilson's

administration drafted a legislative program designed to curtail the civil rights of African Americans. Congress refused to pass it (Loewen, 1995). Wilson did manage to appoint southern Whites to offices traditionally given to Blacks. President Warren G. Harding was inducted into the Klu Klux Klan in a ceremony at the White House (Loewen, 1995). How many students can boast knowledge of this event? How can U.S. history books cover up these events, and hundreds of others, including the 1921 race riot in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in which Whites dropped dynamite from an airplane onto a black community, destroying 1,100 homes and killing 75 people (Loewen, 1995)?

How can we forget the evils of slavery, including the 10,000 native Americans shipped from Charleston, South Carolina, to the West Indies (in one year) in exchange for black slaves? Must we forget that the United States is a country conceived in slavery and baptized in racism?

*The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion* was a work that influenced another American hero—Henry Ford. His newspaper ran a series of anti-semitic articles in the 1920s that were made available to the public in book form under the title, *The International Jew*. In this particular sense the U.S. is not “post-Fordist” at all. At least in the case of rightwing Christian movements, many whom fervently believe that white people are the true Israelites, that Blacks are subhuman, and that Jews are the issue of Satan. The organization known as Christian Identity is linked to British Israelism which began as a white supremacist protestant organization in Victorian England. White Europeans were believed to be the twelve lost tribes of Israel. Like many post-millennial religions, Identity proclaims that God gave the Constitution of the United States to the white Christian Founding Fathers and only white Christian men can be true sovereign citizens of the Republic. Identity followers are set to destroy the “Beast”—the government of the United States, in order to hasten forth Armageddon (Southern Poverty Law Center, 1996). Members of Pat Robertson’s Christian Coalition are aligned with the Patriot movement. This movement wants to establish God’s law on earth, which in the view of some of the members of the movement, calls for the execution of homosexuals, adulterers, juvenile delinquents, and blasphemers (Southern Poverty Law Center, 1996).

Buchanan, Duke, Pete Wilson, and countless other conservative politicians currently enjoying considerable popularity among growing sectors of the United States population owe a great deal to the racist perspectives that they inherited from historical figures such as Jefferson, Franklin, and Lincoln who have been sanctified and haigographed in the larger political culture. It appears that it is as patriotic now for white people to proclaim racist sentiments as it was 150 years ago. Today, however, one has to camouflage one’s racism in deceptive and sophisticated ways by hiding it in a call for family values, a common culture of decency, and a “colorblind” society, but the racist formations underwriting such a call are clearly in evidence to the discerning cultural critic.

The concept of whiteness became lodged in the discursive crucible of colonial

identity by the early 1860s. Whiteness at that time had become a marker for measuring inferior and superior races. Interestingly, Genghis Khan, Attila the Hun, and Confucius were at this time considered as “white.” Blackness was evaluated positively in European iconography from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries, but after the seventeenth century and the rise of European colonialism, blackness became conveniently linked to inferiority (Cashmore, 1996). For instance, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, blood purity (*limpieza de sangre*) became raised to a metaphysical—perhaps even sacerdotal—status, as it became a principle used to peripheralize Indians, Moors, and Jews.

Blackness was not immediately associated with slavery. In the United States, the humanistic image of Africans created by the abolitionist movement was soon countered by new types of racial signification in which white skin was identified with racial superiority. Poor Europeans were sometimes indentured and were in some sense *de facto* slaves. They occupied the same economic categories as African slaves and were held in equal contempt by the lords of the plantation and legislatures (Cashmore, 1996). However, poor Europeans were invited to align themselves with the plantocracy as “white” in order to avoid the most severe forms of bondage. This strategy helped plantation owners form a stronger social control apparatus as hegemony was achieved by offering “race privileges” to poor whites as acknowledgment of their loyalty to the colonial land (Cashmore, 1996).

By the early twentieth century, European maritime empires controlled over half of the land (72 million square kilometers) and a third of the world’s population (560 million people). Seventy-five million Africans died during the centuries-long transatlantic slave trade (West, 1993). The logics of empire are still with us, bound to the cultural fabric of our daily being-in-the-world; woven into our posture towards others; connected to the lenses of our eyes; folded into the sinewy depths of our musculature; dipped in the chemical reactions that excite and calm us; structured into the language of our perceptions. We cannot will our racist logics away. We need to work hard to eradicate them. We need to struggle with a formidable resolve in order to overcome that which we are afraid to confirm exists, let alone confront, in the battleground of our souls.

According to Alex Callinicos (1993) racial differences are invented. Racism occurs when the characteristics which justify discrimination are held to be inherent in the oppressed group. This form of oppression is peculiar to capitalist societies; it arises in the circumstances surrounding industrial capitalism and the attempt to acquire a large labor force. Callinicos points out three main conditions for the existence of racism as outlined by Marx: economic competition between workers; the appeal of racist ideology to white workers; and efforts of the capitalist class to establish and maintain racial divisions among workers. Capital’s constantly changing demands for different kinds of labor can only be met through immigration. Callinicos remarks that “racism offers for workers of the oppressing ‘race’ the imaginary compensation for the exploitation they suffer of belonging to the

'ruling nation'" (1993, p. 39).

Callinicos notes the way in which Marx grasped how racial divisions between "native" and immigrant workers could weaken the working class. United States politicians take advantage of this division, which the capitalist class understands and manipulates only too well. George Bush, Jesse Helms, Pat Buchanan, Phil Gramm, David Duke, and Peter Wilson have effectively used racism to divide the working class. At this point you might be asking yourselves: Doesn't racism pre-date capitalism? Here I agree with Callinicos that the heterophobia associated with pre-capitalist societies was not the same as modern racism. Pre-capitalist slave and feudal societies of classical Greece and Rome did not rely on racism to justify the use of slaves. The Greeks and Romans had no theories of white superiority. If they did, that must have been unsettling news to Septimius Severus, Roman Emperor from AD 193 to 211, who was, many historians claim, a black man. Racism developed at a key turning point in capitalism during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries on colonial plantations in the New World where slave labor stolen from Africa was used to produce tobacco, sugar, and cotton for the global consumer market (Callinicos, 1993). Callinicos cites Eric Williams who remarks: "Slavery was not born of racism; rather, racism was the consequence of slavery" (cited in Callinicos, p. 24). Racism emerged as the ideology of the plantocracy. It began with the class of sugar-planters and slave merchants that dominated England's Caribbean colonies. Racism developed out of the "systemic slavery" of the New World. The "natural inferiority" of Africans was a way that Whites justified enslaving them. According to Callinicos:

Racism offers white workers the comfort of believing themselves part of the dominant group; it also provides, in times of crisis, a ready made scapegoat, in the shape of the oppressed group. Racism thus gives white workers a particular identity, and one moreover which unites them with white capitalists. We have here, then, a case of the kind of "imagined community" discussed by Benedict Anderson in his influential analysis of nationalism. (1993, p. 38)

To abolish racism, we need to abolish global capitalism. Callinicos is very clear on that point.

The educational left has failed to address sufficiently the issue of whiteness and the insecurities that young whites harbor regarding their future during times of diminishing economic expectations. With their "racially coded and divisive rhetoric," neoconservatives may be able to enjoy tremendous success in helping insecure young white populations develop white identity along racist lines. Consider the comments by David Stowe who writes:

The only people nowadays who profess any kind of loyalty to whiteness *qua* whiteness (as opposed to whiteness as an incidental feature of some more specific identity) are Christian Identity types and Aryan Nation diehards. Anecdotal surveys reveal that few white Americans mention whiteness as a

quality that they think much about or particularly value. In their day-to-day cultural preferences—food, music, clothing, sports, hairstyles—the great majority of American whites display no particular attachment to white things. There does seem to be a kind of emptiness at the core of whiteness. (1996, p. 74)

Cornel West has identified three white-supremacist logics: the Judeo-Christian racist logic; the scientific racist logic and the psycho-sexual racist logic. The Judeo-Christian racist logic is reflected in the Biblical story of Ham, Son of Noah, who, in failing to cover Noah's nakedness, had his progeny blackened by God. In this logic, unruly behaviour and chaotic rebellion are linked to racist practices. The 'scientific' racist logic is identified with the evaluation of physical bodies in light of Greco-Roman standards. Within this logic, racist practices are identified with physical ugliness, cultural deficiency, and intellectual inferiority. The psycho-sexual racist logic identifies black people with Western sexual discourses associated with sexual prowess, lust, dirt, and subordination. A serious question is raised by West's typology in relation to the construction of whiteness: What are the historically concrete and sociologically specific ways that white supremacist discourses are guided by Western philosophies of identity and universality and capitalist relations of production and consumption? West has located racist practices in the commentaries by the Church Fathers on the Song of Solomon and the Yvain narratives in medieval Brittany, to name just a few historical sources. West has also observed that human bodies were classified according to skin color as early as 1684 (before the rise of modern capitalism) by French physician François Bernier. The famous eighteenth century naturalist, Carolus Linnaeus, produced the first major written account of racial division in *Natural System* (1735).

People don't discriminate against groups because they are different but rather the act of discrimination constructs categories of difference that hierarchically locate people as "superior" or "inferior" and then universalizes and naturalizes such differences. When I refer to whiteness or to the cultural logics of whiteness, I need to qualify what I mean. Here I adopt Ruth Frankenberg's injunction that cultural practices considered to be white need to be seen as contingent, historically produced, and transformable. White culture is not monolithic and its borders must be understood as malleable and porous. It is the historically specific confluence of economic, geopolitical, and ethnocultural processes. According to Alastair Bonnett (1996), whiteness is neither a discrete entity nor a fixed, asocial category. Rather, it is an "immutable social construction" (1996, p. 98). White identity is an ensemble of discourses, contrapuntal and contradictory. Whiteness—and the meanings attributed to it—are always in a state of flux and fibrillation. Bonnett notes that "even if one ignores the transgressive youth or ethnic borderlands of Western identities, and focuses on the 'center' or 'heartlands' of 'whiteness,' one will discover racialised subjectivities, that, far from being settled and confident, exhibit a constantly reformulated panic over the meaning of 'whiteness' and the

defining presence of 'non-whiteness' within it" (1996, p. 106). According to Frankenberg, white culture is a material and discursive space that

is inflected by nationhood, such that whiteness and Americanness, though by no means coterminous, are profoundly shaped by one another...

...Similarly, whiteness, masculinity, and femininity are coproducers of one another, in ways that are, in their turn, crosscut by class and by the histories of racism and colonialism. (1993, p. 233)

Whiteness needs to be seen as *cultural*, as *processual*, and not ontologically different from processes that are non-white. It works, as Frankenberg notes, as "an unmarked marker of others' differentness—whiteness not so much void or formlessness as norm" (p. 198). Whiteness functions through social practices of assimilation and cultural homogenization; whiteness is linked to the expansion of capitalism in the sense that "whiteness signifies the production and consumption of commodities under capitalism" (p. 203). Yet capitalism in the U.S. needs to be understood as contingently white, since white people participate in maintaining the hegemony of institutions and practices of racial dominance in different ways and to greater or lesser degrees. Frankenberg identifies the key discursive repertoires of whiteness as follows:

modes of naming culture and difference associated with west European colonial expansion; second, elements of "essentialist" racism...linked to European colonialism but also critical as rationale for Anglo settler colonialism and color-segregationism in what is now the USA; third, "assimilationist" or later "color- and power-evasive" strategies for thinking through race first articulated in the early decades of this century; and, fourth,..."race-cognizant" repertoires that emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century and were linked both to U.S. liberation movements and to broader global struggles for decolonization. (1993, p. 239)

Whiteness is a sociohistorical form of consciousness, given birth at the nexus of capitalism, colonial rule, and the emergent relationships among dominant and subordinate groups. Whiteness operates by means of its constitution as a universalizing authority by which the hegemonic white bourgeois subject appropriates the right to speak on behalf of everyone who is non-white, while denying voice and agency to these Others in the name of civilized humankind. Whiteness constitutes and demarcates ideas, feelings, knowledges, social practices, cultural formations, and systems of intelligibility that are identified with or attributed to white people and which are invested in by white people as "white." Whiteness is also a refusal to acknowledge how white people are implicated in certain social relations of privilege and relations of domination and subordination. Whiteness, then, can be considered as a form of social amnesia associated with certain modes of subjectivity within particular social sites considered to be normative. As a lived domain of meaning, whiteness represents particular social and historical formations that

are reproduced through specific discursive and material processes and circuits of desire and power. Whiteness can be considered to be a conflictual sociocultural, sociopolitical, and geopolitical process that animates commonsensical practical action in relationship to dominant social practices and normative ideological productions. Whiteness constitutes the selective tradition of dominant discourses about race, class, gender, and sexuality hegemonically reproduced. Whiteness has become the substance and limit of our common sense articulated as cultural consensus. As an ideological formation transformed into a principle of life, into an ensemble of social relations and practices, whiteness needs to be understood as conjunctural, as a composite social hieroglyph that shifts in denotative and connotative emphasis, depending upon how its elements are combined and upon the contexts in which it operates.

Whiteness is not a pre-given, unified ideological formation, but is a multifaceted collective phenomenon resulting from the relationship between the self and the ideological discourses which are constructed out of the surrounding local and global cultural terrain. Whiteness is fundamentally Euro- or Western-centric in its episteme, as it is articulated in complicity with the pervasively imperializing logic of empire.

Whiteness in the United States can be understood largely through the social consequences it provides for those who are considered to be non-white. Such consequences can be seen in the criminal justice system, in prisons, in schools, and in the board rooms of corporations such as Texaco. It can be defined in relation to immigration practices and social policies and practices of sexism, racism, and nationalism. It can be seen historically in widespread acts of imperialism and genocide and linked to an erotic economy of "excess." Eric Lott writes:

In rationalized Western societies, becoming "white" and male seems to depend upon the remanding of enjoyment, the body, an aptitude for pleasure. It is the other who is always putatively "excessive" in this respect, whether through exotic food, strange and noisy music, outlandish bodily exhibitions, or unremitting sexual appetite. Whites in fact organize their own enjoyment through the other, Slavoj Žižek has written, and access pleasure precisely by fantasizing about the other's "special" pleasure. Hatred of the other arises from the necessary hatred of one's own excess; ascribing this excess to the "degraded" other and indulging it—by imagining, incorporating, or impersonating the other—one conveniently and surreptitiously takes and disavows pleasure at one and the same time. This is the mixed erotic economy, what Homi Bhabha terms the "ambivalence" of American whiteness. (1993: 482)

Whiteness is a type of articulatory practice that can be located in the convergence of colonialism, capitalism, and subject formation. It both fixes and sustains discursive regimes that represent self and "other"; that is, whiteness represents a regime of differences that produces and racializes an abject other. In other words, whiteness is a discursive regime that enables real effects to take place. Whiteness displaces

blackness and brownness—specific forms of non-whiteness—into signifiers of deviance and criminality within social, cultural, cognitive, and political contexts. White subjects discursively construct identity through producing, naming, “bounding,” and marginalizing a range of others (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 193).

Whiteness constitutes unmarked patriarchal, heterosexist, and Euro-American practices that have negative effects on and consequences for those who do not participate in them. Inflected by nationhood, whiteness can be considered an ensemble of discursive practices constantly in the process of being constructed, negotiated, and changed. Yet it functions to instantiate a structured exclusion of certain groups from social arenas of normativity. Coco Fusco remarks: “To raise the specter of racism in the here and now, to suggest that despite their political beliefs and sexual preferences, white people operate within, and benefit from, white supremacist social structures is still tantamount to a declaration of war” (1995, p. 76).

Whiteness is not only mythopoetical in the sense that it constructs a totality of illusions formed around the ontological superiority of the Euro-American subject, it is also metastructural in that it operates across specific differences; it solders fugitive, break-away discourses and re-hegemonizes them. Consumer utopias and global capital flows rearticulate whiteness by means of relational differences.

Whiteness is dialectically reinitiated across epistemological fissures, contradictions, and oppositions through new regimes of desire that connect the consumption of goods to the everyday logic of Western democracy. The cultural encoding of the typography of whiteness is achieved by remapping Western European identity onto economic transactions, by recentring desire to capitalist flows, by concretizing personal history into collective memory linked to place, to a myth of origin. Whiteness offers a safe “home” for those imperiled by the flux of change.

Whiteness can be considered as a conscription of the process of positive self-identification into the service of domination through inscribing identity into an onto-epistemological framework of “us” against “them.” For those who are non-white, the seduction of whiteness can produce a self-definition that disconnects the subject from his or her history of oppression and struggle, exiling identity into the unmoored, chaotic realm of abject otherness (and tacitly accepting the positioned superiority of the Western subject). Whiteness provides the subject with a known boundary that places nothing “off limits,” yet which provides a fantasy of belongingness. It’s not that whiteness signifies preferentially one pole of the white-non-white binarism. Rather, whiteness seduces the subject to accept the idea of polarity itself as the limit-text of identity, as the constitutive foundation of subjectivity.

Whiteness offers coherency and stability in a world in which capital produces regimes of desire linked to commodity utopias where fantasies of omnipotence must find a stable home. Of course, the “them” is always located within the “us.” The marginalized are always foundational to the stability of the central actors. The

excluded in this case establish the condition of existence of the included. So we find that it is impossible to separate the identities of both oppressor and oppressed. They depend upon each other. To resist whiteness means developing a politics of difference. Since we lack the full semantic availability to understand whiteness and to resist it, we need to rethink difference and identity outside of sets of binary oppositions. We need to view identity as coalitional, as collective, as processual, as grounded in the struggle for social justice.

While an entire range of discursive repertoires may come into play, jostling against, superceding, and working in conjunction with each other, white identity is constructed in relation to an individual’s personal history, geopolitical situatedness, contextually specific practices, and his or her location in the materiality of the racial order. In other words, many factors determine which discursive configurations are at work and the operational modalities present.

In his important volume, *Psychoanalytic-Marxism* (1993), Eugene Victor Wolfenstein describes the whiteness of domination as the “one fixed point” of America’s many racisms. He argues that whiteness is a social designation and a “history disguised as biology” (1993, p. 331). Whiteness is also an attribute of language. Wolfenstein claims that:

Languages have skin colors. There are white nouns and verbs, white grammar and white syntax. In the absence of challenges to linguistic hegemony, indeed, language is white. If you don’t speak white you will not be heard, just as when you don’t look white you will not be seen. (1993, p. 331)

Describing white racists as “virtuosos of denigration” (p. 337), Wolfenstein maintains that the language of white racism illustrates “a state of war” (p. 333). Yet the battles are fought through lies and deceit. One such lie is the idea of “color blindness.”

Wolfenstein notes that colorblindness constitutes more than a matter of conscious deceit:

White racism is rather a mental disorder, an ocular disease, an opacity of the soul that is articulated with unintended irony in the idea of “color blindness.” To be color blind is the highest form of racial false consciousness, a denial of both difference and domination. But one doesn’t have to be color blind to be blinded by white racism. ...Black people see themselves in white mirrors, white people see black people as their own photographic negatives. (1993, p. 334)

Wolfenstein suggests that two epistemological tasks be undertaken. Black people need to look away from the white mirror; white people need to attempt to see black people as they see themselves and to see themselves as they are seen by other black people. Wolfenstein links white racism to what he terms “epidermal fetishism.” Epidermal fetishism reduces people to their skin color and renders them invisible. It is a form of social character that is formed within a process of exchange and circulation. As such, whiteness represents the super-ego (the

and social consequences of breaking out of a White identity. Third, they must embark on a daily process of choosing against Whiteness. (López, 1996, p. 193)

Of course, the difficulty of taking such steps is partly due to the fact that, as López notes, the unconscious acceptance of a racialized identity is predicated upon a circular definition of the self. It's hard to step outside of whiteness if you are white because of all the social, cultural and economic privileges that accompany whiteness. Yet, whiteness must be dismantled if the United States is to overcome racism. Lipsitz remarks:

Those of us who are "white" can only become part of the solution if we recognize the degree to which we are already part of the problem—not because of our race, but because of our possessive investment in it." (1995, p. 384)

An editorial in the book, *Race Traitor*, puts it thus:

The key to solving the social problems of our age is to abolish the white race. Until that task is accomplished, even partial reform will prove elusive, because white influence permeates every issue in U.S. society, whether domestic or foreign... Race itself is a product of social discrimination; so long as the white race exists, all movements against racism are doomed to fail. (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1996, p. 10)

I am acutely aware that people of color might find troubling the idea that white populations can simply reinvent themselves by making the simple choice of not being white. Of course, this is not what López and others appear to be saying. The choices one makes and the reinvention one aspires to as a race traitor are not "simple" nor are they easy choices for groups of whites to make. Yet from the perspective of some people of color, offering the choice to white people of opting out of their whiteness could seem to set up an easy path for those who don't want to assume responsibility for their privilege as white people. Indeed, there is certainly cause for concern. David Roediger captures some of this when he remarks: "whites cannot fully renounce whiteness even if they want to" (1994, p. 16). Whites are, after all, still accorded the privileges of being white even as they ideologically renounce their whiteness, often with the best of intentions. Yet the possibility that Whites might seriously consider nonwhiteness and antiwhite struggle is too important to ignore, to dismiss as wishful thinking, or to associate with a fashionable form of code-switching. Choosing not to be white is not an easy option for white people, as simple as deciding to make a change in one's wardrobe. To understand the processes involved in the racialization of identity and to consistently choose nonwhiteness is a difficult act of apostasy, for it implies a heightened sense of social criticism and an unwavering commitment to social justice (Roediger, 1994). Of course, the question needs to be asked: If we can choose to be nonwhite, then can we choose to be black or brown? Insofar as blackness is a social construction (often "parasitic" on whiteness) I would answer yes. Theologian James H. Cone, author of *A Black Theology of Liberation*, urges

white folks to free themselves from the shackles of their whiteness:

...if whites expect to be able to say anything relevant to the self-determination of the black community, it will be necessary for them to destroy their whiteness by becoming members of an oppressed community. Whites will be free only when they become new persons—when their white being has passed away and they are created anew in black being. When this happens, they are no longer white but free... (1986, p. 97)

But again I would stress that becoming black is not a "mere" choice but a self-consciously political choice, a spiritual choice, and a critical choice. To choose blackness or brownness merely as a way to escape the stigma of whiteness and to avoid responsibility for owning whiteness, is still very much an act of whiteness. To choose blackness or brownness as a way of politically disidentifying with white privilege and instead identifying with and participating in the social struggles of non-white peoples is, on the other hand, an act of transgression, a traitorous act that reveals a fidelity to the struggle for justice. Lipsitz sums up the problems and the promise of the abolition of whiteness as follows:

Neither conservative "free market" policies nor liberal social democratic reforms can solve the "white problem" in America because both of them reinforce the possessive investment in whiteness. But an explicitly antiracist pan-ethnic movement that acknowledges the existence and power of whiteness might make some important changes. Pan-ethnic, antiracist coalitions have a long history in the United States—in the political activism of John Brown, Sojourner Truth, and the Magon brothers, among others—but we also have a rich cultural tradition of pan-ethnic antiracism connected to civil rights activism...efforts by whites to fight racism, not out of sympathy for someone else but out of a sense of self-respect and simple justice, have never completely disappeared; they remain available as models for the present. (1995, p. 384)

George Yúdice gives additional substance to Lipsitz's concerns related to coalition-building when he points out some of the limitations of current identity politics:

The very difficulty of imagining a new social order that speaks convincingly to over 70 percent of the population requires critics to go beyond pointing out the injustices and abuses and move on to an agenda that will be more effective in transforming structures. What good is it to fight against white supremacy unless whites themselves join the struggle? (1995, p. 268)

The key, Yúdice maintains, is to center the struggle for social justice around resource distribution rather than identity:

Shifting the focus of struggle from identity to resource distribution will also make it possible to engage such seemingly nonracial issues as the environment, the military, the military-industrial complex, foreign aid, and free-trade agreements as matters impacting local identities and thus requiring a global

politics that works outside of the national frame. (p. 280)

Because ethnic identity is constructed diacritically, whiteness requires the denigration of blackness and brownness (López). Therefore I do not argue for the construction of a positive white identity, no matter how well intentioned. Rather, I argue against celebrating whiteness in any form. As López notes, whiteness retains its positive meanings only by denying itself. I call for the denial, disassembly, and destruction of whiteness as we know it and advocate its rearticulation as a form of critical agency dedicated to social struggle in the interests of the oppressed.

The work of critical multiculturalists attempts to unsettle both conservative assaults on multiculturalism and liberal paradigms of multiculturalism, the latter of which in my view simply repackage conservative and neo-liberal ideologies under a discursive mantle of diversity. In undertaking such a project, I have tried in a modest way to advance a critical pedagogy that will service a form of postcolonial hybridity.

It is true that the concept of hybridity has been used in a powerful way to counter essentialized attempts at creating monolithic and "authentic" forms of identity (McLaren, 1995; Hicks, 1991). However, Fusco rightly reminds us:

Too often...the postcolonial celebration of hybridity has been interpreted as the sign that no further concern about the politics of representation and cultural exchange is needed. With ease, we lapse back into the integrationist rhetoric of the 1960s, and conflate hybridity with parity. (1995, p. 76)

Since not all hybridities are equal, we must attach to the term an ideological tacit nominal qualifier (Radhakrishnan, 1996). In making this assertion, Ragagopalan Radhakrishnan provides us with an important qualification. He maintains that we should distinguish between a metropolitan version of hybridity and postcolonial hybridity. Whereas the former is a ludic form of capricious self-styling, the latter is a critical identitarian mode. Metropolitan hybridity, notes Radhakrishnan, is "characterized by an intransitive and immanent sense of jouissance" while postcolonial hybridity is marked by a "frustrating search for constituency and a legitimate political identity" (1996, p. 159). Metropolitan hybridity is not "subjectless" or neutral but is a structure of identitarian thinking informed by the cultural logic of the dominant West. Postcolonial hybridity, on the other hand, seeks authenticity in "a third space that is complicitous neither with the deracinating imperatives of Westernization nor with theories of a static, natural, and single-minded autochthony" (p. 162). It is within such a perspective that educators are called to create *una pedagogía fronteriza*.

Critical multiculturalism as a point of intersection with critical pedagogy supports the struggle for a postcolonial hybridity. Gómez-Peña captures the concept of postcolonial hybridity when he conceptually maps what he calls the "New World Border":

a great trans- and intercontinental border zone, a place in which no centers remain. It's all margins, meaning there are no "others," or better said, the only true "others" are those who resist fusion, *mestizaje*, and cross-cultural dialogue. In this utopian cartography, hybridity is the dominant culture; Spanish, Franglé, and Gringoñol are *linguas francas*; and monoculture is a culture of resistance practiced by a stubborn or scared minority. (1996, p.7)

A revolutionary multiculturalism must engage what Enrique Dussel (1993) calls "the Reason of the Other." The debates over modernity and postmodernity have a different set of valences in Latinoamerica for *los olvidados*, for the peripheralized, for the marginalized, and for the wretched of the earth. Dussel writes about this distinction, from his own Latin American context:

Unlike the postmodernists, we do not propose a critique of reason as such; but we do accept their critique of a violent, coercive, genocidal reason. We do not deny the rational kernel of the universalist rationalism of the Enlightenment, only its irrational moment as sacrificial myth. We do not negate reason, in other words, but the irrationality of the violence generated by the myth of modernity. Against postmodernist irrationalism, we affirm the "reason of the Other." (p. 75)

Whites need to do more than remember the history of colonialism as it affected the oppressed; they need to critically re-member such history. As Homi Bhabha (1986, p. xxiii) reminds us: "Remembering is never a quiet act of introspection or retrospection. It is a painful re-membering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present." This means piercing the vapors of mystification surrounding the objectification of human relations within bourgeois consciousness in order to construct new forms of subjectivity and agency that operate within a socialist political imaginary.

What I am advocating, dear brothers and sisters in struggle, is a revolutionary multiculturalism that moves beyond the ludic, metrocentric focus on identities as hybrid and hyphenated assemblages of subjectivity that exist alongside or outside of the larger social totality. Revolutionary multiculturalism, as I am articulating the term, takes as its condition of possibility the capitalist world system; it moves beyond a monoculturalist multiculturalism that fails to address identity formation in a global context, and focuses instead on the idea that identities are shifting, changing, overlapping, and historically diverse (Shohat, 1995). Revolutionary multiculturalism is a politics of difference that is globally interdependent and raises questions about intercommunal alliances and coalitions. According to Ella Shohat, intercommunal coalitions are based on historically shaped affinities and the multicultural theory that underwrites such a coalitionary politics needs "to avoid either falling into essentialist traps or being politically paralyzed by deconstructionist formulations" (1995, p. 177). Shohat articulates the challenge as follows:

Rather than ask who can speak, then, we should ask how we can speak together,



and more important, how we can move the dialog forward. How can diverse communities speak in concert? How might we interweave our voices, whether in chorus, in antiphony, in call and response, or in polyphony? What are the modes of collective speech? In this sense, it might be worthwhile to focus less on identity as something one 'has,' than on identification as something one 'does.' (1995, p. 177)

Revolutionary multiculturalism recognizes that the objective structures in which we live, the material relations tied to production in which we are situated, and the determinate conditions that produce us, are all reflected in our everyday lived experiences. In other words, lived experiences constitute more than subjective values, beliefs, and understandings; they are always mediated through ideological configurations of discourses, political economies of power and privilege, and the social division of labor. Revolutionary multiculturalism is a socialist-feminist multiculturalism that challenges the historically sedimented processes through which race, class, and gender identities are produced within capitalist society. Therefore, revolutionary multiculturalism is not limited to transforming attitudinal discrimination, but is dedicated to reconstituting the deep structures of political economy, culture, and power in contemporary social arrangements. It is not about reforming capitalist democracy but rather transforming it by cutting it at its joints and then rebuilding the social order from the vantage point of the oppressed.

Revolutionary multiculturalism must not only accommodate the idea of capitalism, it must also advocate a critique of capitalism and a struggle against it. The struggle for liberation on the basis of race and gender must not remain detached from anti-capitalist struggle. Often the call for diversity and pluralism by the apostles of postmodernism is a surrender to the ideological mystifications of capitalism. The fashionable apostasy of preaching difference from the citadels of postmodernist thought has dissolved resistance into the totalizing power of capitalist exploitation. In this regard, Ellen Meiksins Wood rightly warns:

We should not confuse respect for the plurality of human experience and social struggles with a complete dissolution of historical causality, where there is nothing but diversity, difference and contingency, no unifying structures, no logic of process, no capitalism and therefore no negation of it, no universal project of human emancipation. (1995, p. 263)

The challenge is to create at the level of everyday life a commitment to solidarity with the oppressed and an identification with past and present struggles against imperialism, against racism, against sexism, against homophobia, against all those practices of unfreedom associated with living in a white supremacist capitalist society. As participants in such a challenge you, dear comrades, become agents of history by living the moral commitment to freedom and justice, by maintaining a loyalty to the revolutionary domain of possibility, and by creating

a collective voice out of the farthest reaching "we"—one that unites all those who suffer under capitalism, patriarchy, racism, and colonialism throughout the globe.

Comrades, at times we must allow our faith in revolutionary praxis to overwhelm the cynical reason of our age, a reason that lies halfway between wakefulness and a fitful sleep, a reason that contributes to ensuring the dissymmetry of power between the rich and the poor. We must advance toward an unconditional assent to struggle, to victory, to life. *Hasta la victoria siempre.*

Living in Los Angeles is like being encysted in a surrealist hallucination. Yet as I look at the city from this cafe widow, things don't seem that bad: Kid Frost pulsates through the airwaves, a 1964 Chevy Impala cruises the street in all its bravado lowrider beauty; the sun is shining bountifully on brown, black, and white skin (albeit prematurely aging the latter); my gas tank is full and the ocean is reachable before the heat gets too heavy and the streets get too packed. I'll take Olympic Boulevard towards Venice, searching for that glimmer of light in the eyes of strangers, seeking out that fertile space to connect, picking through that rag-and-bone shop of lost memories, and seizing that splinter of hope at the faultline of the impossible where the foundation of a new public sphere can be fashioned out of the rubble of concrete dreams.

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