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ETHNIC STUDIES REVIEW

Ethnicity: Analyses of Cultural, Social & Political Trends

The National Association for Ethnic Studies

Ethnic Studies Review (ESR) is the journal of the National Association for Ethnic Studies (NAES). ESR is a multi-disciplinary international journal devoted to the study of ethnicity, ethnic groups and their cultures, and inter-group relations. NAES has as its basic purpose the promotion of activities and scholarship in the field of Ethnic Studies. The Association is open to any person or institution and serves as a forum for its members in promoting research, study, and curriculum as well as producing publications of interest in the field. NAES sponsors an annual spring conference.

Designed by Eileen Claveloux

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Ethnicity: Analyses of Cultural, Social & Political Trends

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EDITOR'S NOTE

The scholarly narratives comprising the ethnic studies project take into the multidimensional worlds of diverse ethnic communities both in the United State and abroad. Using the conceptual, analytical and experiential lenses of ethnic studies scholars we are presented opportunities for learning more about the multifarious experiences of ethnic groups.

While we are challenged to subject both the lenses and the narratives to scholarly scrutiny, we are also challenged to be opened to the prospects and possibilities of new learning which comes from different perspectives, views, and interpretations. It is through the tension of the dynamic of scholarly exchange that we are brought closer to an accurate understanding of the complexities of the human experiences central to the scholar's narration.

The articles in this issue of ESR continue the trend long established in this journal. Namely, using the tools of interdisciplinarity to explore, represent, and in effect, further the didactic mission of ESR. Towards this end, each piece makes a worthwhile contribution.

Philip Q. Yang and Starlita Smith in the article, "Trends in Black-White Church Integration" provide a contemporary analysis of data demonstrating that 11 o'clock on Sunday mornings illustrates the extent to which patterns of Black-White segregation continues in the United States. Dina Fachin's "Inside the Image and the Word: the Re/Membering of Indigenous Identities" argues that indigenous peoples in the Americas, drawing from ancient writing systems and more contemporary visual technologies, are able to represent their own identities and in doing so offer critiques of western representations of indigenous cultures.

Quan Manh Ha's article "Trey Ellis's Platitudes: Redefining Black Voices" challenges African American authors to adopt a more authentic and relevant African American aesthetic for writing post 1980's fiction. This article asserts that attending to the messages of the Harlem Renaissance and the 1960s Black Arts Movement are essential to forming an authentic voice that does not repeat weary platitudes. In "Sacred Hoop Dreams: Basketball in the Work of Sherman Alexie," David S. Goldstein provides an

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analysis of how Native American writer Sherman Alexie uses both the sport of basketball and the ball as literary tools for analyzing and commenting on the complexities of the lives of the Native Americans in Alexie's short stories and novels.

A path towards political trends is taken in the last two articles. Ravi Perry's article "Black Mayors in Non-Majority Black (Medium Sized) Cities: Universalizing the Interests of Blacks" is a research based study of the several challenges facing both candidates and incumbents in cities where the Black electoral base is small and in some cases diminishing. This article is based on a paper selected by the National Association for Ethnic Studies for the Phillips G. Davies Award for the top graduate paper. "Ethnic Politics, Political Corruption and Poverty: Perspectives on Contending Issues and Nigeria's Democratization Process," authored by Dewale Adewale Yagboyaju, explores the several issues negatively impacting Nigeria's ability to create a democratic society. The author holds leadership at all levels responsible for the prevailing corruption and poverty in this nation and suggests strategies for implementing processes for democratization.

Collectively these thought provoking articles should prompt much reflection.

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Trends in Black-White Church Integration*

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Historically, the separation of blacks and whites in churches was well known (Gilbreath 1995; Schaefer 2005). Even in 1968, about four years after the passage of the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. still said that "eleven o'clock on Sunday is the most segregated hour of the week" (Gilbreath 1995:1). His reference was to the entrenched practice of black and white Americans who worshiped separately in segregated congregations even though as Christians, their faith was supposed to bring them together to love each other as brothers and sisters. King's statement was not just a casual observation. One of the few places that civil rights workers failed to integrate was churches. Black ministers and their allies were at the forefront of the church integration movement, but their stiffest opposition often came from white ministers. The irony is that belonging to the same denomination could not prevent the racial separation of their congregations. In 1964, when a group of black women civil rights activists went to a white church in St. Augustine, Florida to attend a Sunday service,

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the women were met by a phalanx of white people with their arms linked to keep the activists out (Bryce 2004). King's classic "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" was a response to white ministers who criticized him and the civil rights movement after a major civil rights demonstration (King [2002]).

Since King's remarks in 1968, progress in black-white church integration has supposedly been made. Surprisingly, however, there is little quantitative evidence that documents such progress or a lack of it. It is important to understand the status of, and change in, black-white church integration because integrated worship is an important measure of interaction, closeness, and race relations between blacks and whites. Even though American society is no longer just black and white, black-white relations have remained a central focus in race relations in this nation. Social distance between blacks and whites has remained the greatest (Bonilla-Silva 2003; Warren and Twine 1997; Yancey 1999). Blacks and whites often have totally different views of events and problems in our society. Whites blame blacks for being hypersensitive and quick to make accusations of racism, while blacks say that whites have no idea how much discrimination and prejudice still control their lives. Whites find race a very uncomfortable subject to discuss, so many just do not talk about it. Some even go so far as to say that we have a color-blind society.

Blacks find this refusal to talk honestly about race clear evidence of some form of racial blindness, but certainly not a good kind (Blauner 2006; Bobo 2006; Gallagher 2006; Omi and Winant 1986). Many blacks argue that as long as we all don't see the racial landscape clearly, we will never make the kind of substantial, permanent progress that we could. Although segregation between blacks and whites in residential neighborhood and workplace has been well researched and documented (see, for example, Farley et al. 1978; Farley and Frey 1994; Feagin and Feagin 2003; Herring 2006; Massey and Denton 1987, 1993; Oliver and Shapiro 1995; Royster 2006), one can hardly find systematic information on black-white church segregation or integration (Yancey 1999). This is certainly an area that cries for research.

One difficulty of studying black-white church segregation

or integration is the dearth of representative samples, especially at the national level. Fortunately, the 1978-1994 General Social Surveys (GSS's) provide some useful information to address this issue. Although church integration could be defined broadly, we choose a narrow definition of it in this paper because of its available measurement. We define black-white church integration as the intermixing of black and white worshippers in the same church, which is the opposite of black-white church separation. We measure it by the attendance of the same church by black and white worshippers. At the individual level, attending the church of another race indicates an action of racial integration in congregations. At the aggregate level, rate of attending the same church by members of different racial groups measures the degree or level of church racial integration. We seek to answer three questions: (1) What were the trends in the rate of black-white church integration in the period of 1978-1994? (2) How had the likelihood of attending the same church by blacks and whites changed in the period under study, holding other relevant factors constant? (3) What variables predict the attendance of churches of other race among blacks and whites?

The next section briefly reviews the literature. We then offer our hypotheses that answer our research questions. The subsequent section describes our sample, variables, measurements, and methods of data analysis. This is followed by the presentation of our research results. The final section summarizes the findings and discusses their implications.

Most of the literature on the subject of blacks and whites attending church together confirms the concern that churches have remained highly segregated; yet there exists very little quantitative research on this issue. Based on the National Congregations Survey, Emerson (2006) estimated that only 7 percent of American congregations are racially integrated. Protestant churches were least racially mixed at a rate of 5 percent; Catholic churches (15 percent) were three times more likely to be multiracial than Protestant congregations; and all other non-Christina congregations were 28 percent multiracial (Emerson 2006).

One black pastor of a small integrated congregation in

Birmingham, Alabama placed the onus for the lack of integration on both blacks and whites. "The church is segregated now because that's what we like. In King's era, churches were segregated because whites didn't want to be around blacks. Now it's two-sided. Today we both choose to be separate," said the late Spencer Perkins, son of the Rev. John Perkins, one of the founders of the religious racial reconciliation movement (Gilbreath 2000: 11)

Another study found a difference in worship patterns of blacks and whites.

"Blacks were much more likely than either whites or Hispanics to read the Bible, pray to God, attend Sunday school, participate in a small group, and have a quiet time during a typical week. Church attendance levels were the same among all three groups, and the likelihood of born again individuals sharing their faith with nonbelievers was also equivalent across all three of the major ethnic groups" (Barna 2001: 3).

Some denominational studies confirmed a pattern of segregated worship and the often discriminatory practices and halting efforts of some denominations to try to bring blacks into their mostly white flocks. We did find some work that tried to explain the segregation in American churches in terms of history and culture.

One of the first detailed sociological studies of black religious life was done by W. E. B. Du Bois in his book, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study,* in 1899 (Zuckerman 2002). In fact, many credit Du Bois with creating the sociology of religion. Du Bois praised the African Methodist Episcopal Church of American as "the most remarkable product of American Negro civilization," and he theorized that the black church was the way in which African Americans preserved and maintained their African culture in slavery and after emancipation.

Larry L. Hunt and and Matthew Hunt (1999) studied attendance at black churches in the rural South using data from the 1972-1994 General Social Surveys and the 1984 National Alcohol Survey. They found that attendance at black churches was "involuntary" and driven more by the segregated nature of the rural South than choice.

"The thesis suggests that segregation has shaped two major

forces that mobilize involvement in the black church, especially in the historical mainline denominations: (1) the structural absence of secular outlets for achievement that has indirectly made the black church the community context in which status, leadership, and respectability can be achieved, and (2) the cultural presences of powerful community moral pressures to support the institution that provides both material and spiritual nourishment to the black community" (Hunt and Hunt 1999: 780).

Although Hunt and Hunt used the 1972-1994 GSS's, they did not examine whether or not blacks or whites attended each other's churches. Nor did their follow-up study (Hunt and Hunt 2001), which focused on whether African Americans have a distinctive religiosity and whether there is support for the "semi-involuntary" interpretation of African American religious involvements.

Evans, Forsyth and Bernard (2002) studied the continued existence of segregated churches in the Catholic Diocese of Lafayette, Louisiana. They pointed out that for the Catholic Church, there are practical considerations involved in maintaining segregated churches, as it becomes more difficult to staff small parishes with a dwindling number of new priests, and the clergy already in place age and become unable to fulfill their duties. The researchers used surveys, interviews, and historical documents to conduct their study of the diocese. They found that blacks had not really been integrated into the white churches of the parish. When they were allowed to attend the white churches, they were often permitted to sit in segregated sections of the church or treated in some otherwise discriminatory ways to the point that many blacks left the Catholic Church in favor of Protestant denominations where they could have their own congregations. Finally, the diocese did establish some black churches, but until the 1930s, there were no black priests to staff these African American churches. In the 1970s, the church attempted to reintegrate the churches with uneven results. There was friction among the black and white parishioners that led to boycotts and other problems. Another impediment to reintegration was that blacks had developed their own distinctive worship practices infused with their music and culture that were more meaningful to them than those employed by the white

churches, and they did not want to give those practices up in the name of integration (Evans, Forsyth and Bernard 2002).

The hidden segregation among the Catholic churches points to a pattern of racism within church denominations. In the past, white Christians have used their religion to justify support for such racist practices as slavery, ban on inter-racial marriage, and racial segregation. When the National Council of Churches decided to support the civil rights movement during the 1960s, several southern denominations and churches protested. Some decided to withhold their donations to the organization and some congregants even left their churches (Wood 1972). White evangelical Christians supported various forms of segregation until the 1990s. Several, including Billy Sunday, held separate services and meetings for their black and white followers. One of the first to challenge segregation was internationally known evangelist Billy Graham, who in 1953 caused a furor by removing a rope that separated his audience according to race Chattanooga, Tennessee (Gilbreath 1995). Among the best known of the openly discriminatory denominations was the Church of Latter Day Saints which forbade black men to be in its priesthood until 1978 (Kimball 2006).

However, even churches that had no written sanctions against blacks have in their roots some form of discriminatory practice toward people of African descent. In her study "The Black Experience Within the Episcopal Church," McAdams (1998) described a denomination that has a long history of exclusionary practices dating back to the 14th century when it was believed that slaves should not be baptized because that might make them want to be free. Later in 1623, the Church of England, a precursor of the Episcopal Church, baptized slaves at Jamestown, Virginia, but the old idea that baptism would lead to ideas of freedom resurfaced. After the Revolutionary War and the formation of the Protestant Episcopal Church in America, the church formed black congregations. In 1602, Absalom Jones, a former slave, became the first black minister ordained by any denomination in the United States. Jones, an Episcopalian, and Richard Allen, a Methodist, were the first leaders of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in Philadelphia in 1816 (McAdams 1998). Another source set the

date of the founding of the AME Church as 1819 (Murray 1989).

By the turn of the century, there were only 15,000 black members of the Episcopal Church in the U.S. Throughout the 20th century, there were various efforts to form groups within the church to minister to blacks, but blacks were not consecrated as bishops and could not have full representation in some church bodies. In the 1960s, in response to the civil rights movement, Episcopalians decided to merge black parishes with white ones. "Blacks were expected to assimilate into the culture of white churches, but instead became unwelcome second-class citizens. There was a distinct lack of opportunities for black clergy in white or integrated parishes, and for this reason, the Church had difficulty in recruiting young blacks to the clergy"(McAdams 1998: 5).

Finally in 1994, the church adopted a statement called "the Sin of Racism" in which it acknowledged complicity in the genocide of Native Americans, slavery and racism, apologized, committed itself to work for a better future, and, two years later, established an anti-racism commission. McAdams wrote that only 4-6 percent of Episcopalians are black. "In the black community, the Episcopal Church carries an image of exclusiveness, open only to whites and light skinned professional African Americans" (McAdams 1998: 6). This image harks back to Weber's ideas of stratification as embodied by churches as an institution (Weber [2001]).

The Methodist Church, now known as the United Methodist Church, also has a long history with black membership. At the beginning of the 20th century, most blacks were Baptist or Methodist (Murray 1989); however, despite the importance of black Methodists to the church, racism has also been part of Methodism in America. For this reason, most black Methodists have worshiped in all black Methodist denominations since 1819 when Richard Allen organized the AME Church and 1821 when James Vargic organized the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church.

Like the Methodist and Episcopal churches, the Presbyterian Church USA is also overwhelmingly white. An article published by the church's Racial-Ethnic Ministries said that "It is also worth noting that while 71.9 percent of the total population of the United States is white, 94 percent of the members of the Presbyterian

Church (U.S.A.) are white" (Koenig 2001: 1).

Black Christians have seen their churches as islands of freedom and self-expression in a racist culture (Murray 1989). While Murray (1989: 69) does not provide any numbers, he wrote that

> "By definition Methodists were Protestant, gentile and church members, and the black membership was a minute portion of black Americans. Yet the experience of the church was very similar to that of American society. Racial inclusiveness in the Methodist Church originated because white Methodists did not see the depth of racism in society, and black Methodists, like other black Americans were not willing to accept changes that simply gave a new appearance to American racism."

Over time deep philosophical differences arose between black denominations and churches and white ones. "African Americans lean toward a social emphasis; the white churches lean toward the evangelical, especially in the South, and for some reason, we have not been able to get those two to work in concert," said the Rev. E. Bailey, an African American pastor in Dallas (Gilbreath 2002).

Other historical studies documented the rise of black churches in response to second-class treatment at white churches (Bauer 1992; Collins 1998; Gravely 1984; Lincoln 1999). These black churches became a power base for blacks who went to church not only for religious solace and celebration, but also to coalesce to fight the discrimination and other social problems that beset them. Gravely (1984) pointed out that the African Methodist Episcopal churches of Philadelphia fought slavery in the South not only because it was morally wrong, but the members had a personal vested interest in eradicating an institution that could threaten their own freedom.

Sometimes trying to foster more diversity within a denomination has meant a total reevaluation of the denomination's origins. The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) in 1995 issued a statement denouncing its racist beginnings and its support for slavery (SBC 1995). The denomination was founded in Augusta, Georgia in 1845 when slaveholders split from the main Baptist body. In the resolution

of 1995, the Southern Baptists asked for forgiveness from African Americans. Remarkably, the resolution acknowledged that many congregations had either intentionally or unintentionally barred blacks from worshipping in white Southern Baptist congregations. At the time the resolution was issued about 500,000 blacks were members of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC 1995).

Even politically and theologically liberal denominations have had their problems with integration. Mark D. Morrison-Reed (1994), a black Unitarian minister, who was elected president of the Unitarians in Canada about a year ago, described the problems black Unitarian ministers had kept their congregations going. Although the Unitarians boast about being liberal, Morrison-Reed wrote that at its height in 1968 before a painful schism between black and white Unitarians, black membership in the church was only 1 percent. He described the pain of being in an extreme minority:

"I am a black-born, Unitarian-bred minister of the liberal faith. I am an anomaly. This uniqueness has placed me in a dilemma. My allegiance is split. My long and enriching experience with Unitarian Universalism has led me to a commitment to the liberal ministry. At the same time, I am proud to be an Afro-American, and I realize my fate is tied to that of the black community.… The quandary I face is twofold. First, given my chosen vocation as a minister in a white denomination, how can I serve the black community? And, second how can I inform the Unitarian Universalist tradition through the black experience? (Morrison-Reed (1994: xii)"

It would be far from fair to say that only black ministers like Morrison-Reed are concerned about the segregation on Sunday morning. There have been some research and reports on the "racial reconciliation" movement among mostly white churches concerned with finding the ways to become more diverse (Chaddock 1998; Davies and Hennessee 1998; Gilbreath 2002; Okholm 1997; Peart 2000; Sherkat and Ellison 1999). However, most of the researchers note that most churches will have a difficult time convincing their own congregants that such an effort is necessary. One of the more successful attempts has been undertaken by the United Methodist Church, which for decades was strictly segregated (Collins 1998).

Collins describes how resistance to the civil rights movement carried over into many congregations which equated whiteness with godliness and patriotism and a defense of "our way of life." In 1959, one Alabama state senator even introduced legislation that would allow any congregation to withdraw from the parent denomination if it disagreed with the parent group and maintained ownership of its property (Collins 1998:55).

Drew R. Smith (2001) studied the church attendance patterns of residents of predominantly black Indianapolis public housing complexes to determine how churches relate to poor black people in the cities. Although dozens of churches were near the housing complexes, for one of them located in a white neighborhood, there was very little substantive integrated interaction among church members and housing complex residents. Smith found that while the white churches said they were involved with the residents of the housing complexes, it was only as providers of charity. Seldom did this volunteer work lead to actual invitations to the poor blacks to visit the white churches.

It appears that much still has to be done to bridge the gaps that have widened over hundreds of years.

Hypotheses

We propose that in the period under study, the rate of black-white church integration had slowly increased. We also expect that the likelihood of attending the same church by blacks and whites had slowly increased. The gradual rise in the rate and likelihood of black-white church integration was due to progress in American society and new efforts to bring people of different racial backgrounds together. As a result of the enforcement of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the most overt racial discrimination in daily life and social institutions including church attendance had declined (Bobo 2006; Bonilla-Silva 2003; Bryce 2004; Chaddock 1998; Collins 1998; Davies and Hennessee 1998; Farley and Frey 1994; Gallagher 2007; Lincoln 1999). Anti-black racial prejudices had also decreased (Firebaugh and Davis 1988; Schuman, Steeh, and Bobo 1997). As American society became more open, racial integration in general and church integration in particular should

have increased. Moreover, there have been some accelerated efforts, most notably the racial reconciliation movement, to bring more integration to churches since the late 1980s (see Emerson and Smith 2000). For example, there has been an explosion of racial-reconciliation conferences, books, articles, study guides, videos, speeches, organizational practices, formal apologies, and even mergers of once racially segregated organizations in the evangelical community since the late 1980s (Emerson and Smith 2000). These efforts should have contributed to an increase in black-white church integration. While multiracial congregations were rare in the 1950s and 1960s, the number of such congregations has increased significantly across the nation since the 1970s (see DeYoung et al. 2003 for details).

The slow progress in black-white church integration can be explained by a number of cultural and structural factors. The cultural explanation argues that blacks and whites feel more comfortable to worship with people who share the same racial background (Emerson and Smith 2000). This in-group preference due to similar worship styles, desires to be with familiar people, and similar expectations about congregations tends to resist change. Similarities of like people in social associations engender group consensus and stability, which enable the creation of meaning and belonging (Verbrugge 1977). Chaves and Montgomery (1996) provided some evidence on the congregational preferences of people with similar characteristics through an experiment. However, direct evidence of black-white in-group congregational preferences is still lacking. Furthermore, structural factors probably play even more important roles in the internal homogeneity of congregations among blacks and whites.

One such structural factor is the persistent residential segregation between blacks and whites. This structural explanation contends that continuous residential segregation between blacks and whites severely limits the ability of churches to attract people outside their current dominant racial group, resulting in continuous black-white church segregation. Since people normally attend church in the neighborhood they live, a high level of continuous black-white residential segregation becomes a barrier for progress in interracial

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congregations (Emerson 2006). Emerson (2006) documented some effects of neighborhood diversity on multiracial congregations, although he also claimed that this is neither a necessary nor a sufficient factor for multiracial congregations.

Social network theory, another structural explanation, maintains that people are recruited to join a congregation through social networks that are themselves homogeneous. The recruitment of racially diverse people could lead to the marginalization of people who are different and the instability of congregations. Competition from churches of other race could further increase the internal similarity of congregations. Empirical studies of Popielarz and McPherson (1995) and Emerson and Smith (2000) confirm these principles.

A third structural explanation is that differences between blacks and whites in average social class standing further increases the internal similarity of their churches, because people with atypical socioeconomic characteristics tend to have a higher dropout rate in voluntary associations including religious organizations (Blau 1977, 1994). Another structural explanation is that internally similar congregations are less costly than internally diverse congregations because the latter have greater potential for internal conflict and require greater efforts necessary to maintain social solidarity and group identity (Emerson and Smith 2000). The final structural explanation is that black-white racial tensions remained high as shown in such events as the consternation over the Rodney King trials (Feagin and Vera 1995), and efforts at black-white church integration were limited (Davies and Hennessee 1998; Evans, Forsyth and Bernard 2002; Gilbreath 2002; Lincoln 1999; Okholm 1997; Yancey 1999). A combination of these cultural and structural factors at the individual, community, and societal levels, accounts for the tenacity in the internal homogeneity of black-white churches.

Within each group, blacks or whites with a higher socioeconomic status should be more likely to attend the church of other race than their respective counterparts with a lower socioeconomic status because a higher social status is normally associated with less prejudice and more tolerance. In addition, people at the top

of the social hierarchy often associate with each other to maintain their status and separate themselves from those who do not have as much prestige and power; on the other hand, blacks or whites of lower class backgrounds may find less necessity of attending the same churches.

Political leanings also have an impact on how likely blacks and whites are to worship together (Morrison-Reed 1994). Blacks or whites who are more conservative are expected to be less likely than their respective counterparts who are less conservative to attend each other's church because conservatives, such as the evangelical Christians, have been less likely to favor racial integration than liberals.

Religion also has an influence on whether blacks and whites are likely to worship together. Protestant churches have for the most part maintained segregated congregations (Bryce 2004; Collins 1998; McAdams 1998; Murray 1989). In most cities, some black churches and white churches mirror each other. For example, there often exist a large, wealthy, influential white Protestant church, and a large influential, solidly middle-class black Protestant church. However, there is a movement to have some integrated worship as some blacks seek out denominations that have not been the traditional choices for black people. For both blacks and whites, Protestants should be less likely to worship with the other race than non-Protestants because of historical tradition.

Blacks and whites in urban areas are hypothesized to be more likely to attend each other's churches than their corresponding counterparts living in non-urban areas because opportunities and options for interracial congregational interactions are greater in urban areas than in non-urban areas. Region is an important factor. Blacks and whites in the South, Midwest, and Northeast should be less likely to attend church with each other than blacks and whites in the West because the West has a progressive reputation and fewer historically segregated communities.

Age should be negatively associated with the likelihood of attending the church of other race because earlier generations were more likely to be socialized into the environment of church segregation than later generations. Men will be less likely to attend

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the church of the other race than women since men are more likely to be on the conservative side on social issues than women.

Data and Methods

We use data from the General Social Surveys 1978-1994, the years during which respondents were asked: "Do (Blacks/Negroes/African-Americans)/Whites attend the church that you, yourself, attend most often, or not?" The GSS's are nationally representative samples of the adult population aged 18 or over. We restricted our analysis to respondents who were black or white and who provided valid responses to the question. This yielded a sample of 1,848 blacks and a sample of 10,310 whites. We did separate analyses for blacks and whites and present them side by side for an easy comparison.

Ideally, covering the periods before 1978 and after 1994 would allow us to understand the trend in black-white church integration more thoroughly. However, the question on church integration was not asked in the GSS before 1978 and after 1994 so that the earlier and post-1994 trends cannot be quantitatively documented. The GSS asked the question on black-white church integration for the first time in 1978 because of a growing concern about a persistently high level of black-white church segregation even in the mid 1970s. In the period prior to 1978, the level of black-white church integration was at an even lower level because of anti-black prejudice and discrimination and historical black-white congregational segregation. Another limitation is that the question was not asked in 1979, 1981, 1982, 1985, and 1992. Only data for 12 years during the 1978-1994 period are included. Finally, the question does not provide information on the regularity and frequency of attending the church of other race. These limitations notwithstanding, this nationally representative data set spanning 16 years offers a unique opportunity to understand the trends in American church integration.

Our dependent variable is church integration, which is measured by a dichotomous variable with 1 indicating attending the same church of other race and 0 indicating otherwise.

We use a number of independent variables including year of

the survey, education, family income, political orientation, religion, region, urban residence, age, and sex. In logistic regression analysis, we created a number of dummy variables for year with 1 for a designed year and 0 otherwise and used 1978 (the earliest year) as the reference category. This allows us to detect any nonlinear effect of year on the likelihood of church integration. Education is measured by years of schooling completed. Family income is an ordinal variable with 12 categories ranging from under $1,000 to $25,000 or more. Political orientation is a 7-point ordinal scale with 1 indicating "extremely liberal" and 7 indicating "extremely conservative." Religion was coded as a dummy variable with 1 for Protestant and 0 otherwise. Urban residence is a dummy variable with 1 for urban and 0 otherwise. We created regional dummy variables for the Northeast, Midwest, South, and used the West as the reference category. Age is a ratio variable measured by years. Sex is a dummy variable with 1 for male and 0 for female.

We first computed the rates of black-white church integration by year from 1978 to 1994. We then did logistic regression analysis separately for blacks and whites. For each subsample, we tested two models. The first model includes dummy variables for years only, and the second model adds other socioeconomic, political, demographic variables to the first model to see how the likelihood of church integration changed over time after holding these variables constant.

Results

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for black and white respondents separately. For both groups, females out-numbered males, especially for blacks (65 percent females versus 35 percent males). On average, blacks were three years younger than whites. A large majority of the respondents lived in urban areas, more so for blacks. The white respondents were somewhat more evenly distributed across regions with higher proportions in the South and Midwest. Blacks, on the other hand, were highly concentrated in the South (52 percent). Whites had higher levels of education and family income than blacks. However, in terms of political orientation both groups were moderate based on the median scores. For both

groups, Protestants constituted the majority, especially among blacks; Catholics also comprised a large proportion (29 percent) among whites, but a small proportion among blacks; other religions made up around 6 or 7 percent for both groups. The proportions before 1988 were somewhat higher than later years, and the 27 percent for blacks in 1987 was due to over-sampling.

Figure 1 shows the trends in black-white church integration for the period under study. It is evident that the rates of whites attending the same church with blacks slowly increased with fluctuations from 37 percent in 1978 to 57 percent in 1984, then leveling off at the 40 percent range for almost a decade except for 1988, and finally jumping to 61 percent in 1994. The rates of blacks attending the same church with whites followed a similar trajectory except for a slight decline in 1994. The overall trends for both blacks and whites were slow increases in church integration over time. This is in agreement with our hypothesis. The levels of whites attending black churches were slightly higher than those of blacks attending white churches with the exception of 1990 and 1993. For the period of 1978-1994, the rate for whites attending black churches was 47 percent, and the rate for blacks attending white churches was 41 percent.

We use logistic regression analysis to answer our second research question. The results of logistic regression models for both the black sample and the white sample are presented in Table 2. Note that in the black sample, the black respondents reported whether whites attended their churches. Model 1 shows the logistic regression coefficients (i.e., B's) and odds ratios of the dummy variables for years only. All the logistic regression coefficients are positive, indicating that the likelihood for whites to attend the black churches in later years was higher than that in 1978 (the reference category), but only 1980, 1984, 1986, 1987, 1988, and 1994 were significantly different from 1978. The overall pattern is similar to the pattern shown in Figure 1 (whites attending black church)—gradual increases with fluctuations. The odds ratios show the same pattern but are easier to interpret. For example, an odds ratio of 2.662 for 1994 means that the odds for whites to attend black churches in 1994 were about 2.7 times the odds for whites to do

so in 1978.

Our main interest lies in Model 2, which includes socioeconomic, political, and demographic variables in addition to the year dummy variables. The sign of the logistic regression coefficients does not change although the magnitudes of B's and odds ratios do and fewer coefficients are statistically significant at the .05 level. Figure 2 based on the odds ratios of Model 2 shows that holding other variables constant, the likelihood of whites attending the same church with blacks had stagnated over time except for 1984 and 1994. This pattern is different from the pattern shown in Figure 1 and Model 1. It suggests that the slowly increasing pattern observed in Figure 1 and Model 1 can be largely explained by the differences in these socioeconomic, political, and demographic variables. However, controlling for these variables, there was little progress over time.

Was the pattern of blacks attending white churches any different? Models 3 and 4 show evidence. In the white sample, the white respondents reported whether blacks attended their churches. Model 3 replicates the pattern shown in Figure 1—gradual increases in the likelihood of blacks attending the same church with whites with fluctuations. Except for 1983, all other years were significantly different from 1978 in the likelihood of church integration. However, controlling for other variables in the equation, the likelihood of blacks attending white churches did not increase much as shown in Figure 2 based on the odds ratios from Model 4.

Turning to our last question "What variables predict the attendance of the same church with other race among blacks and whites?", we examine the effects of socioeconomic, political, and demographic variables on the dependent variable in Models 2 and 4. In the black sample, urban blacks were about 2.3 times (3.257 − 1 = 2.257) more likely to report that whites attended their churches than non-urban blacks. Blacks in the South and the Midwest were 75.9 percent (.241 − 1 = -.759) and 62.3 percent (.377 − 1 = -.623), respectively, less likely than those living in the West to report that whites attended their churches. Blacks in the Northeast were not significantly different from those in the West in that regard.

Black Protestants were less likely to report that whites attended their churches than their non-Protestant counterparts. However, education, family income, political conservatism, age, and sex do not make significant differences in reporting church integration.

In the white sample, the majority of the predictors show effects consistent with our hypotheses. For example, urban residence significantly increases the likelihood of black-white church integration. Whites in the South, Midwest, and Northeast were less likely to report blacks attending the same churches with them than those in the West. Education and family income are positively associated with reporting black-white church integration. White Protestants were less likely to see blacks attending their churches than their non-Protestant counterparts. However, consistent with the finding from the black sample, political orientation appears to be not a good predictor of black-white church integration, so does gender. Albeit significant, age shows only a slight yet positive effect of reporting black-white church integration because of the very large sample size.

Conclusion

Using the 1978-1994 GSS data, this paper analyzes the trends in black-white church integration, a topic of great importance but little systematic research. Our bivariate analysis indicates that both the rate of whites attending black churches and the rate of blacks attending white churches had slowly increased with vacillation in the period under study. However, multivariate logistic regression analysis reveals that the likelihood of whites attending black churches and of blacks attending white churches had remained stagnant, holding socioeconomic, political, and demographic variables constant. We also find that urban residence, region, and religion are good predictors of black-white church integration, but political orientation and gender are not, and the effects of education, family income, and age vary depending on the specific samples.

Our findings suggest that progress in black-white church integration had been very sluggish or almost non-existent if socioeconomic, political, and demographic variables are held constant. We argue that an array of cultural and structural conditions including tenacious in-group congregational preferences, persistent

black-white residential segregation, social network recruitment and competition, black-white disparity in average social class standing, lingering black-white racial tensions, and limited efforts in black-white church integration explains this lack of progress. This also suggests that merely eliminating racial prejudice and discrimination cannot bring black-white church segregation to an end (Emerson and Smith 2000), and structural and cultural changes are required for black-white church integration. As a Judeo-Christian nation, church attendance is a significant indicator of the kind of society we have. As long as blacks and whites do not attend church with each other, then the injuries and separation of the past are not only in the past, but they are alive and well among us. Faith is at the core of the belief systems of many Americans. Church attendance provides a significant and meaningful opportunity for contact between members of different races. Multiracial congregation can increase egalitarian, cooperative, and intimate contact between different races, which can decrease racial prejudice and encourage racial harmony (Yancey 1999). Multiracial congregation is perhaps one of the solutions to the race problem in America (DeYoung et al. 2003). Racial reconciliation is a move in the right direction, but the movement appears to have made a minor impact on the racial separation of worshipers. Real consorted endeavors must be made at the national, state, and local levels to boost black-white church integration.

Today, when one visits various churches, it is still likely that congregations will be completely segregated or very slightly integrated—one or two white families in a black church, or five or six black ones in a white congregation. It is a profound statement on the state of race relations that Sunday morning remains such a segregated time that integrated congregations still merit news coverage because of their rarity. Because of the limitation of the GSS, we cannot document the changes after 1994. Future research should fill this gap with nationally representative samples.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Black and White Samples

|	Blacks	Whites
Gender		
Male	35%	42%
Female	65%	58%
Mean Age	43 years	46 years
Residence		
Urban	92%	84%
Rural	8%	16%
Region		
Northeast	18%	20%
Midwest	24%	30%
South	52%	33%
West	7%	17%
Mean years of schooling	11.55	12.56
Mean family income	$8,000-$9,999	$15,000-$19,999
Political views	Moderate	Moderate
Religion		
Protestants	87%	64%
Catholics	7%	29%
Other	6%	7%
Year of Survey	8%	11%
1978	7%	11%
1980	8%	12%
1983	9%	10%
1984	9%	10%
1986	27%	10%
1987	6%	7%
1988	6%	7%
1989	5%	6%
1990	7%	7%
1991	6%	7%
1993	3%	3%
1994		

Table 2. Logistic Regression Estimates Predicting Black-White Church Integration, U.S., 1978-1994

| | Black Sample | | | | White Sample | | | |
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
Predictor	B	Odds Ratio	B	Odds Ratio	B	Odds Ratio	B	Odds Ratio
Year (ref.=1978)								
1980	.544* (.246)	1.722	.357 (.279)	1.428	300*** (.088)	1.350	.253*** (.096)	1.288
1983	.115 (.240)	1.122	.194 (.329)	1.214	.056 (.088)	1.058	.194 (.118)	1.214
1984	.839*** (.235)	2.313	.589** (.269)	1.802	.380*** (.089)	1.462	.281*** (.098)	1.324
1986	.336** (.229)	1.399	.012 (.262)	1.013	.073* (.090)	1.076	-.086 (.100)	.917
1987	.516** (.193)	1.675	.361 (.221)	1.435	.375*** (.089)	1.456	.214** (.099)	1.238
1988	.618** (.258)	1.855	.220 (.293)	1.246	.619*** (.099)	1.857	.427*** (.109)	1.533
1989	.365 (.263)	1.440	.098 (.299)	1.103	.265*** (.100)	1.304	.090 (.111)	1.094
1990	.311 (.268)	1.365	.207 (.314)	1.230	.412*** (.104)	1.509	.268** (.116)	1.307
1991	.385 (.247)	1.469	.139 (.286)	1.149	.473*** (.098)	1.605	.276** (.109)	1.318
1993	.233 (.262)	1.263	.007 (.298)	1.007	.593*** (.099)	1.809	.378*** (.110)	1.459
1994	.979*** (.323)	2.662	.820** (.400)	2.271	.431*** (.125)	1.539	.207 (.137)	1.230
Education			.033 (.022)	1.034			.077*** (.009)	1.080
Family income			.008 (.018)	1.008			.023** (.010)	.023
Pol. conservatism			.030 (.039)	1.031			.022 (.018)	1.022
Protestant			-.554*** (.172)	.574			-.420*** (.050)	.657
Urban			1.181*** (.254)	3.257			.986*** (.076)	2.680
Region (ref.=West)								
Midwest			-.975*** (.267)	.377			-.623*** (.069)	.536
South			-1.423*** (.257)	.241			-.444*** (.067)	.642
Northeast			-1.037 (.074)	.355			-.384*** (.274)	.681
Age			-.002 (.004)	.998			.004*** (.001)	1.004
Male			-.126 (.117)	.882			-.047 (.046)	.954
Constant	-.544*** (.171)	.581	-.243 (.569)	.784	-.665*** (.063)	.514	-.146*** (.193)	.117
-2 Log likelihood	2531.3		87.442		13855.275		11040.457	
Model χ²	24.855		133.647		96.360		700.748	
Pseudo R²	.018		.117		.013		.105	
Degree of freedom	11		21		11		21	
N	1,848		1,459		10,310		8,628	

* p≤.05**   p≤.01   ***p≤.001

Notes: The odds ratio is the antilog of the B, and standard errors are in parentheses.

Figure 1. Rates of Blacks or Whites Attending the Same Church with Whites or Blacks, U.S., 1978-1994
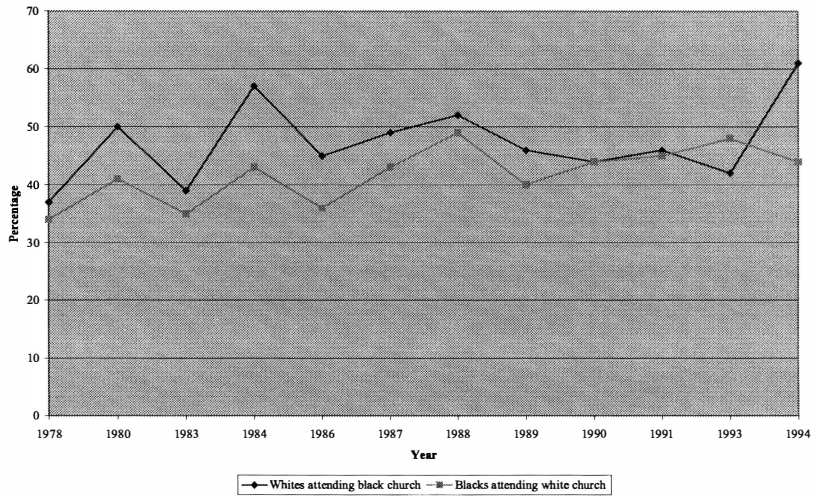
Figure 2. Odds Ratios of Attending the Same Church with Other Race by Year and Race, 1980-1994 (Reference = 1978)
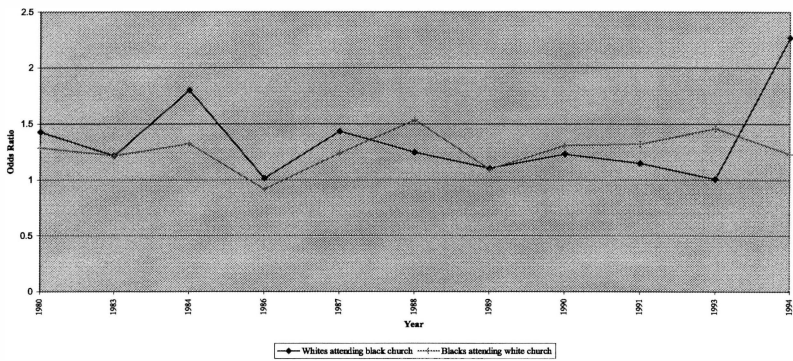
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Inside the Image and the Word:
The Re/membering of Indigenous Identities*

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Introduction

By appropriating the power of writing of the phonetic Latin alphabet and recent visual technology, new generations of indigenous people from the Americas have been able to articulate and reinforce their own sense of identity from "within" their cultural constructs. In so doing, they have been shaping new narratives of indigenous adaptation and survival based on native ontologies and epistemologies that critically decolonize the homogenizing forces of national and global rhetoric. I argue that the texts under examination put forward ways to conceive and to know individual and communal identity that cannot be understood outside specific, ancient notions of territoriality and re/membering.

In the following essay developed out of an ongoing, larger project on self-representation in indigenous literatures and video making in Mexico, I extend my research to the works of U.S. indigenous writers and scholars such as Laguna Pueblo L. M. Silko and the late Acoma Pueblo Simon Ortiz in order to foster a hemispheric approach to the problematizing of indigeneity. I

believe that a comparison between the indigenous histories from North and Latin America of the last two decades is imperative to the fostering of intercultural dialogues and to the formulation of research methodologies that respond to the demands and the protocols of the indigenous nations themselves.

In line with most indigenous studies scholars, I claim that self-representation is used by indigenous writers and community videomakers hemispherically as a proposal for social change, as a decolonizing, empowering strategy that unravels the history of colonization. Even though popular culture manifestations ranging from musical bands, fashion, style, and mass media imagery show that younger generations of indigenous men and women in North and Latin America are inclined to assimilate into the mainstream and to leave traditional heritages behind, this essay focuses on alternative responses to the commodization of culture.

My fieldwork in Mexico in 2006 and 2007 as well as some archival research on contemporary indigenous political and cultural grassroot movements led me to the conclusion that several young people are indeed taking a critical look at the homogenizing forces of global and assimilationist policies within their countries. While, for example, some rural communities from the Costa Chica of Oaxaca, Mexico, have materialized these efforts in the realization of community projects for the handmade production of textiles, artifacts and the fostering of self-subsistence economies, the Zapatistas in Chiapas have internationalized their struggles through the consistent and innovative use of communication technologies. By the same token, several indigenous tribes from the U.S. have engaged in language revitalization and educational projects that clearly testify to the need to keep local identities alive and carry on the elders' knowledge and teachings in the native languages. One of the best examples in this direction being the "Harrington Project" coordinated by Prof. Martha Macri at the University of California, Davis and realized with the collaboration of California indigenous tribes. Given these examples and among several significant ones, I believe that a close look at literature and visual production will help us not only understand the potential of images and creative language in fostering cultural awareness, but also the "theoretical"

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and epistemological foundations of contemporary indigenous activism and grassroots work —both literature and videomaking constituting "organic", intellectual activities within the context of community building.

Over the past twenty years, indigenous and mixed-blood cultural producers have engaged in a conversation with current historical and social changes and made their struggle for survival "visible" by re-mapping key concepts such as ethnic identity, community, autonomy and sovereignty, and territoriality from an emic point of view. In light of this, I will discuss how literature and videomaking offer major contribution to the unmaking of the flat cartography of the conquest and therefore to the restoration of the sacredness and the vitality of the native space to their cosmological order, balance, and multidimensionality. In these textual dynamics, creativity and imagination play the crucial roles of traditional truth seekers and of depositaries of (oral) collective and sacred memories; that is to say, cultural practices related to language and to the visual image recontextualize tradition in a process of innovation and transformation that guarantees its survival, "it is also the case that the "real" tradition is to break with tradition, to desacralize and actualize it." While this approach invites us to acknowledge the epistemic value of the landbase and traditional knowledge as the most important commonalities between indigenous discourses, it also urges us to look at difference as a foundational, decolonizing paradigm that leads to a re-thinking of indigenous identities as specific and distinct from one another. This paper, therefore, is part of a decolonizing project because it ultimately seeks to prove that "self-representation" is a viable tool in the dismantling of hegemonic representational frameworks, and in the assertion and dissemination of local indigenous worldviews.

As we will see in the following pages, indigenous philosophies, pedagogies, spiritual beliefs, political engagement and history are profoundly embedded in languages, storytelling, ritual ceremonies, and in the creative works of most contemporary indigenous cultural producers. By the same token, the works of indigenous studies scholars offer major contribution to "culturally appropriate" theoretical frameworks that question hegemonic canons in the

investigation and conceptualization of indigenous experiences across the Americas. I argue, therefore, that only by putting in dialogue such different sources will we be able to understand the healing power of both "creative" and academic works, as well as the complementary role that they fulfill in relation to one another.

The first part of this essay, "Understanding through contextualization" looks at the intersections of indigenous cultural production and political activism: I explain that while imperialistic notions of progress and modernization clash with indigenous perspectives, the texts under examination speak to the appropriation and reframing of such notions in more indigenous terms. The following section, "Set in Stone: the language of place writes back to the cartography of the conquest" offers some theoretical reflections by Native American Studies scholars on the epistemological, cosmological and ontological value of the "language of place". The last section, "Choosing the right word: repositioning knowledge, the self, and the community within the cosmos," revolves around the works of some indigenous writers and community videomakers and examines how their narratives contribute to the formulation and enhancement of both individual and collective identity across different, indigenous contexts.

Understanding through contextualization

Since its very inception, Native American Studies has called for a dialogue across different, academic disciplines and, as most recent scholarship shows, between communities of intellectuals from different ethnic backgrounds, be they native or not. One of the most significant factors in the establishment of Native American Studies as an academic discipline was the indigenous activism of the late 1960s-70s, along with the prolific production of socially committed art and writing. The interdisciplinary, hemispheric nature of this scholarship undermines the social science oriented notion of a specialized knowledge by calling for a holistic approach to Native American experience. This, in fact, is based on an over encompassing knowledge of indigenous political, economic, belief systems, literary works, oral accounts, and traditions.

As ever, the hemispheric framework is now in tune with the

expansion, in the international arena, of contemporary activism. Given the problematic relationship between linear notions of progress (promoting modernization, capitalism and globalization) and longstanding principles of sustainability, reciprocity, and moral economy, such an approach helps us understand how Northern and Latin American indigenous people alike have been debating on the "macrohistorical context in which the present world social system developed." Since Columbus' arrival, ideologies of progress and evangelization predicated upon the perception of indigenous territories and natural resources as terra nullius have endorsed imperial designs of expansionism both at the national and international level. Although the modalities of the conquest were different in the two hemispheres, [for the Spaniards] "la conquista no solo significaba la ocupación de territorios sino la conversión de los vencidos. [for the English] la noción de evangelización tuvo un lugar secundario en la expansión colonial inglesa" genocide, diseases, forced assimilation and moral oppression were historical traumas shared by entire populations throughout the continent. Indigenous activism has thus aimed at healing the ruptures of colonialism by recollecting the memory of the earth and of its people, by fostering community cohesion as well as indigenous notions of sharing and reciprocity. These, in fact, should be taken as fundamental, guiding principles in the building of a global world that values ethnic and cultural differences over homogeneity, and that puts the natural environment at the center of international agendas of political and economic development. In the article "Globalization and Traditional Cultures" Shelton Davis couples the role that local communities have in rural (alternative) development with "the recent surge of interest in global environmental issues." However, I argue that political economy and environmentalist approaches are not the only branches of knowledge to which we shall turn to in order to understand the devastating effects of genocide and European invasions on indigenous territories today. Rather, indigenous conceptualizations of the territory, place and the cosmos are deeply rooted in pre-colonial history; these find some of their best expressions in the rich repertoires of traditional storytelling and knowledge that constitute, in their turn, the

foundations of contemporary indigenous writing and of visual production.

Thanks to translation in literature and to the immediacy of the visual media, indigenous people have furthered the dialogue within —and between— communities across borders. It is the case of Maya-Jakaltec Victor Montejo's translations of Simon Ortiz's work, of Carlos Montemayor's anthological translations of Mexican indigenous poetry, prose and theater, into Spanish (and English) as well as of the recently published anthology of Mexican indigenous poetry Reversible Monuments. By the same token, community videos are being shown not only locally, but also at international festivals: Seeking for Well-Being, for example, was awarded the prize for the Proceso Socio-Organizativo de los Pueblos Indígenas in 1999. With regard to indigenous organizing and political mobilization, these narratives speak to a common, joint effort in the affirmation and preservation of indigenous knowledge in the face of encroaching globalization. Some may also argue that especially the visual image —as in the case of Kayapo videomaking in the Brazilian Amazon— can give way to remarkable examples of "staged" ethnicity. In the "meta-representation" of ritual life, mimesis and replication become contiguous strategies for the construction of social and cultural realities, as well as for the fostering of political engagement,

> . . . their supreme dramatic role, their greatest feat of creative mimesis, has undoubtedly been their enactment of themselves in their self-representations to Brazilians and other Westerners , from environmentalists to World Bank executives. These self-representations have played a crucial role in their successful political actions over the past decade. There has been a complex feedback relationship between Kayapo self-dramatization in these political encounters, many of which have taken on an aspect as guerrilla theatre, and the Kayapo use of video media.

On a political level, these narratives unsettle official narratives and bring to the forefront the necessity for "glocal" agendas that legitimize autonomy and self-determination as integral parts of

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national (if not post-national) and international processes: issues
of land claiming, environmental policies, and religious rights
constitute the core of most video projects both in the Northern
and in the Southern hemisphere. Quite illustrative is, in this sense,
the Declaration of 2003 World Summit on the information Society
that in taking up "the challenge of creating an all-inclusive and
equitable information society by bridging the digital divide between
developed and developing nations" has come to acknowledge (at
least on the paper) indigenous peoples' rights to self-determination
in the use of information technology. As Wilmer claims, far from
totally rejecting modernization and progress, indigenous people
adopt them "in a manner consistent with their own cultural context.
They advocate the right to choose the degree and terms of their
interaction with other cultures." In so testifying to this negotiation
between "colonial and indigenous" understandings of the world,
these works stand out as sound examples of cultural resilience and
as invaluable tools of inquiry into the complexities of contemporary,
indigenous identity.

Set in stone: the language of place writes back to the cartography of the conquest

In his essay "Una dialéctica negada. Notas sobre la multietnicidad
mexicana," Stefano Varese stresses on the role of language in the
shaping of distinct, ethnic identities,

> El índice sintético de una etnicidad ergo de su cultura es
> el idioma. Las lealtades del grupo social hacia su universo
> semántico, la solidaridad individual hacia aquellos que
> comparten este universo semántico, es la definición
> operacional con la cual puede manejar un concepto
> antropológico tan manoseado como el de la cultura.

If, on the one hand, his analysis is undoubtedly appropriate
in relation to (indigenous) cultures from Mexico, a country where
native languages are still widely spoken, on the other, it leaves
room for more reflections on the colonial history of the U.S. That
is, how can we apply the linguistic criteria to the definition of a
culture/ethnicity in those contexts where the language has been

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completely eradicated or is only now in the process of being revitalized? I suggest considering the term "language" beyond its "verbal" connotation and extending it to the sphere of social practices that weave in the fabric of indigenous "cultural identities." In fact, the long history of indigenous resistance to colonial practices on both hemispheres testifies to the resilience of indigenous ways of signifying the world not only through the use of language but also ceremonies, dances, visual representation, etc.

As recent decolonizing projects ranging from creative, to environmental, educational, political initiatives etc. clearly show, shared histories of genocide, forced assimilation, and social dismemberment have produced discourses of ethnic and cultural identity articulated and rooted in notions of culture that put the land at the center of the individual experience and within the context of original peoples' ethics, ways of knowing, belief-systems and (as noted above) of ancient memory. Consequently, native perceptions of the space and the time we are living in emerge from views of existence that cannot exist outside the grammar of respect and reciprocity between individuals, communities and the land. The earth itself is also the source and nurturer of the language of place whereby native people articulate and renew their own sense of identity and respond to centuries of colonialism and of forced acculturation.

Although this emphasis on the connection between the individual and the place has been dismantled by postmodern theories in order to justify the formulation of a hybrid, "unrooted" and —I would add— "placeless" identity, I agree with Sandy Grande's observation that, "While American Indian intellectuals also seek to embrace the notion of transcendent subjectivities, they seek a notion of transcendence that remains rooted in historical place and the sacred connection to land." This, however, is not to say that identity is static and predetermined —and even less so, is this the case for place and time; indeed, it is mostly positional, strategic, and largely (but not exclusively) a function of remembering, ". . . our individuality is not produced in a vacuum; rather, the available social forms and, of course, our interactions with others help shape it." While the verb re/membering suggests that the recapturing of

indigenous identity is anchored to a memorial recollection of the past, it is also true that its etymology refers to the act of putting together the individual —and, by extension, the collective— body again in the present time. Far from advocating the idea of an authentic indigenous identity —which, for that matter, would be quite in tune with the act of stereotyping itself— I propose resorting to the paradigm "individual (and collective being) rooted in place and place intertwined with time" in dynamic terms and look at it as a foundational principle for the construction, transformation and understanding of indigenous identity across history.

As I will discuss more in-depth in the next section, far from being an alienating act, digging into one's own personal story, that is to say "taking history so personal" is instrumental to the decolonization of the mind, an obliged passage for the successive (and successful) deconstruction of official historical narratives. In so using the word as a means to explore and to inquire into family and personal history, the writer detects the wounds left by centuries of genocide and Eurocentric "problematic acculturation." Nez-Perce Chicana/Tejana scholar and writer Inés Hernández-Ávila also suggests how integral the act of creativity is to the process of autonomy and therefore to the assertion of both individual and collective values, "Lo que está en juego es nada menos que la creación misma, porque la creatividad, el acto creativo, rechaza el control e insiste en la autonomía, tanto al nivel individual como al colectivo." In this context, the creative act constitutes a tool of discovery and recovery that, along with imagination, allows for the re-shaping of reality from the ontological and epistemological standpoint of the "oppressed." not only does such a process allow for a re-examination of traditional cultural values but it offers the space to fight back against past and ongoing politics of conquest and colonialism.

The re-telling of oral traditions is, therefore, the quintessential embodiment of a decolonizing act that integrates ritual, collective memory and present time in the restoration of holistic, cosmocentric ontologies; that is to say, the cosmos, and not the human being, lies at the center of existence. The reciprocal, dynamic relationship between community, tribe and nature becomes therefore essential

to the nourishment of what we can call "chorographic ideologies;" these refer to the practice of specific languages, religions, territorial sovereignty and self-determination as inalienable ethnic rights.

Guillermo Delgado's illuminating insights into the notion of indigeneity sheds further light onto this, "indigeneity is a coming together, or re/membering of a native ethic, it articulates renewed senses of being in society and community, beyond anthropocentricity." As he goes on to explain, not only does such a view debunk the foundations of anthropocentrism, but it also offers precious contributions to an understanding of ethnicity in terms of cultural constructivism. The dynamic, multidimensional and "mobile" notion of indigeneity subscribes to the view of a topos that embraces the migratory experience as a transformative, regenerative process of individual and collective identity formation, which is at best expressed by the voices of uprooted indigenous groups (and living away from their ancestors' lands) now speaking from different places and historical moments.

Territoriality transcends the limits of geographical notions of space, and finds its most eloquent explanation in the metaphor of a re/membered body, an "inhabited territoriality" where indigenous people re-discover and simultaneously experience their histories, heritages, and sense of belonging both at home and across borders. This "coming together" legitimizes the articulation of several, different stories as integral parts of a polyphonic universe whose vision is based, similarly to the natural world, on the cultural logic of (bio)diversity and multiplicity, "Diversity, on the other hand, as defined by Scott, "refers to the plurality of identities, and it is seen as a condition of human existence rather than as the effect of an enunciation of difference that constitutes hierarchies and asymmetries of power."

As I will further elucidate in the next section, any discussion of indigenous experience needs to acknowledge this sense of responsibility towards the land and its geocentric role; in quoting Lakota writer Cook-Lynn's notion of "language of place" as the one that literally and —I would add— symbolically embodies the space where culture is reproduced, Varese suggests that "a paradigmatic shift that accentuates topos rather than logos is needed to

understand indigenous people." In this context, the revitalization of indigenous languages in literary and visual narratives has offered major contribution to the refashioning and dissemination of localized, historical narratives such as origin, migration stories, and legends.

Choosing the right word: repositioning knowledge the self, and the community within the cosmos

> The details of my story are given here not as a point of interest in and of themselves but as a vehicle to deconstruct the images of Indians as victims in this war dance in the blood of colonization (Gloria Bird)

The works of indigenous writers in Mexico and the U.S., as well as of community videomakers, eloquently speak to the cultural producer's responsibility in the dissemination and reinforcement of the community's voice(s) and of what I would call a "cosmo-historical" identity. In the latter, I condense the idea according to which —as I explained earlier— indigenous identity cannot be understood out of indigenous paradigms of space, time, and community. In this sense, both written and visual narratives constitute the space where the author grounds her/his own epistemological message. Specifically, I argue that the narratives under examination account for enduring believes in ways of living, of expressing one's own individuality in society and sense of belonging to the community that are totally foreign to the effects of modern alienation and individualism. Although dominant societies have often portrayed indigenous cultures as static and conservative, these works show that resistance to assimilationist practices can translate into a dynamic negotiation, dialogue and mutual transformation between different traditions. Given the crucial role that oral tradition has been playing in the survival of Native American cultures, these new narratives shed light onto a multiplicity of longstanding, native imaginaries that constitute the soil of indigenous peoples' worldviews. Leslie Marmon Silko's "The Pueblo Migration Stories" illustrates this quite eloquently: here she elaborates on the openness of migration stories' structures

and pinpoints the pivotal role that the community fulfills in their transmission. The end result being, as she goes on to explain, that the truth emerging from this cycle is a "communal" vis-à-vis an "absolute" one, "The ancient Pueblo people sought a communal truth, not an absolute truth. For them this truth lived somewhere within the web of differing versions, disputes over minor points, and outright contradictions tangling with old feuds and village rivalries."

In contrast to western dogmatism, the validation of several, loose versions of the same story emerges from an epistemological framework that finds its raison d'être in pluralistic and diversified views of existence that change over time and generations. The memory of Silko's community constitutes, therefore, a space of identification where Laguna pueblo people share the same roots and ancestry, but also where future generations can create new meanings and refashion the complexities and dynamism of tradition in their own terms, "Las culturas indígenas son (y eran) complejas, no monolíticas, sino llenas de contradicciones, ambuiguedades, conflictos, préstamos, innovaciones, (re)creaciones." The transformative process embedded in storytelling contributes also to the enhancement of collective consciousness whereby indigenous people simultaneously perceive themselves as subjects and objects of their own, original "stories." Although, from a theoretical standpoint, the subsequent processes of selection and editing (especially with regard to video production) can nonetheless make the replication of these narratives partial and reified, from a political perspective the articulation of the voice "from within" is crucial to break up the silence imposed by centuries of colonial and patriarchal oppression.

As I previously mentioned, not only do these works emerge and spread out in consonance with ongoing struggles for autonomy and self-determination, but they also express indigenous people's will to appropriate and transform western ways of producing knowledge. With regard to this, Nahuatl scholar Natalio Hernández remarks that in the cultural encounter between native and mainstream cultures, indigenous people strip themselves of the stereotypical labels of primitive, inarticulate, mythical and exotic perpetuated

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by colonial, evangelical and —I would add— twentieth-century indigenist discourse. Hence, in the works of Javier Castellanos and Victor de La Cruz, Natalio Hernández, Benjamin Gonzales Urbina, Gerardo Can Pat "podemos encontrar otra vision de lo indigena otra forma de interpretar lo cotidiano, lo circunstancial, lo sagrado y otros valores autóctonos."

Most importantly, such narratives conflate into a decolonized conceptualization of a "territorial identity" which subscribes to a critique of an ideology that considers the values underlying the moral foundation of indigenous peoples' cultures as backwards and antithetical to the dominant modern world order. Besides being informed by an "emic" native perspective, territorial identity departs also from postmodern theorizing.although paving the way to a radical critique of western scientific axioms, this has overlooked —if not failed to acknowledge— the values and ethics of indigenous cultures. Not only does the act of territorial re/membering advocate specific histories and ways of producing and passing down knowledge, but it also reconnects the individual to him/herself and to the community by means of what Assiniboine/Nakota scholar Kathryn Shanley calls a "thinking heart."

Hence, the territorial body-metaphor stands for an everlasting encounter between the human being and the place, a returning home that, in so transcending most recent theorizing on the individualized body, aims at restoring the "members" of the community to their original birthplace. In this context, the use of indigenous languages in the works of Mexican writers and videomakers undoubtedly contributes to the preservation of traditional stories, myths, and local ethnic values and, most importantly, it allows to regain control over a wide, diversified range of both natural and cultural resources, and a relationship with the world whereby the human being finally re-knows the "sacred forces of nature." In the video "Searching for Well-being" (directed by Guillermo Monteforte and María Santiago Ruíz) Eucario Angeles explains in Zapotec how the homonymous organization was started with the precise goal to rediscover and restore traditional ways of living "las señales, los cuentos, las formas de antes: el conocimiento de como vivir…. aunque los padres no fueron a la escuela…las costumbres de

antes... [para] revivirlas y usarlas."

More specific in theme, the video El arbol del jabón revolves around Zapotec people's resistance to an economic system that exploits and eventually destroys the natural environment. Here, a group of women from one of the rural communities in the municipality of San Pedro Quiatoni decide to do away with the laundry detergents advertised by the media, and to learn the techniques for the homemade production of soap. The idea of resorting to a plant that grows in the area as well as the conscious and ecological use of it brings us back to the deeply engrained notion of reciprocity between nature and human labor. The elders' knowledge —that, in this case, is epitomized by la abuela Rosa— and oral tradition are pivotal in the perpetuation of a lifestyle that is constantly jeopardized by the logics of consumerism and of market economies. By the same token, the dialogues in Zapotec reinstate the women's sense of belonging to a community that, however constantly exposed to the national language (Spanish) —this being successfully conveyed by the commercial appearing on Doña Juana's TV set at the beginning of the story— still identifies itself with the language of the ancestors and of the place.

Interestingly, the "critique" of market economy portended in these narratives provides also the ground for engaging discussions on the social values of indigenous communities: as I previously mentioned with regard to Silko's essay, community elders and ancestors are the "teachers" and depositaries of the knowledge of place and nature. showing the centrality of the elders' in the oral transmission, from time immemorial, of agricultural techniques, weather forecasting, economic and trade systems, both of these videos critically respond to the mainstream "consecration" of the youth as the only actor in the economic and cultural progress of society. In a similar fashion, in her short story "Lo que contaron nuestros abuelos y tatarabuelos," Tojolabal writer María Rosaria Jímenez looks at the elders as central figures in the preservation of the community's "collective memory." Although I am aware of the scholarly debate around the term, in this specific context I refer to collective memory as a self-representational practice that the community carries out by means of the oral tradition and therefore

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in contrast with the historiographic process that —whether it is performed by the indigenous or non-indigenous intellectual— is ultimately individualist. Conversely, this way of constructing history "orally" lacks in the critical and analytical approach that characterizes the historiographic method, but it nonetheless gives both the writer and the community the simultaneous roles of "authors," "readers" and "listeners." Thus, in so representing themselves through the story or the myth, they articulate their own agency in the weaving and in the perpetuation of the community's history. Most importantly, the story being told is never the same one within the same group and is therefore subject to the contingency of specific historical moments, social dynamics, and power relations.

> Esto contaban nuestros abuelos y tatarabuelos sobre el Ixk'inib', cerro que acompaña al pueblo tojolabal Lomantam del municipio de las Margaritas [. . .] Ese cerro poseía un tesoro del que unicamente podían disfrutar gentes dotadas de sabiduría y encantamiento. Ese cerro es el Ixk'inib' de Lomantam. Ahí los abuelos escogidos disfrutaban de ese misterio del interior. Otros hombres lo intentaron, penetraron y nunca encontraron nada. Pero ellos decían que todo lo conseguían en un pintoresco y exuberante lugar, incomparable. [. . .] El cerro de ahí está haciendo compañía al pueblo tojolabal de Lomantam y conservando en su interior el recuerdo de nuestros abuelos.

These passages undeniably illuminate the enduring, magic relationship between the territory, its creatures and the word; here creativity fulfills the role of both originator and truth seeker, and reinscribes both the self and the community within their own, cosmological time and place. As Silko would say, "Whatever the event or the subject, the ancient people perceived the world and themselves within that world as part of an ancient, continuous story composed of innumerable bundles of other stories [. . .] Pueblo oral tradition necessarily embraced all levels of human experience."

Similarly, in the introduction to the volume Speaking for

the Generations, Simon Ortiz accounts for the "mythic source" of his people's existence and goes on to elucidate how native contemporary writing pays homage to traditional ways of living and to an endless cycle of cultural renovation,

> Acoma Pueblo people believe they came into existence as a human culture and community at Shipapu, which they know as a sacred mythic place of origin [. . .] This belief is expressed time and time again in traditional song, ritual, prayer, and story, and in contemporary writing. Verbalizing, articulating, and practicing in social and religious activities today is simply carrying on a traditional way of life.

Quite significantly, this passage raises the concept of autonomy as an individual act —namely the author's freedom and will to articulate his and his people's belief system— and as a collective one —i.e. the community's right to exert it as a day-to-day practice and in relation to other external collectivities such as the nation itself. However, it is also important to note that Ortiz's timeless notion (in the indigenous sense of the word) of a resiliently alive "sacred mythic place of origin", invites us to relocate our sociopolitical definition of autonomy within a more philosophical —if not religious— terrain. "Territorial autonomy" is, in this sense, autonomy, sovereignty of time, embedded in a cosmological history that knows no boundaries between the tangible and the intangible world,

> En forma humana deambulan
> En la soledad de la noche.
> Jinetes de caballos dorados
> Que roban espiritus ingenuos.
> Guardianes de la tierra
> Que recolectan tributes.
> Ojos de la luna que vigilan la noche.
> Reflejos de estrellas
> Que iluminan el cielo.

Native American visual production in the United States also puts forward themes that revolve around the survival of indigenous

identities, cultural and religious values in today's society. The documentary In the Light of Reverence (2001), co-produced by Christopher McLeod and Lumbee Malinda Maynor offers a compelling analysis of the ways in which Indian Country has been responding to the governmental policies that jeopardize religious practices, territorial and cultural sovereignties. Even though the narrative specifically focuses on three tribal experiences (the Lakota and Devil's Tower, the Hopi and the Colorado Plateau, and the Wintu and Mt. Shasta), it nonetheless opens up a discussion on how the American Indian Religious Freedom Act (AIRFA) first signed in 1978 is still mostly overlooked and violated by the U.S. government.

The narrative portends two "antithetical" perceptions of the land as a sacred site and as a commodity through the voices of spiritual leaders, elders, indigenous and non-indigenous scholars, lawyers, park officers, local people, and entrepreneurs. Doing so, it invites the viewer to reflect upon the challenges that different cultural and religious systems inevitably bring about. To what extent are these reconcilable? And if so, how? Rather than trying to give a specific answer to the complexities of such an issue, the video aims at arising knowledge and educate the U.S. public on indigenous communities' sacred places.

For the indigenous groups presented, the right to practice religious ceremonies is embedded in the respect and preservation of the landmarks that carry symbolic meanings about the genesis, history, and spiritual existence of their peoples. For example, in the section on the Colorado Plateau, one of the Hopi spiritual leaders brings to the viewer's attention the role that petroglyphs have in the preservation of local history. As we previously discussed, the land is traditionally the carrier of indigenous peoples' sense of time and existence in their place of origin. The loss of such a cultural and existential patrimony to the advantage of large-scale infrastructural projects is thus detrimental to the perpetuation of tribal knowledge and conceptualizations of history that, in this case, are undoubtedly "geophysical" in nature. In a similar way, the (voice over) narrator's recounting of creation stories and myths of origin at the beginning of each section emphasizes the foundational role of the oral tradition

in the explanation of the world outside western paradigms. The stories presented throughout the documentary propose, over and over again, cosmovisions and narrative structures centering on the interdependence between the supernatural, animal, vegetable, geological and human worlds alike. Altering such a balance has thus damaging consequences not only on the physical existence of the earth, but also on the spiritual and intellectual formulation and survival of local knowledge.

While documentary making is widely used as a tool that helps foster first person testimonial narratives, fiction allows indigenous and mixed-blood filmmakers to question mainstream representational paradigms even more directly and effectively. In most cases, Hollywood cinematic production and popular culture have contributed to reify Native American peoples and represent them either as "Wild West" savages, sports mascots, touristy attractions, or commercial icons. Although this topic would make for another entire essay, it is worthwhile pointing out that feature films by Spokane/Coeur D'Alene writer Sherman Alexie (The Business of Fancy Dancing, 2002) and Cheyenne/Arapaho director and producer Chris Eyre (Smoke Signals, 1998 and Skins, 2002) constitute strong critiques of mainstream representations of indigenous identities. In particular, they bring to our attention the transformative power of "independent" cinematic narratives by First Nation directors/screen-players within the arena of popular media culture. Endowed with cunning touches of irony and sarcasm, Alexie and Eyre's works sharply address the complexities of contemporary indigenous and mixed-blood identities both inside and outside the reservation "boundaries."

Unlike the documentaries previously discussed, the stories presented in these movies primarily revolve around the personal experiences of some young men and women who come to terms with the challenges and plights of living across "different worlds." In Smoke Signals, Victor, a Cour d'Alene Reservation Indian sets off on a journey to recover the body of the dead father, Arnold —an abusive, alcoholic man— only to come to a deeper understanding of his own, indigenous identity and of the reasons behind Arnold's alcoholism. Although, at first glance, the movie seems to do

nothing but perpetuate the stereotype of dysfunctional Native American reservation life, indeed its ultimate goal is to show that racism, marginalization, and poverty are colonial legacies that still affect the lives of indigenous people and especially of younger generations. But characters like Victor demonstrate that, in order to heal, it is imperative to go through a process of self-analysis that will allow the individual to develop a more constructive attitude towards the plight of his immediate family and of the reservation.

A critical look at these recent productions along with those by many more U.S. indigenous film and videomakers such as Navajo Sydney Freeland, Shonie de la Rosa, Rachael J. Nez, Bennie Klain, etc. disproves the generalized idea according to which all indigenous people have by now given in to the forces of assimilation. In the same way as the proliferation of community video-documentary projects in Mexico —and, for that matter, throughout the Americas— testifies to the proactive stance of younger generations in their people's struggles for self-determination, the increasing numbers of fictional narratives at indigenous Film Festivals, international conferences, forums and TV channels in the U.S. speak to indigenous peoples' ongoing questioning and will to bring onto the table discussions about their own sense of ethnic belonging to (or alienation from) both their communities of origin and mainstream society.

Conclusion

The purpose of this essay has been to discuss the importance of a hemispheric approach to the study of indigenous people, to look at the intersections of indigenous identity and territoriality, and to understand creativity in relation to processes of autonomy and decolonization. The centrality of the landbase in the narratives here presented is illustrative of a sense of being in and knowing the world that, despite centuries of foreign domination and exploitation, continues to inform the lives of indigenous peoples throughout the Americas today. Most importantly, from a theoretical standpoint, these texts bring forth the centrality of human faculties such as creativity, imagination and memory in the shaping of representational narratives that critically respond to centuries of stereotyping and misrepresentation. In order to better understand

this, it is necessary to contextualize issues of cultural production and survival within a framework that while valuing the contribution of each single community and tribal history emphasizes the collective work of indigenous people in the international arena.

While I was writing a first draft of this essay, the state of Oaxaca was hosting the VIII Festival Internacional de Cine y Video de los Pueblos Indígenas, "Raíz de la imagen:" the event had the goal not only to foster the production and dissemination of community video projects, but also to reinforce networking between indigenous audiences and videomakers from Latin America. Even if, as videomaker Guillermo Monteforte once stated in a conversation with me, there is still a lot of work to do in this direction —given the political and social reality that the communities have to struggle with on a daily basis, the impact of video production is still marginal and temporary— events like this and resilience on the part of community activists give hope and optimism for the future of indigenous video making.

By the same token, writing in indigenous languages (as in the case of Mexican writers) or appropriating English (as in the case of U.S. Native American writers) helps re/member and carry on ways of signifying the world that call for a reformulation of identity, creativity, territoriality and community cohesion primarily based on an indigenous framework. If on the one hand, literature in indigenous languages (vis-à-vis Spanish) inevitably addresses specific and limited audiences, on the other it plays a primary role in the development and dissemination of bilingual education programs in Mexico. These, besides fostering diversity, constitute an integral part of a decolonizing agenda that promote the legitimization of indigenous languages in the processes of nation building not only at home, but also within the context of transnational, diasporic experiences.

Notes
* This article has gone through several revisions, and has benefited from the insightful comments of Stefano Varese, Guillermo Delgado and Sergio de la Mora along the way. I am also grateful for the precious suggestions of the anonymous reviewers for the Ethnic Studies Review

i The past thirty years have witnessed an unparalleled development of

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ethnopolitical movements; hence, I look at these literary and visual projects as some of the most illustrative contemporary examples of resistance through self-representation. Although, for the purpose of this essay, I have limited my time frame to the last twenty years of production, we need to remember that a long legacy of "anti-colonial" texts produced by indigenous people has been in place since the beginning of Colonialism . Hence, the importance of looking at these narratives as part of a long-term process of cultural resilience.

ii See Inés Hernandez-Ávila, "¿Qué está en juego? Las comunidades indígenas México/Estados Unidos," in Renacerá la palabra. Identidades y diálogo intercultural, ed. José Manuel Valenzuela Arce (México, D.F.: El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, 2003), 155-172.

iii Angela Cavender Wilson, "Reclaiming our Humanity. Decolonization and the Recovery of Indigenous Knowledge," in Indigenizing the Academy. Transforming Scholarship and Empowering Communities, eds. Devon Abbot Mihesuha and Angela Cavender Wilson (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 69-88. In her work, Dakota historian Angela Cavender Wilson addresses the issue as to how history has been written by non-indigenous scholars and argues for a decolonizing methodology that gives centrality to oral tradition and that voices the point of view of tribal members. "Reclamation of indigenous knowledge is more than resistance to colonial domination, it is also a signifier of cultural revitalization and mounting Native nationalism".

iv The first term refers to indigenous people in Mexico and the second one to the U.S., i.e. to the nation to nation relationship between tribes and the U.S. government, as the history of treaties illustrates.

v As I imply throughout my essay, this type of research moves in the direction of decolonizing scholarship: its main purpose is to start precisely from the demands of the communities under examination as a gateway to the understanding and reformulation of indigenous experiences in indigenous terms and therefore to the legitimization of "non-academic" knowledge. I subscribe, therefore, to the gramscian notion of "organic intellectual" who commits to the community he/she is working with, as well as believe in the political and social role that the researcher plays in bridging the gap between the academia and the outside world.

vi "Interview with Tomás Ybarra-Frausto: The Chicano Movement in a Multicultural/Multinational Society," in On edge: the crisis of contemporary Latin American culture, eds. George Yúdice, Jean Franco and Juan Flores (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 214.

vii Stefano Varese, "The Territorial Roots of Latin American Indigenous Peoples' Movement for Sovereignty," in The Future of Indigenous Peoples. Strategies for Survival and Development. eds. Duane Champagne and Ismael Abu-Saad (Los Angeles: UCLA American Indian Studies Center, 2003), 48-65.

viii Franke Wilmer, The Indigenous Voice in World Politics (London: Sage Publications, 1993), 7.

ix Octavio Paz, "México y Estados Unidos. Posiciones y Contraposiciones. Pobreza y Civilización" (1978) in his El Laberinto de la Soledad (Madrid: Ediciones Cátedra, 1998), 451.

x In this context, I use the term "genocide" as Native American Studies scholars in the U.S. have appropriated it in order to explain the deliberate act of extermination carried out against the indigenous peoples of the Americas. Nevertheless, I am aware that, historically, colonization has followed different paths in the several regions of the two hemispheres: accordingly, indigenous peoples' existence has been affected in various ways and degrees (physically, culturally, emotionally, etc.). Hence, in some cases it would be more appropriate to use the term "ethnocide", namely the intentional eradication of a culture and ways of life in order to subjugate its people.

xi Shelton Davis, "Globalization and Traditional Cultures" Northeast Indian Quarterly (Spring 1991): 42.

xii Carlos Montemayor and Donald Frischmann, eds. Words of the True Peoples. Palabras de los Seres Verdaderos (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004).

xiii VI Festival Americano de Cine y Video de los Pueblos Indígenas, Guatemala 1999.

xiv Terence Turner, "Defiant Images: The Kayapo Appropriation of Video" Anthropology Today 8 (1992): 10.

xv Jamie Brown and Tara Tidwell Cullen, "Indigenous People at the World Summit on the Information Society" Cultural Survival 29 (Spring 2005): 13.

xvi Wilmer, The Indigenous Voice in World Politics, 55.

xvii Stefano Varese, "Una dialéctica negada. Notas sobre la multietnicidad mexicana" in En torno a la cultura nacional (1980): 148

xviii It is important to note, however, that this essay was first published in 1976 and, ever since, the author has been redefining his position in relation to this issue by adopting a hemispheric approach to the understanding of indigeneity.

xix See Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Decolonizing Methodologies (New York: Zed Books Ltd., 2001). Although mostly focusing on Maori research and methodology, Tuhiwai Smith's work offers great contribution to the re-thinking and re-formulation of indigenous knowledge within the academia. In the chapter "Twenty-five Indigenous Projects" she clarifies how struggles for self-determination, healing, reclaiming, cultural survival, etc. have been taken up

both by indigenous researchers and community activists. Their work has thus been articulated into a series of research projects that constitute, in their turn, an overarching research agenda.

In this essay, I am also formulating an operational use of the concept of culture within a dialectical perspective: specifically, I refer to culture as a system of values, social practices, symbolic and spiritual meanings that are constantly shifting and re-adapted to new historical and social contexts.

xxi Obviously, here I mean land in its broader meaning (nature, environment, home, etc…). For further reference, see Stefano Varese and Michael Grofe, "Notas Sobre la Territorialidad, Sacralidad y Economia Politica: Tercera Mesa Redonda de Monte Alban" UC Davis: Indigenous Research Center of the Americas, Department of NAS, no. 4 (2002), HYPERLINK "http://repositories.cdlib.org/irca/territoriality/4/" http://repositories.cdlib.org/irca/territoriality/4/

xxii Sandy Marie Anglás Grande, "American Indian Geographies of Identity and Power: At the Crossroads of Indígena and Mestizaje" Harvard Educational Review 70 (Winter 2000): 482.

xxiii Kwame Anthony Appiah, Daedalus, "The politics of identity" Daedalus (Fall 2006): 18.
Such a perspective also invites us to reiterate the symbolic function of territory and time in the articulation of ethnic identity, "En el territorio étnico el tiempo y el espacio se conjugan, ya que allí ha transcurrido la experiencia vital que da sustento a la memoria histórica de la sociedad. [. . .] De todas maneras la tierra sigue proporcionando un sustento possible a la identidad, incluso entre los grupos migrantes cuyas tierras ancestrales se transforman en referentes mitificados." Miguel Alberto Bartolomé, Gente de Costumbre y Gente de Razón. Las identidades étnicas en México (México D.F.: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1997), 87-89.

xxiv See Guillermo Delgado, note xxvi.

xxv Hernández-Avila, "Tejana Intonations/Nez Perce Heartbeat: Notes on Identity and Culture" a/b: Auto/Biography Studies 7, no. 2 (Fall 1992): 292-306. Native American writers such as Gloria Bird (Spokane), and Inés Hernández-Avila often address issues of "decolonization of the mind" and the rewriting of official history in response to centuries of assimilation policies carried out by the U.S. and Mexican governments. Along with land expropriation, forced acculturation, and Christianization were aimed at the psychological, spiritual and emotional colonization of native peoples. Therefore, I claim that the works by contemporary indigenous and mixed blood cultural producers analyzed in this essay and elsewhere in my research emerge from processes of self (and collective) discovery and inquiry that by acknowledging the disruptive effects of colonization also envision the possibility of the recovery and revalidation of indigenous ways of being in the world.

xxxvi Hernandez-Ávila, "¿Qué está en juego? Las comunidades indígenas México/Estados Unidos", 170.

xxvii See Guillermo Delgado, "Imagin/ing Border Indigeneity: Two Notes on Decolonization and Sp(l)ace," Unpublished manuscript, 2005. I seize the opportunity to thank Guillermo Delgado to let me quote material from this essay.

xxviii Ibid.

xxix For further clarifications see Carlos Alberto Torres, "Education in Latin America and the Caribbean: A Theoretical Discussion of Citizenship, Democracy, and Multiculturalism," in The Future of Indigenous Peoples. Strategies for Survival and Development, 75-103. "People identify themselves in certain ways in order to protect their bodies, their labor, their communities, their way of life; in order to be associated with people who ascribe values to them; and for purposes of recognition, to be acknowledged, to feel as if one actually belongs to a group, a clan, a tribe, a community. So that anytime we talk about the identity of a particular group over time and space, we have to be very specific about what the credible options are for them at any given moment" (Cornel West 1996: 57 in Torres, 88).

xxx Torres, "Education in Latin America and the Caribbean: A Theoretical Discussion of Citizenship, Democracy, and Multiculturalism," 88.

xxxi Varese, "The Territorial Roots of Latin American Indigenous Peoples' Movement for Sovereignty," 51.

xxxii L.M. Silko, "Writing a s "Witness,"" in Speaking for the Generations. Native Writers on Writing, ed. Simon Ortiz (Tucson: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 10.

xxxiii Hernandez-Ávila, "¿Qué está en juego? Las comunidades indígenas México/Estados Unidos," 171

xxxiv Juan Gregorio Regino, "Escritores en lenguas indígenas," in Situación actual y perspectivas de la literatura en lenguas indígenas, ed. Carlos Montemayor (San Angel D.F.: Consejo Nacional Para la Cultura y las Artes, 1993), 133-134.

xxxv Wilmer, The Indigenous Voice in World Politics.

xxxvi Kathryn Shanley, "The Thinking Heart: American Indian Discourse and the Politics of Recognition," in Race, Ethnicity, and Nationality in the United States: Toward the Twenty-First Century, ed. Paul Wong (Boulder: Westview Press, 1999), 256-276.

xxxvii As Delgado infers in his manuscript "Imagin/ing Border Indigeneity: Two Notes on Decolonization and Sp(l)ace," with regard to Raul Prada Alcoreza's

work on territoriality,
"Obviously Prada Alcoreza is establishing a clear intertextual dialogue with an ethnography that paid too much attention to the human body-metaphor in the thought of Quechua Ayllu Kaata members (in the Bolivian Andes) inhabitants that have always considered their territory parts of the human body and its functions, the body metaphor of land and water kinetics. (Bastien 1978)."

xxxviii Gabriela Coronado Suzan, "La literatura indígena: una mirada desde fuera," in Situación actual y perspectivas de la literatura en lenguas indígenas, 55-74.

xxxix One of the founders of the local organization Buscando Bienestar (Municipality of San Pedro Quiatoni, Oaxaca).

xl Santiago Ruíz María and Martinez Reyes Eugenia, dir. Buscando Bienestar. Grupo Solidario Quiatoni, 1997.

xli That is to say, the transcriber of the community's oral repertoire.

xlii María Rosaria Jiménez, "Lo que contaron nuestros abuelos y tatarabuelos," in Words of the True Peoples. Palabras de los Seres Verdaderos, 152.

xliii L.M. Silko, "Writing as "Witness,"" 8-9.

xliv Simon Ortiz, "Wah Nuhtyuh-yuu Dyu Neetah Tyahstih (Now It Is My Turn to Stand)," in Speaking for the Generations. Native Writers on Writing, xiv.

xlv Juan Gregorio Régino, "Los guardianes de la tierra," in Los Escritores Indígenas Actuales I, ed. Carlos Montemayor (San Angel D.F.: Consejo Nacional Para la Cultura y las Artes, 1992), 73.

xlvi Similarly to The Business of Fancy Dancing, the screenplay for this movie was also written by Sherman Alexie.

Trey Ellis's *Platitudes*:
Synthesizing Black Voices

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Trey Ellis has emerged as a prominent African American writer of the late-twentieth century, despite the small number of his published works. "The New Black Aesthetic," an essay that he first published in *Callaloo* in 1989, one year after the publication of his first novel, *Platitudes*, stands as a manifesto that defines and articulates his perspective on the emerging black literary voices and culture of the time, and on "the future of African American artistic expression" in the postmodern era.[1] According to Eric Lott, Ellis's novel parodies the literary and cultural conflict between such male *experimental* writers as Ishmael Reed and such female *realist* writers as Alice Walker.[2] Thus, Ellis's primary purpose in writing *Platitudes* is to redefine how African Americans should be represented in fiction, implying that neither of the dominant approaches can completely articulate late-twentieth-century black experience when practiced in isolation. In its final passages, *Platitudes* represents a synthesis of the two literary modes or styles, and it embodies quite fully the diversity of black cultural identities at the end of the twentieth century as it extends African American

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literature beyond racial issues. In this way, the novel exemplifies the literary agenda that Ellis suggests in his theoretical essay.

While Ellis's essay has captured positive attention from authors and critics, *Platitudes* unfortunately remains obscure, although it best represents the literary ideology that he describes in "The New Black Aesthetic." Too few critical articles have been written about *Platitudes*, and those articles generally have focused more interest on his essay than on the novel itself. Yet the novel demonstrates Ellis's virtuosity in employing innovative postmodern techniques in a narrative, and in "Hip-Hop Fiction," a review article on *Platitudes*, Lott notes that the novel is "a call for truce in the black literary world" and that Ellis accurately perceives the prevalent "Reed-Walker paradox" within African American literature, in which *male* authors tend to focus on sexual freedom while *female* authors emphasize black folkloric heritage and domestic harmony.[3] Lott categorizes Ellis's *Platitudes* as parody,[4] but Doris Jean Austin treats it as satire.[5] The terms *parody* and *satire* often overlap in their definitions. J.A. Cuddon points out that parody itself "is a branch of satire,"[6] so the two critics place Ellis's novel under related rubrics, which I shall refer to henceforth as satire. Unarguably, *Platitudes* is an innovative literary work that thematically and stylistically deviates from the mainstream of African American literature, which traditionally has focused on racism, slavery, oppression, and black identity.

T.S. Eliot argues in his essay "Tradition and Individual Talent" (1920) that the individual writer of the Modern Age could create aesthetic unity by joining the "timeless" and the "temporal," or the diachronic and synchronic dimensions of the culture, in new works, so that a continuity with earlier literary works by "dead authors" is maintained even as "living authors" speak meaningfully to the audiences of their time.[7] In a very innovative way, Ellis attempts to synthesize the tradition of black literature and his own individual talent in *Platitudes*, and this effort of synthesis is particularly discernable in Ellis's satire. In "The New Literary Blackface," Jennifer Jordan observes that a verbal tradition of satire has long been associated with African

American literature because "[t]he very language that black people created once they arrived in America is filled with ironic rituals and stories, which like all satire point out failures and foibles using humor."[8] According to Jordan, postmodernist black writers draw upon the Western tradition of satire in their works because it imbues African American literature with a sense of vitality.[9] Trey Ellis himself states that *Platitudes* is "a satire of every type of writing imaginable."[10] Ellis extends the use of this African American tradition in satire innovatively, without straying far from the African American literary mainstream in the exercise of his individual talent. It is undeniable at least that his novel is fraught with humor, irony, and sarcasm, and that it parodies writings by some of Ellis's notable contemporary African American authors.

Ellis states that the New Black Aesthetic has the Harlem Renaissance and the Black Arts Movement as its most proximate antecedents.[11] Thus, it is crucial to examine how *Platitudes* both preserves and extends these two movements in the arts in order to posit a new, post-nationalistic African American aesthetic in the post-1980s era. Since the appearance of *Platitudes* in 1988, the few critics who have given consideration to the work have focused their attention on how Ellis's literary manifesto, "The New Black Aesthetic," shapes his novel. Their assessments of the work have been both positive and negative. On the positive side, Bertram D. Ashe notes that "Ellis's multi-dimensional exploration of a fluid black culture, combined with his experimental approach to narrative form, first coalesced in *Platitudes*."[12] Doris Jean Austin praises Ellis for his success "when he's being irreverent about sacred subjects, social and political, American and un-American."[13] Maurice J. Bennett argues that *Platitudes* "is more than just another story of adolescent initiation (the loss of virginity, the discovery of love), [and] more than another picture of the writer writing (about how to tell a tale)."[14] On the negative side, Penny Kaganoff says that the novel is entertaining, but it "degenerates into tedious attempts at wit and humor."[15] J. Martin Favor questions the authenticity[16] of black voices that Ellis attempts to represent in

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his novel, and he concludes that Ellis's overall vision of the New Black Aesthetic is "impractical," both in his literary manifesto and in his novel.[17]

According to Ellis himself, however, the primary goal of the New Black Aesthetic accords with the spirit of T.S. Eliot's perception: it is to "expand the boundaries of traditional Black art"; he suggests that African American literature should not be characterized by its presentation of such common themes as jazz, Africa, and poverty, because "Black folks deserve and crave more choices."[18] Ellis employs the word *traditional* broadly, but in his writings, he suggests that the New Black Aesthetic movement actually originates in the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s. In general, *Platitudes* illustrates Ellis's concept of the continuity of the traditional amid the experimentation of the postmodern age. Thus, Ellis's view recalls in his own period, through either direct or indirect influence, the similar vision that Eliot had articulated for the modernist period: the aesthetic dialogue taking place in Ellis's novel is between the tradition of African American creative experience and the individual African American writer who lives and creates art in his own era.

In *Platitudes*, Ellis presents a novel in which two author-characters, Dewayne Wellington (who speaks in a voice strongly reminiscent of that of Ishmael Reed) and Isshee Ayma (who speaks in a voice similar to that of Alice Walker)[19] interact and collaborate to construct a novel-within-the-novel, which constitutes the focus of the literary discussion contained within *Platitudes*. In the end, Ellis's two narrators, as well as the main characters whom they create for the novel-within-the-novel, are reconciled harmoniously. Ellis is a "post-soul-era" author, according to Nelson George, "[and] despite the rise of Afrocentric consciousness ... many young-gifted-and-black post-soulers practice integration without anxiety," as Ellis recommends and does. George goes on to explain that because most post-soul black authors have not experienced ghetto life and have been educated in predominantly white schools, they tend to make "race consciousness less central to their being,"[20] which is an important observation for understanding how Ellis

differs from the black modernist authors of earlier decades. Dewayne has the primary narrative gaze within Ellis's novel, and his view of the events and the interactions of the characters affirms George's observation: nowhere does Dewayne focus his attention on racial discrimination or social injustice—the themes that dominate earlier twentieth-century African American literature. He effectively incorporates new scenarios in his writing that obviate the boundaries of race and class, and his characters live relatively comfortably and happily, bridging the various gaps between the black world of their families and friends, the racially diverse metropolitan milieu in which they live, and the dominant white culture of America.

The novel-within-the-novel that Ellis's characters, Dewayne and Isshee, create actually is used to contrast their differing perspectives on the social and economic circumstances of their own two main characters, Earle Tyner and Dorothy Lamont. Employing this innovative device, Dewayne and Isshee portray Earle and Dorothy as two ambitious black teenagers, but from Dewayne's and Isshee's differing authorial perspectives simultaneously.

In Dewayne's version, Earle and Dorothy represent second-generation, urban, middle-class African Americans whose economic situations allow them to enter into mainstream American life. As Ellis states in "The New Black Aesthetic," Earle and Dorothy are "*cultural mulattos*, [who are] educated by a multi-racial mix of cultures and [who] can navigate easily in the white world" (emphasis added).[21] In parallel to the opening of Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940), the opening chapter of Dewayne's novel depicts a morning in a black household. However, while Bigger Thomas (the main character in Wright's novel) and his folks live in a dilapidated, rat-infested, ghetto apartment, Earle lives in a decent, comfortable, middle-class apartment: "Light pours through the apartment window over the large schefflera leaves; it filters past [the plastic models of a] P38 Mustang and the four-stage Estes Saturn 5 rocket."[22] The words *light*, *Mustang*, and *Estes Saturn 5 rocket* suggest a higher level of optimism and imagination in Earle's personal

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environment than that suggested by the gloomy, impoverished, cramped conditions in which Bigger Thomas's family lives. As an author, Dewayne is moving beyond the themes of anger, desperation and poverty that prevailed in much of African American literature of the previous era; he is depicting an optimistic expectation of success for his protagonist. He is interested in portraying black characters who have an education and who anticipate opportunities for personal and professional advancement similar to those of middle-class white people. For instance, Earle's collection of college pennants and his ultimate dream of studying at Cal Tech or MIT suggest his reasonable aspirations for higher education—as a potential passport to a comfortable, stable life in the postmodern era. The late twentieth century witnessed a growth of black contributions in fields that previously had been closed to them. Thus, Earle represents an active participant in the social dynamic toward American ethnic diversity and greater inclusion, especially in an era dominated by the consumer ideal. Earle, along with two of his friends, is a member of a group of computer buffs, the "Trinary"; thus, Earle in himself debunks an assumption held by many people around him—the myth that the computer world is owned by white people, so all computer nerds must be white.

Dorothy Lamont, in Dewayne's version of the novel, attends St. Rita's Catholic School, where she is at the center of the popular social crowd. She wishes to escape the stifling atmosphere of her mother's family-style restaurant in Harlem and live as a liberated middle-class sophisticate. Constructing her own American Dream, she looks forward to the day when she can say, *"Goodbye ghetto,"*[23] and begin earning a good salary in a business corporation. Her dream is clearly conceptualized in her young consciousness:

> *after college and biz school I won't have to worry about that [family business] no more 'cause it'll be Morgan Stanley investment banking and Fifty Grand a Year City, yeah buddy. No more crashing on Julie's or Olivia's floor like a slave 'cause you absolutely cannot train it past one [a.m.]. Yeah, I'll have me a dee- luxe apartment in de skyaaaay.*[24]

Basically, Dorothy just wants to be *"rich and black*."[25] She wishes to establish her black identity first by pursuing higher education at a prestigious academic institution and then living a luxurious life. Although Dorothy lives in Harlem, she attempts to ignore that community and her working-class family background as she immerses herself in New York urban life, partying with such rich white friends as Janey Rosebloom and Richard Manilow.

Ellis came from an educated family himself; his parents graduated from the University of Michigan and Yale University, and he completed an MFA at Stanford University. In Dewayne's version of the novel, it seems that Dewayne's authorial voice echoes Ellis's, at least in terms of the importance of the character's academic ambition. Dewayne's teenage characters come from middle- and working-class families, but they either plan to attend or already attend elite educational institutions. They herald a movement among the second-generation, metropolitan blacks who are capable of pursuing success as defined by mainstream values and experimentation in the arts. Both Earle and Dorothy are urban black teenagers who successfully integrate themselves into metropolitan society and who are not constrained by their black ethnicity. Earle desires to earn a degree in computer science at Cal Tech or MIT; Dorothy plans to transfer to Stanford, and one of her sisters already has become a Yale graduate. These characters represent Ellis's "rapidly growing group of cultural mulattos,"[26] a loaded term that Ellis seems to have coined. By emphasizing the value of academic degrees from prestigious schools, Dewayne suggests that second-generation African Americans no longer need to accept the limited aspirations of "second-class citizens," that their future is promising, and that they no longer should be disadvantaged by a slave mentality or a culturally instilled sense of inferiority.

It is important to note that throughout his novel, Dwayne describes black characters as beautiful and confident, and they, in general, are appreciated in white society. In fact, in Dewayne's narrative, it often is difficult to discern which characters are

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black and which are white. Chapter 28 of *Platitudes* describes Dorothy's successful integration into the sexuality of the white world surrounding her, in which wealthy white people live comfortably and happily. In this urban milieu, Dorothy is just as beautiful and seductive as white teenagers, and the distinction between blond hair and blue eyes or black hair and ebony skin does not exist. In one nightclub, for example, Richard, a charming, elegant white model, "was aiming for her [Dorothy] from the start,"[27] and they "go to the dance floor and spin and bop like maniacs and together they make a great couple because she's gorgeous of course and he's an absolute hunk."[28] In Dewayne's novel, black people are equal to white people, and neither group feels superior or inferior to the other. Sexual desire is a cultural, as well as biological, phenomenon, and the interracial couplings in Ellis's novel both embody and symbolize the "cultural mulattoism" that he describes and to which he calls attention.

In the Introduction to *Post-Soul Nation,* Nelson George makes a valid point that the black authors of the post-soul era have "challenged the traditional views of black politics and values,"[29] and Ellis's *Platitudes* unarguably challenges common, stereotypic images of African Americans. In an interview for the *People Weekly* conducted by V.R. Peterson, Ellis comments, "Unfortunately, there are people who still try to pigeonhole black men and see us only as Africa, as a problem, or as something to be pitied and feared."[30] African American literature of the Harlem Renaissance period and of the 1960s typically portrays a crisis of racial and personal identity in the struggle of black communities against the ethnic constructs projected upon black people by the racist society around them. Characters in African American literature of the pre-Civil Rights, Modernist era, generally focus their thoughts and actions upon the rift that blatantly separated the black and white worlds into two strictly delineated realms of consciousness. For example, in Wright's post-Harlem Renaissance novel *Native Son,* Bigger Thomas is constantly conscious of his skin color, which he believes to be the main cause of his family's poverty: "We

black and they white. They got things and we ain't."[31] However, Dewayne's narrative approaches skin color with a different mindset criticizing the generalizations or assumptions made about or among black people. For instance, when Dorothy proudly declares that "black most always are [good kissers], ... Sheena always objects, because she says you *can't* stereotype our race" (emphasis added).[32] In this exchange, Ellis articulates his stance on the cultural discourse as it pertains to racial authenticity. Mark Anthony Neal, in his discussion of the "post-soul intelligentsia," accurately observes that Ellis's New Black Aesthetic "attempts to rearticulate traditional conceptions of blackness [and] ... to animate and deconstruct popular assumptions of black identity" by parodying and democratizing black critical discourse.[33] Readers should perceive this effect in the scene mentioned above.

Another racial cliché that Dewayne addresses in his version of the-novel-within-the-novel is the relationship between skin color and the sexual revolution, which is another of Ellis's prominent themes. On this topic, Mark Anthony Neal points out that "for some African American men it has been difficult to separate their race pride from their anxieties about their masculinity," which represents their black identity.[34] As his narrative illustrates repeatedly, Dewayne's black and white characters live harmoniously, and racial differences do not characterize their sexual encounters. Richard dances and flirts with Dorothy in a club, as mentioned above, and both seem preoccupied by each other's physical beauty, while remaining unconscious of their differing skin colors. Interestingly, a sexual encounter between Earle and Janey (a white friend), presented in immodest detail in Chapter 54, focuses upon each character's libido. The description of consummation is purposefully explicit: "She kisses his *dark* ear. Both his *brown* hands replace the *white* bra," and "[h]er *pearl* hands pad his *inky* shoulders" (emphasis added).[35] It is obvious that Dewayne gives attention to skin color, but it is not the attention that Earle and Janey give to each other in their erotic play. It is the attention that Dewayne, the author, gives his characters, using his own authorial gaze. Color loses its usual defining importance for the characters,

and the readers' interest remains on the sexual fulfillment that the scene coveys, but attention to racial differences appears only in the author's perspective. According to Susan Koshy's discussion of sexual naturalization in American history and culture, interracial heterosexuality and miscegenation have demanded a new way of reconsidering issues of "race, representation, and nationhood" in ethnic studies. Koshy states that the early twentieth-first century has witnessed a "reemergence of mixed-race identity as a sign of beauty and desirability in popular culture." She also argues that multiracial beauty will be considered a "seductive symbol of America's hybrid racial feature, by figuring hybridity as a sign of beauty rather than of unmanageable conflict or violence."[36] Ellis's description of his characters' interracial sexuality illustrates Koshy's argument. Earle is neither a dangerous nor a pitiful character; Janey, a white, rich schoolgirl, trusts and shares with him even her depression after she learns to appreciate his kindness and intelligence. Thus, Earle and Janey come to embody the liberalized social integration that Ellis advocates. Another significant point that Ellis addresses in his essay is this: "Today, there are enough young blacks torn between the two worlds to finally go out and create our own [identity]. The New Black Aesthetic says you just have to *be* natural, you don't necessarily have to *wear* one."[37] Earle's and Dorothy's behavior and lifestyles are natural, and they do not need to pretend or wear a mask to please the white world (a condition that is described quite memorably by Paul Laurence Dunbar in his famous poem "We Wear the Mask").

Martin Favor rightly notes that *Platitudes* presents black voices that are new in black literature: Ellis is concerned with new middle-class black voices that have not gained sufficient attention in the history or tradition of African American literary expression.[38] However, Tera Hunter summarizes Ellis's avoidance of creating certain types of inauthentic voices as follows:

It [the New Black Aesthetic] re-appropriates black culture by black artists for black people, stresses the importance of [their] individual expression without dispensing [with] social and political responsibility, draws on traditions across race and class boundaries, and rejects bourgeois preoccupations with portraying pristine

Cosbyesque images.[39]

Still, she questions Ellis's credibility in establishing truly representative black voices. She says, for example, that Ellis has had little personal connection with the larger African American community who lived through the pre-Civil Rights era: he attended an elite, predominantly white university, he has not lived around black people except his own family until he went to Stanford University, and he has proclaimed himself to be an "alienated junior intellectual." Thus, Hunter challenges Ellis's credentials to discuss "an aesthetic that is homegrown in black culture."[40] In his response to Hunter's critique, Ellis states that although he has spent most of his life around white people, his education has given him opportunities to access books written by black artists, and programs in African American studies have given him an aesthetic distance necessary to understand his characters;[41] thus, his education helped to form his literary ideology and define his literary production.[42] In terms of Eliot's dichotomy of "the tradition" and "the individual talent," Ellis places great emphasis upon the position of the literary artist living in his own era and writing about his own times, and less upon perpetuating the paradigms that prevailed in earlier periods of the literary tradition.

With such an understanding in mind, Eric Lott maintains that Ellis treats his material unfairly by investing more attention in Dewayne's experimental agenda than in Isshee's traditional plan for the novel. In the end, Dewayne's novel reaches a conclusion while Isshee's is left unfinished, and her joking criticisms of Dewayne's writing are left without response.[43] Although *Platitudes* parodies the writings of both Ishmael Reed and Alice Walker, Ellis shows a preference for the former, and in the end, both Dewayne and Isshee seem to advocate an experimental approach to creating their own private lives, which runs in parallel with the experimental approach taken by their characters Earle and Janey, whom they create in their fiction. In their private lives, both Dewayne and Isshee resist any scenarios that the social and cultural mainstream would create for them, and they adopt a scenario that they create for themselves. To replace the term *post-postmodernism*, Raoul Eshelman coins the term *performatism*, to characterize conditions "in which subject,

sign, and thing come together in ways that create an aesthetic experience of transcendency," in which new meaning is created.[44] Conditions in Ellis's *Platitudes* affirm this definition. The ending of Ellis's novel achieves such transcendency, in which Dewayne and Isshee create something new in their lives and in their fiction, just as Ellis suggests that writers should in his essay, "The New Black Aesthetic." T.S. Eliot defined the nature of the dialogue that exists between the literary tradition and creative expression through individual talent for Modernist writers, but he probably would be surprised by Ellis's innovative way of representing this dialogue so literally in his post-postmodernist novel.

Platitudes succeeds in parodying the main dichotomy of late twentieth-century literary politics within African American literature and the African American community: the dichotomy between the use of the tradition and the development of the individual talent among people who live their lives creatively. However, such critics as Hunter and Favor, who assume that Dewayne actually represents Ellis, defictionalize parts of the novel and read them as autobiographical. Hunter stresses that "Ellis … tends to conflate class status with class origins," and she questions whether the art presented in *Platitudes* is "true to the black,"[45] and Favor questions how Ellis's novel defines and reflects reality in terms of African American experience and expression.[46] In Dewayne's version of the novel-within-the-novel, Earle, like Ellis himself, is detached from his African American heritage, except for one of his pastimes—he watches *The Jeffersons* on television, a situation-comedy focusing on the lives of affluent African Americans living in New York. His experience with Harlem is accidental, and his exploration of Harlem derives from distanced curiosity rather than from existential necessity. For Earle, who comes from a middle-class family, Harlem is a dangerously exotic place where he must put to use the black behavior patterns portrayed in the popular media: Earle says to himself, "*God, what a weird place. Mom'll kill me is she finds out I ate up here*," and "*Stop fooling around and just look mean so they won't know you're not from uptown.*"[47] Dorothy lives in Harlem, but she feels scant connection with it and spends most of her time with her white friends at school and in up-town New York—and

she herself hums the theme song of the TV-series *The Jeffersons* on the subway. For Dorothy, Harlem is where she serves food to customers while dreaming of escaping and becoming more "booj" (bourgeois) than her rich, white friends.[48] Both Earle and Dorothy want to attend prestigious universities such as MIT and Stanford. However, Eric Lott argues that there is a "gap between the hope for such institutions and their actual paucity."[49] In his interpretation of Ellis's fiction, Lott notes that Ellis's characters do not share the same life experience and educational background that the majority of African Americans have, so they represent at best only Ellis's own ideological aspirations and *not* the realistic aspirations prevailing in the black community as a whole. Thus, Lott tends to view Ellis's text as autobiography, but he also perceives that Ellis is hoping for the "further democratization of American culture,"[50] in which all races will have the same opportunities to pursue happiness and attain success and wealth, much as Martin Luther King, Jr. projected in his powerful speech "I Have a Dream." In other words, Lott does seem to acknowledge that, with his own individual talent for writing, Ellis is bearing witness to the possibility of a new African American mindset that many critics around him, possibly due to constraints passed on by the tradition, fail to perceive, but Lott admits this only for the lucky few, and not for the many. Without striving to fulfill a dream, a dream seldom comes true. Ellis is not suggesting that serious effort is not required for advancement, but he does suggest that defeatism and anger are not the only responses to adversity in the society. Striving to realize the dream is presented subtly in Earle's political efforts to register voters for a mayoral campaign. Ellis, however, affirms in his novel that the individual talent needs to transcend the tradition, in life as well as in fiction.

In Madhu Dubey's discussion of racial presentation in U.S. black cultural studies, Dubey states, "Blind to the ways in which class privilege buffers the experience of racism and expands the scope of individual agency, Ellis implies that the principle of bourgeois individualism is equally available to all members of the race, regardless of class."[51] Although racial and ethnic relations, boundaries, and identities have been transformed significantly since the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., led a march across

the Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, Timothy J. Meagher maintains that, in the post-1980s era, race remains socially, economically, and politically significant and that "racial division seem[s] as intractable as it ever had been in America."[52] Because the racial gap between black and white people was perceived to be so intense in the 1990s, the Clinton administration launched two initiatives to promote cultural and racial understanding: the National Endowment for the Humanities' National Conversation on American Pluralism and Identity and the President's Committee on Race.[53] Viewed in this critical and political context, Dewayne (or Ellis) either does not notice or intentionally ignores this on-going racial conflict in the portrayal of his "cultural-mulatto" characters. Earle and Dorothy both represent cultural mulattos whose black identities become neutralized in the white world and who choose to have little connection with the ethnic tradition that preceded them. They have black skin, but they have made, it would seem, a "quantum leap" from ghetto frustration to bourgeois happy-ever-aftering in a relatively painless way. There is nothing uniquely black about them, and in Dewayne's novel, it would make little difference if they were white characters, because *Platitudes* is more about teenage romance, entrance into adulthood, and youthful pursuit of ambitions—common themes of contemporary adolescence literature—than about a struggle to achieve one's own African American identity or American dream in *white America*. Ellis's vision entails accepting the Civil Rights Movement as having been effective, and then moving forward.

Nevertheless, Ellis does address "the conflict percolating in the black literary community that concerns *perceived disparities in the reception of black male and female authors*"(emphasis added).[54] Thus, Isshee Ayam's attempt to revise Dewayne Wellington's novel-in-progress draws Dewayne into a dialogue with her, presenting two different approaches to perceiving, experiencing, and representing the life of African Americans in the postmodern or post-postmodern United States. Isshee's first chapter, "Rejoice," for example, depicts Earle as a respectful, obedient child of a poor-but-honest black family living in Lowndes County, Georgia, and also in a different historical period. She presents her scenario in contradistinction

to Dewayne's depiction, in which Earle is a young-but-ambitious urbanite. Isshee's novel is fraught with images of poverty and social struggle: "[Baptist] thighs that shook with the centuries of injustice and degradation," "the long and stout dirt road," and "the schoolhouse."[55] Dewayne's novel presents images of marginal success and of the normal economic struggles of middle-class urban life. Thus, Isshee attempts to reposition Dewayne's black characters into the traditional black molds and contexts found in earlier African American literature, removing Earle and Dorothy from a city and placing them into a community of strong black women in a rural Southern area. Isshee's version of the novel, with its poverty, rural setting, and class struggle, establishes the conditions of the literary realism or naturalism that prevailed in much early twentieth-century African American literature, whereas Dewayne's urban and potentially upwardly-mobile setting creates conditions for an optimistic resolution to the plot. Concerning Dewayne's authorial voice, Favor asks a very significant question: "[I]s it the voice that the New Black Aesthetic is looking for?"[56] Ellis, of course, is satirizing African American authors who "affect … 'superblackness' [by trying to] dream themselves back to the ghetto."[57] Nevertheless, Favor's question is valid: Does Ellis's voice suggest more "fairy tale hope" than social and economic realities will allow?

When characters are introduced in *Platitudes*, or in the novel-within-the-novel (by the same title), they stand as separate, isolated individuals with very limited connections with each other, but as they interact, they develop understanding and mutual appreciation. Although Dwayne asks Isshee for help with his novel, he ignores her advice and suggestions. Their dialogue, nevertheless, develops into a relationship that parallels the one that forms between Earle and Dorothy: as Dwayne overcomes his lack of self-confidence, Earle becomes successful with women; when Isshee apologizes to Dwayne for missing an appointment, she makes Earle the hero of her novel. In the end, the characters (Earle and Dorothy, as well as the fictional authors who created them, Dwayne and Isshee) arrive at harmony after learning to appreciate each other's individuality. The potential for sexual fecundity between Earle and Dorothy, as

revealed in sexually explicit passages in the novel becomes the potential for artistic fecundity between Dwayne and Isshee, which is revealed in Dewayne's need to create a fictional reconciliation for his characters: "He [Earle] is choking, trying to swallow his tears, then shakily, convulsively he breathes out and cries and cries one continuous siren and she [Dorothy] cries too and they hold each other, lock each other with their arms, their tears wetting each other's cheeks."[58] Dwayne, having narrated a tearful reunion for his characters, finally is ready to consummate his newly formed relationship with Isshee. Thus, romantic love becomes a device in the literature that helps new black artists (such as those representing Reed and Walker) to resolve their differences in order to generate something new in African American art. Behind Ellis's harmonious resolution lies the metaphor of America as the "melting pot," which derives as an appellation in literature from Israel Zangwill's play by that name, *The Melting Pot*, of 1909. It is propelled by the Christian precept that love is the key to a utopian future. It also derives from T.S. Eliot's famous essay of 1920, "Tradition and Individual Talent," with which Ellis must have been very well acquainted.[59]

In "Double Vision," Marcellus Blount commends Ellis for his ability to "insulate himself from thematic censure by manipulating his point of view in order to make his characters bear the brunt of his criticisms, instead of the real contemporary black writers and white audiences whom they represent."[60] At first, however, Isshee's *blackening* of her characters and plot and Dewayne's *whitening* of his own characters and plot place their individual literary approaches into opposition. As the title of Ellis's novel suggests, each fictional-author's approach, when practiced in isolation, creates hackneyed platitudes. Ellis's new black artist must wed traditional black folkloric culture with mainstream general popular culture in order to articulate a black voice that can speak representatively for African American culture in the post-1980s era. One question raised by Ellis's innovations in the structure and style of his novel has important implications for African American culture, and for all culture in general, at the threshold of the twenty-first century: Does art imitate life or does life imitate art? If art imitates life, then Isshee's realism or naturalism would seem to be validated. If life

imitates art, then Dewayne's optimistic view appears to present the approach of choice. Ellis's ending suggests that individuals must write their own scenarios as opportunities present themselves. This implies that a certain amount of freedom can be granted to the will, and perhaps that each moment in a life needs to be created as individual talent permits. Neither Isshee nor Dwayne lives life according to the fictional models presented by Ishmael Reed or Alice Walker, and in the end, a new scenario must be invented to accommodate new circumstances. This is necessary if the fictional authors, such as Dwayne and Isshee, are to transcend the potential platitudes that their lives otherwise might comprise.

In Trey Ellis's artistic and intellectual manifesto of 1989, "The New Black Aesthetic," a movement which he sometimes abbreviates to its acronym NBA, one of the most ringing lines concerning his postmodern generation of black authors and artists is: "We're not saying racism doesn't exist; we're just saying it's not an excuse."[61] From the larger context in which this sentence occurs, readers understand what it is that Ellis means by "not an excuse." Racism is not an excuse for debilitating anger and rage in a new era in which optimism and opportunity are not only possible, but very evident. A few paragraphs earlier in the essay, Ellis posits two advantages that his generation of the New Black Aesthetic of the post-1980s has over black writers and artists of earlier decades:

For the first time in our history we are producing a critical mass of college graduates who are children of college graduates themselves. Like most artistic booms, the NBA is a post-bourgeois movement driven by a second generation of middle class. Having scraped their way to relative wealth and, too often, crass materialism, our parents have freed (or compelled) us to bite those hands that fed us and sent us to college. We now feel secure enough to attend art school instead of medical school.

Another great advantage we have over the artists of the Seventies is that today's [of the 1980s] popular culture is guided by blacks almost across the board.[62]

These highly educated and highly motivated individuals are the black subjects that Ellis chooses to treat in *Platitudes*, at least through the vision of Dewayne, the primary author of his novel-

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within-the-novel that develops the college-bound characters Earle and Dorothy. In spite of negative comment, they are among the characters in black literature who escape the paradigms of anger and rage that had characterized the literature of previous generations, and they participate in the optimism and opportunity that propelled the careers of the almost hyper-educated Barack and Michelle Obama in the first decade of the twenty-first century.[63] As Ellis rightly observes in his prophetic essay of 1989, the rise of the Obamas is supported by the positive image of the black people presented in American popular culture: "the world is not only now [in 1989] accustomed to black faces in the arts, but also hungers for us."[64]

Ellis uses satire generously to help Dewayne, and perhaps Isshee, eventually, to move beyond traditional characters, who were representative of intelligent people hindered in their social and economic development in the pre-Civil Rights era, and create more accurate role-models for the 1990s and beyond. In *Platitudes*, Ellis satirizes the literary conventions that prevailed in earlier decades of the tradition in which he worked, even as he drew upon the positive influences that allowed him to develop his own remarkable individual talent in the post-modern period. Critical statements have been delivered, suggesting that Ellis's characters are not true to the tradition. In some ways, this might be true, but they tend to be true to their individual talents, and history seems to be affirming the decision that Ellis made for them.

Notes

1   Martin J. Favor, "'Ain't Nothin' Like the Real Thing, Baby': Trey Ellis' Search for the New Black Voice," *Callaloo*, 16, no. 3 (Summer 1993): 695.

2   Eric Lott, "Hip-Hop Fiction," *The Nation*, 247, no. 19 (Dec. 19, 1988): 691.

3   Ibid., 691; Erik D. Curren, *"Platitudes,"* Literary Reference Center, EBSCOHOST.

4   Ibid., 692.

5   Doris Jean Austin, review of *Platitudes*, by Trey Ellis, *The New York Times Book Review* 94 (19 February 1989): 20.

6 J. A. Cuddon, *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 3rd ed. (London: Penguin, 1992), 682.

7 T.S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in *Criticism: Major Statements*, 4th ed., ed. Charles Kaplan and William Davis Anderson (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000), 214-222.

8 Jennifer Jordan, "The New Literary Blackface," *Black Issues Literary Review* 4, no.2 (Mar. 2002): 26.

9 Ibid., 26, 28

10 Trey Ellis's official website: http://treyellis.com/ellis-books.htm

11 Trey Ellis, "Response to NBA Critiques," *Callaloo* 38 (Winter 1989): 250.

12 Bertram D. Ashe, Foreword, *Platitudes and "The New Black Aesthetic,"* by Trey Ellis (Boston: Northeastern UP, 2003), xv.

13 Doris Jean Austin, review of *Platitudes*, by Trey Ellis, *The New York Times Book Review* 94 (19 Feb. 1989): 20.

14 Maurice J. Bennet, "The Black Preppie and the Sharecropper's Son," *Book World* 18 (Oct. 1988): 9.

15 Penny Kaganoff, review of *Platitudes*, by Trey Ellis, *Publishers Weekly* 234, no. 1 (1 July 1988): 72.

16 *Authenticity* is a controversial term in post-structuralism because of the question: Based on what criteria is *authenticity* defined? Also, according to post-structuralists, meaning is subject to destabilization.

17 Favor argues, "Far from being an 'anti-aesthetic that defies definition' (1989a:251), Ellis' NBA is a class-conscious manifesto concerned with the repositioning of certain types of epistemological power. To be heard is not necessarily to be completely understood, but it does afford the possibility of attaining leadership positions and the power to attempt to 'perfect society and perfect the soul' (1989a:250). If this is the case, however, it falls to the artist to create an overall vision of this new ideology. It becomes his/her task to say what is real and what is not. This is where Ellis' project, in both the novel and the manifesto, becomes impractical" (704).
    Concerning the authenticity of black voices in African American literature, Favor criticizes the reality that Ellis attempts to portray in his work: "Ellis seems comfortable in claiming that reality is diversity, but isn't he really insisting that the power to make reality lies with the black middle class? If anything, Ellis seems uneasy with the privilege he has made for himself. He can parody

certain formulations of blackness but is hesitant to define a new one beyond the broadest (and, unfortunately, most masculine) terms. To insist on one, specific, 'authentic,' voice emanating from the black bourgeoisie would generate enormous controversy…" (704).

18 Quoted in Tonya Bolden Davis, "Word Star," *Essence* 19 (June 1988): 36.
19 In his discussion of the critical context of *Platitudes*, Curren writes,

Dewayne Wellington is reminiscent of African American male writers such as novelist, poet, and social critic Ishmael Reed. Reed has criticized black feminist writers for their negative portrayals of black men as sexist. His own satirical fiction is known for its portrayal of a conspiracy against African American men, as in his novel *Reckless Eyeballing* (1986). Reed's narrative style relies on experimental techniques that blend black folk culture with material from white American culture in a playful postmodern style.

One of the female writers criticized by Reed is Putlizer Prize-winning author Alice Walker. Like Isshee Ayam, Walker is a well-known novelist and feminist critic. Her best-selling novel *The Color Purple* (1982) focuses on the warmth and vitality of black folk and family life in the rural South, where black people are protected from the corrupting values of white society. Isshee's version of the story of Earle and Dorothy is a broad parody of the folkloric style of Walker's fiction.

20 Nelson George, *Buppies, B-Boys, Baps and Bohos: Notes on Post-Soul Black Culture* (New York: Harper, 1992), 6.

21 Trey Ellis, "The New Black Aesthetic," *Callaloo* 38 (Winter 1989): 235.

22 Trey Ellis, *Platitudes* (New York: Vintage, 1988), 3.

23 Ibid., 107.

24 Ibid., 106.

25 Ibid., 106.

26 Ellis, "The New Black Aesthetic," 235.

27 Ellis, *Platitudes*, 99.

28 Ibid., 103.

29 Nelson George, *Post-Soul Nation* (New York: Penguin, 2004), ix.

30 Contemporary Authors Online, "Trey Ellis," Gale Literary Databases <http://galenet.galegroup.com>.

31 Richard Wright, *Native Son* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1998), 20.

32 Ellis, *Platitudes*, 104.

33 Mark Anthony Neal, "'It Be's That Way Sometimes 'Cause I Can't Control the Rhyme': Notes from the Post-Soul Intelligentsia," *Black Renaissance/Renaissance Noir* 1, no. 3 (31 July 1988): 15.

34 Mark Anthony Neal, *Soul Babies: Black Popular Culture and the Post-Soul Aesthetic* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 6.

35 Ellis, *Platitudes*, 168.

36 Susan Koshy, *Sexual Naturalization* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2005), 12-13, 18.

37 Ellis, "The New Black Aesthetic," 236.

38 Favor, 694.

39 Tera Hunter, "'It's a Man's Man's Man's World': Specters of the Old Re-newed in Afro-American Culture and Criticism," *Callaloo* 38 (Winter 1989): 247.

40 Ibid., 247.

41 Ellis, "Response to NBA Critiques." Although Ellis does not state which black authors he has read. He merely says, "It has always been impossible to have been educated in America without having been greatly influenced by non-black artists. Phyllis Wheatley never read any poetry written by a black person other than herself. Ironically, thanks to black-studies programs, today's black artists, including the "cultural mulattoes" (blacks who grew up in white neighborhoods), have probably been exposed to more black art than any other black people in any other age. And being a middle class artist, black or white, has always been the rule rather than the exception" (251). However, in his essay "The New Black Aesthetic," he refers to author James Baldwin and singer James Brown.
42 Ibid., 251.

43 Lott, 691.

44 Raoul Eshelman, "Performatism in Architecture: On Framing and the Spatial Realization of Ostensitivity," *Anthropoetics- The [Online] Journal of Generative Anthropology* 7, no. 2 (Fall 2001/Winter2002). Available online at <http://www. anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap0702/arch2.htm>.

45 Hunter, 247.

46 Favor, 694.

47 Ellis, *Platitudes*, 22, 23.

48 Ibid., 106.

49 Lott, "Response to Trey Ellis's 'The New Black Aesthetic,'" *Callaloo* 38 (Winter 1989): 244-246: 246.
50 Ibid., 246.

51 Madhu Dubey, "Postmodernism as Postnationalism? Racial Presentation in U.S. Black Cultural Studies," *Black Scholar: Journal of Black Studies and Research* 33, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 8.

52 Timothy J. Meagher, "Racial and Ethnic Relations in America, 1965-2000," in *Race and Ethnicity in America: A Concise History*, ed. Ronald H. Bayor (New York: Columbia UP, 2003), 193-240: 221-22.

53 Ibid., 222.

54 Bennet, 9.

55 Ellis, *Platitudes*, 16, 19, 49.

56 Favor, 699.

57 Ellis, "The New Black Aesthetic," 235.

58 Ellis, *Platitudes*, 183.

59 I assume that because Ellis studied literature and Creative Writing, he must have been familiar with T.S. Eliot's essay.

60 Marcellus Blount, "Double Vision," *Village Voice* 33 (29 Nov. 1988): 66.

61 Ellis, "The New Black Aesthetic," 240.

62 Ibid., 237.

63 As I am writing this article, Barack Obama, a black graduate of Columbia and Harvard University, is running for President of the United States in the 2008 general election.

64 Ellis, "The New Black Aesthetic," 237.

Sacred Hoop Dreams:
Basketball in the Work of Sherman Alexie

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The game of basketball serves as a fitting metaphor for the conflicts and tensions of life. It involves both cooperation and competition, selflessness and ego. In the hands of a gifted writer like Sherman Alexie, those paradoxes become even deeper and more revealing. In his short story collections, The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven and The Toughest Indian in the World, his debut novel, Reservation Blues, and his recent young adult novel, The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian, Alexie uses basketball to explore the ironies of American Indian reservation life and the tensions between traditional lifeways and contemporary social realities. So central is basketball to the Lone Ranger and Tonto short story collection, in fact, that the paperback edition's cover depicts a salmon—the Coeur d'Alene Indians are fishermen—flying over a basketball hoop.

Communal experience typically trumps individualism in American Indian value systems, experience that often manifests itself in leisure activities of North American Indians. Although most contemporary anthropologists wisely hesitate to generalize across hundreds of American Indian societies, they do report, as

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do American Indian scholars and storytellers, that the sacredness of life, the balance or harmony of relationships among humans and between humans and nature, and the cultural centrality of stories characterize most Indian groups. Certainly the writings of American Indian authors like Michael Dorris, M. Scott Momaday, Leslie Marmon Silko, and Louise Erdrich return often to such themes.

It is no wonder, then, that such values inform the leisure pursuits of American Indians, at least as interpreted by its artists like Alexie. Indeed, as Daniel McDonald and Leo McAvoy point out, the connection between leisure and other aspects of life are less starkly drawn in most American Indian societies than they are in Euro-American society. This interrelationship between life and leisure manifests itself quite thoroughly in Alexie's work, especially in his treatment of basketball. As just one example, a character named Simon in a story titled, "The First Annual All-Indian Horseshoe Pitch and Barbecue," jokes that basketball should be their new religion, noting, "A ball bouncing on hardwood sounds like a drum" (147). And in "Saint Junior," a story in The Toughest Indian in the World, the narrator tells us that the protagonist had participated in "many of the general American Indian ceremonies like powwows and basketball tournaments" (183), unironically implying equivalence between the two.

So important is basketball to Alexie's literary cosmos that the narrative voice in his poem, titled, "Why We Play Basketball," apparently speaking on behalf of all Indians, or at least Alexie's own Spokanes, dramatically insists,

> It is just a game
> we are told by those
> who cannot play it
> unless it is play.
> For us, it is war …. (711)

Although equating sports with war is hardly a new literary gesture, Alexie gives the impression- that the connection for him is literal, not figurative.

Alexie's poem also suggests that basketball helps Indians make

sense of their daily lives and their place in the larger world:

> In basketball, we
> find enough reasons
> to believe in God,
> or something smaller
> than God …. (711)

The narrative voice states that Indians play basketball because "we want to / separate love from / hate, because we know / how to keep score" (712)—the game, like a story, reflects life back to us, giving it meaning. Finally, the voice draws a parallel between the ball and the tribe itself: "These hands hold the ball. / These hands hold the tribe" (712). In one short poem, Alexie thus uses basketball to evoke epic themes of war, God, and peoplehood, themes that also run through his longer works.

In The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian, his National Book Award-winning novel for young adults, Alexie's protagonist, an adolescent Indian nicknamed Junior, literally and figuratively leaves his reservation to attend high school in the nearby white town. An outsider in every way, Junior earns a place on the white high school's basketball team, and the court becomes the stage upon which he struggles between his loyalty to his people and his reservation on the one hand and, on the other, his commitment to escape the cycle of poverty and hopelessness on the reservation.

Recalling the reservation's eighth-grade football team's 45 to 0 loss to their opponents from the white town, Junior says, "Of course, losing isn't exactly fun. Nobody wants to be a loser" (49). To Junior, losing a game signifies losing at life. He speaks of loss again later after reading Euripides's play, Medea, in which the title character asks, "What greater grief than the loss of one's native land?" Junior responds,

> I read that and thought, "Well, of course, man.
> We Indians have LOST EVERYTHING.
> … We only know how to lose and be lost." (173)

But when Junior's high school basketball team routs the reservation team, and Junior holds his former best friend, the

reservation team's top shooter, to four points, Junior realizes his victory means his friend's, and his tribe's, defeat. As a sign of Junior's coming of age, he also understands that he can live in multiple worlds, from the tribe of Spokane Indians to the "tribe of teenage boys," the "tribe of poverty," and, "the tribe of basketball players" (217). Fittingly, the novel ends with a rapprochement between Junior and his best friend, whereupon they play one-on-one "until the moon was huge and golden and perfect in the dark sky" (229). "We didn't keep score," Junior adds (229). In Junior's maturing mind, basketball no longer serves only to distinguish the winners from the losers. In his more complex cosmology, Junior's concept of basketball transcends the binary and becomes a metaphor for a capacious, complex, and joyful world.

In The Absolutely True Diary, as in all of his works, Alexie aggressively reminds us that American Indians live their lives in the contemporary world. His unflinching depiction of reservation poverty, based, as he has said, on his own memories, makes basketball a natural form of recreation on the reservation. Basketball is popular on reservations for the same reason it is popular in other disadvantaged pockets of America: it costs virtually nothing to play. In The Toughest Indian in the World, the narrator of the story "Saint Junior"—perhaps the same Junior in The Absolutely True Diary—says that a character named Roman Gabriel Fury "knew that basketball was the most democratic sport. All you needed to play was something that resembled a ball and something else that approximated the shape of a basket" (156). However, Alexie resists the essentializing and reductionist notion that Indian behavior and beliefs can be so neatly generalized. His use of basketball as metaphor is complicated and nuanced.

Some of the stories suggest that the basketball players on the Spokane Indian Reservation in eastern Washington—where Alexie himself grew up—value service to their team above personal achievement or victory over an opponent. Junior Polatkin, a character who recurs in several stories in The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven, says that their reservation basketball team—ironically called the Wellpinit Redskins—had good players but rarely won: "We always had two or three of the best players

in the league, but winning wasn't always as important as getting drunk after the game for some and for [sic] going to the winter powwows for others," he says (206).

Other stories, however, feature players who are reservation legends for their individual magic on the court. In "The Only Traffic Signal on the Reservation Doesn't Flash Red Anymore," for example, the narrator, Victor, says:

> There's a definite history of reservation heroes who never finish high school, who never finish basketball seasons. Hell, there's been one or two guys who played just a few minutes of one game, just enough to show what they could have been. And there's the famous case of Silas Sirius, who made one move and scored one basket in his entire basketball career. People still talk about it.
>
> "Hey," I asked Adrian. "Remember Silas Sirius?"
>
> "Hell," Adrian said. "Do I remember? I was there when he grabbed that defensive rebound, took a step, and flew the length of the court, did a full spin in midair, and then dunked that fucking ball. And I don't mean it looked like he flew, or it was so beautiful it was almost like he flew. I mean, he flew, period." (47)

Laughing, Victor states, "A reservation hero is a hero forever" (48). Yet the characters sadly observe that the hero, like hope on the reservation, rarely transcends bleak reality: Sirius died of diabetes before making his comeback. Having already complicated the simplistic notion that individual heroics have no place in American Indian life, Alexie then twists the knife, confronting the complementary realities of both legend and material life. Victor asks, "But what happens when our heroes don't even know how to pay their bills?" (49).

Alexie uses basketball to conjure poignancy in other stories, as well. In "Indian Education," written in the form of brief diary entries from first through twelfth grade, the narrator, Junior, writes of the first time he picked up a basketball in fifth grade saying that "it

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felt good, that ball in my hands, all those possibilities and angles" (175). Later, though, in eleventh grade, he writes this entry:

> Last night I missed two free throws which would have won the game against the best team in the state. The farm town high school I play for is nicknamed the "Indians," and I'm probably the only actual Indian ever to play for a team with such a mascot.
>
> This morning I pick up the sports page and read the headline: INDIANS LOSE AGAIN.
>
> Go ahead and tell me none of this is supposed to hurt me very much.

With a single newspaper headline with a double meaning—Indians losing once more in the game of hoops and in the game of life—Alexie pushes basketball to mean far more.

In <u>Reservation Blues</u>, which stars Thomas Builds-the-Fire from <u>The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven</u>, Alexie uses another basketball allegory to help provide insights into himself, his father, and the larger Spokane culture. With his father asleep, drunk, on the kitchen table, Thomas begins to tell his guests, sisters named Chess and Checkers, about his father's fall from greatness. He tells them that his father, the Washington State High School Basketball Player of the Year in 1956, was so good that he was a reservation hero, of whom the tribe began to expect miracles. Thomas says, "Sometimes they'll stop a reservation hero in the middle of the street, look into his eyes, and ask him to change a can of sardines into a river of salmon" (97). Once his father started drinking, though, he did not stop, continues Thomas.

Soon, Thomas launches what becomes a continual story of his father, Samuel Builds-the-Fire, and his fellow Spokane, Lester FallsApart, who end up challenging the brutal tribal police to a hoops game after a confrontation. The court becomes a battleground. The tale, which readers encounter in installments throughout the novel, becomes not only a method of characterizing Samuel as well as Thomas through his memories of his broken father, but

also a thematic thread running through the plot like a point guard weaving through defenders to the key. As the face of authority on the reservation, the tribal police are depicted as violent traitors to their fellow Indians, and the skirmish quickly takes on epic meaning.

The narrative returns episodically to the great game over the space of more than twenty pages, as Samuel and Lester first take the lead (103), then lose it to the tribal police (113), regain it (117), and again slip behind (121). Finally, down by one point, Samuel makes a legendary jump shot in a passage that recalls the theme of flying humans in Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon and other African American texts: "Samuel flew. He had dreamed of flying before. But there he was, flying for real. Flying true. … Samuel laid the ball gently over the rim" (126). The narrator then hits the reader in the gut with the simple declaration, "Samuel missed the shot" (126). This story is no Hoosiers, in which the underdog triumphs. Ultimately, the chapter ends with Chess saying to Thomas, "You never told us who won that game between your father and the Tribal Cops."

> "Who do you think?" Thomas asked. "Who you think won
> that game?"
> (129).

The text offers no definitive answer, but it seems clear that one can expect another headline to read, "INDIANS LOSE AGAIN." Alexie leaves the gap intentionally, forcing readers to reach their own conclusions regarding the Indians' chances in the game of basketball and, by extension, in the game of life.

Again, however, Alexie thwarts simple interpretation. At the end of the novel, the Catholic priest, Father Arnold, who, despite his human faults, stands as a force for good on the reservation despite being white, leads the Catholics to a basketball championship victory over a rival church on the reservation. When an opponent hints that Father Arnold spent too much time practicing at the expense of his parish, a member of the church retorts, "[W]hat the hell do any of you know about being Catholic? You have no idea how hard it is" (293). Indeed, as the readers know, Father Arnold

had had to muster enormous self-control to maintain his celibacy after Checkers begins to fall in love with him. The challenge of maintaining integrity in the face of external challenges is not, Alexie implies, the sole territory of the American Indian.

In the remarkable 1998 film, Smoke Signals, whose screenplay he wrote based on the stories in The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven, Alexie further develops the basketball metaphor. Smoke Signals focuses on two less-prominent characters in Lone Ranger, Victor Joseph and Thomas Builds-the-Fire, who embark on a road trip from the Spokane reservation to Phoenix, where Victor's estranged father, Arnold, has died. In a flashback that fleshes out a story that Arnold's girlfriend tells Victor after Victor arrives to claim his father's body, Arnold stands alone on a court outside his trailer in the desert. Looking at the ball, he begins a monologue to himself, which is worth quoting at length:

> Everything in the world can fit inside this ball. God and the Devil, cowboys and Indians, husbands and wives, fathers and sons.

> And how does it all fit? It's about magic, man. It's about faith. It's about holding this ball in one hand, and in the other hand, you're holding the hearts of everybody who's ever loved you.

> You know, this one time, me and my son, Victor, we was playing this two-on-two basketball game against these Jesuits. Man, those Jesuits were in their white collars, in their black robes, and they was pretty damn good. By the way those priests were playing, I coulda sworn they had at least seven of the twelve apostles on their side. I mean, every time I tried to shoot the ball, this storm of locusts would come flying in and blind me. I was shooting in the dark, I tell you! But my boy, Victor, he was magical. He couldn't miss. Those Jesuits didn't have a prayer of stopping him fair and square. But Victor, he was only about twelve years old and he was kinda small, so those Jesuits were beating up on him pretty good. They were beating up

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on him and chanting at him like Victor was possessed or something. And maybe Victor was possessed, by the ghost of Jim Thorpe or something, because he had this look in his eyes that was scary. It was mean. "Come on, Victor," I shouted. "We're playing the Son and the Father here, but these two are going to need the Holy Ghost to stop us!" I mean, the score was tied up and the next basket wins, you know? So, the Jesuits had the ball, and this big redheaded Jesuit drove in and knocked my boy over, you know? Just bloodied Victor's nose all up. All that Jesuit could say was "Forgive me." Can you believe that? But my boy, Victor, he was tough. He just wiped that blood on his sleeve, picked up the ball, and took it to the hoop. He flew, man, he flew, right over that Jesuit. Twelve years old and he was like some kind of indigenous angel. Except maybe his wings were made from TV dinner trays! Ha! But my boy, Victor, he was the man that day. He took that shot and he won that game. It was the Indians versus the Christians that day and for at least one day, the Indians won." (86–87)

But when the story flashes forward to the present, Victor tells Arnold's girlfriend, Suzy Song, that he had missed that shot. His father had lied to make his son look better. So, with Arnold's tale, the audience first believes that the Indians won that symbolic victory that day, only to be disillusioned. But because Alexie layers cynicism with hope, we recognize, as does Victor himself, that Arnold loved him in his own way. He was proud enough of his son to lie about his son's failure that day.

As Victor struggles to reconcile his desire to be loved by his father with his resentment of his father's abandonment of the family, he at first refuses to enter his father's trailer to sort through the belongings. "There's nothing in there for me," he says (93). But Suzy makes him a bet: "Hey, how about this? If I make a basket, then you have to go inside. Deal?" Victor takes the bet, and the cinematographer, Brian Capener, captures in slow motion Suzy's beautiful, graceful shot, the ball floating through the night sky like a sun (a simile, in fact, that Alexie uses in <u>Lone Ranger</u>). She makes the shot, and Victor, after first trying to renege, enters the trailer,

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symbolically entering his father's world, a first step toward his psychic reconciliation.

Suzy then tells him his father's greatest secret, the one that drove him from the reservation: His father had accidentally started the fire that killed his friend Thomas's parents. By coming to terms with his father and the truth of his past, Victor reconnects with his own roots, growing closer to the memory of his father and to his irritating friend, Thomas Builds-the-Fire, whose parents Arnold had accidentally killed so many years earlier.

An interestingly parallel scene takes place in "Saint Junior," a story in the The Toughest Indian in the World volume. Although a mediocre, semi-professional basketball career haunts the protagonist, Roman Gabriel Fury, the story tenderly depicts his love for his wife, Grace Atwater. At the end of the story, Roman tries to melt the snow on the half-court outside their reservation home by lighting kerosene he had poured on the snow (a scene that recurs in his poem, "Why We Play Basketball"). When Grace comes out to see him, she reveals that she is wearing nothing beneath her coat.

"You make the next shot and you can have all of this," she said.

"What if I miss?" he asked.

She closed the coat tightly around her body.

"Then," she said, "you'll have to dream about me all day."

"Hey," he said, his throat suddenly dry, his stomach suddenly nervous. "We've got to be to work in fifteen minutes."

"Hey," she said. "It's never taken you that long before. I figure we can do it twice and you'll still be early."

Grace and Roman smiled.

"This is a good life," she said.

He stared at her, at the basket, at the ball in his hands. Then he lifted the ball over his head, the leather softly brushing against his fingers, and pushed it toward the rim.

The ball floated through the air, then, magically, it caught fire. The ball burned as it floated through the air.

Roman and Grace watched it burn and were not surprised.

Then the burning ball hit the backboard, rolled around the rim, and fell through.

Grace stepped toward her husband. Still burning, the ball rolled to a stop on the frozen ground. Roman stepped toward his wife. Ceremony. (187–88).

The ball, a spot of warmth in the cold, white snow: the basketball represents hope and joy as much as it suggests a world of disappointment and arbitrary chance.

And here we see it all come together: the connection to the past with a foot in the present, the blurry dichotomy of the real and the imaged, fate and self-determination, the awake and the dreaming, harmony with nature and with others, self-identity balanced with membership in a family and a tribe—all brought together through the rotating planet of a basketball, and, significantly, through telling stories about basketball. Alexie knows, as irrepressible Thomas Builds-the-Fire knows, stories are everything.

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Black Mayors in Non-Majority Black (Medium-Sized) Cities: Universalizing the Interests of Blacks[1]

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Introduction

The nature of political representation of Black constituents' interests from their elected Black representatives is changing in the twenty-first century. Increasingly, African Americans are being elected to political offices where the majority of their constituents are not African American. Previous research on this question tended to characterize Black politicians' efforts to represent their Black constituents' interests in two frames: deracialized or racialized (McCormick and Jones 1993; Cruse 1990). However, the advent of the twenty-first century has exhausted the utility of that polarization. Black politicians no longer find explicit racial appeals appropriate for their electoral goals, given the changing demographic environment, and greater acceptance of African American politicians in high-profile positions of power. Black politicians also increasingly find that a lack of attention to racial disparities facing constituents within their political boundaries does not effectively address why certain groups like Blacks are disproportionately and negatively affected

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than others, across a range of issues. Rather than continue to make efforts to represent Black interests within those two frames, Black politicians have begun to universalize the interests of Blacks.

Universalizing Black interests as interests that matter for the good of the whole is increasingly the adopted governing strategy of twenty-first century African American politicians elected to offices where the majority of their constituents are not Black. As a result of the greater acceptance of African American politicians in high-profile political offices and changing demographics over the course of two decades, this new approach has been made available to Black politicians who wish to represent Black interests even given their White constituent majority - the emergence of the universalizing of Black interests as interests that matter to all constituents. This is a departure from previous approaches that advocate issues that transcend and de-emphasize race (McCormick and Jones 1993).

Universalizing the interests of Blacks, as many Black politicians have done since the turn of the century, though controversial, is a unique approach many such politicians employ to represent the interests of African Americans, without alienating support from the majority of their constituents. Universalizing the interests of Blacks in a Black politician's attempt to represent their interests is different from deracialization. It is unique in that these Black politicians, in their representation of Black interests, have often noted, for example, the racial disparities present, given the issue they support. This approach, while resulting in varying electoral levels of success for some Black politicians, has a particular benefit to a Black politician's successful governing. Had, for example, these politicians employed a deracialization strategy, they, by definition, would have not emphasized race.

McCormick and Jones define deracialization as "conducting a campaign in a stylistic fashion that defuses the polarizing effects of race by avoiding explicit reference to race-specific issues" (1993, 76). While the working definition of deracialization is limited to an electoral strategy, its application to a Black politician's governing strategy is not too far-fetched. One could replace the 'conducting a campaign' phrase with 'governing an administration,' for example,

and receive a similar result. If this understanding is accepted, then it can be argued that many Black politicians no longer 'avoid explicit reference to race-specific issues.' Rather, in their attempt to represent Black interests, Black politicians increasingly note of racial disparities where appropriate and craft their rhetoric in a stylistic fashion that warrants non-Blacks not to feel threatened.

Yet, McCormick and Jones also note that a deracialized approach "at the same time emphas[izes] those issues that are perceived as racial transcendent."[1] While the McCormick and Jones definition emphasizes the avoidance of race specific issues and the advocacy of issues that transcend race, the definition does so with the underlying assumption that the topic of race is not discussed. The entire effort, then, is made on the part of the Black politician to "enhance effectively the likelihood of white electoral support" to maintain or capture public office.[2] The main difference in the approach of Black politicians in the twenty-first century is often the reason behind the approach. The effort is not solely being made to win public office and gain the necessary White votes. Rather, the approach is consciously designed to represent Black interests given the majority White constituency (Ford 2009).

Some of the components of deracialization are undoubtedly present in the approach to universalize Black interests. For example, in what scholar J.Q. Wilson calls a nonthreatening image (1980, 214-254); McCormick and Jones emphasize the need for Black politicians to project a safe portrayal to Whites to obtain a greater likelihood of winning White support. However, given the greater acceptance of African Americans to high-profile political offices, the meaning of a nonthreatening image has changed since the McCormick and Jones writing. Thus, while Black politicians, who, in the twenty-first century, may make efforts to represent Black interests and do not wish to lose the support of some Whites, they often do have the support of liberal Whites in their efforts (Cunnigen 2006; Nelson 2006). Hence, projecting a nonthreatening image toward all Whites is not a concern of many Black mayors. Rather, the electoral concern has shifted to how can Black politicians

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1 Ibid.
2 Ibid.

represent Black interests and convince enough Whites that those interests are not represented at the expense of their interests.

Corroborating this trend has been an array of elections of African American mayors of non-majority Black cities. For example, in the state of Ohio, Columbus, Toledo, Dayton, Cincinnati, Youngstown, and Cleveland all elected Black mayors in the twenty-first century. Outside of Ohio, many major cities with a history of Black mayors continued to elect them, such as, Washington, D.C., Atlanta, Georgia, New Orleans, Louisiana, and Baltimore, Maryland. Other cities with less of a history of Black mayors, elected some as well, Buffalo, New York, Tallahassee, Florida, Philadelphia, Mississippi, and Mobile, Alabama. This trend suggests Whites have an increasing willingness to vote for Black candidates when they feel as though their interests are not threatened (Hajnal 2007, 160). In other words, when African American mayors are perceived as pursuing the interests of the majority and not the interests of particular racial constituencies, (e.g., Blacks) Whites are more likely to support them in the voting booth.

Noticeably, this development excludes mention of the interests of the mayor. For example, for a reasonable number of cases, significant scholarship has not yet identified if Black mayors who garnered large amounts of White support in their election pursuits by utilizing a deracialization strategy, continued to pursue the interests of the majority, once elected. To the extent that scholars have found Black mayors do, a behavioral/psychological political analysis has yet to demonstrate if they did so preferentially. This matters because it addresses the role shared racial experience plays when Black mayors consider activities to represent the interests of African Americans in non-majority Black cities.

An attempt to introduce these and related questions, this article analyzes the question of how, if at all, the representation of Black interests is being pursued by Black mayors. Specifically, I seek to briefly examine and identify under what conditions do the elected Black mayors of non-majority Black medium-sized cities actively pursue policies and programs designed to improve the quality of life of Black residents.[3] This research question is derived from two

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3 It is important to acknowledge that 'active pursuit' does not equal influence or

propositions. First, as a racial minority that has long been socially, politically and economically marginalized, Blacks historically have experienced disproportionate disparities in housing, education, and income. As a result, the election of a Black mayor is viewed by Black residents as an opportunity to see city government work in their interests and to address these inequities. Consequently, African Americans embrace the election of one of their own with high expectations.

High Expectations

When the first wave of Black mayors won office in the 1960s and 1970s, expectations ran high. Scholars who have studied former mayors Carl Stokes, Richard Hatcher, Kenneth Gibson, David Dinkins and others have noted that ~~realty~~ reality (Moore 2002; Lane 2001; Curvin 1972; Biles 2001; Thompson 2006; Reed 1999; Nelson 2006; Preston 1990). Hence, across the country, the election of Black mayors raised the expectations of Black voters. African-American voters viewed Black mayors as modern-day Messiahs who, once in office, would dramatically alter the Black community's social and economic predicaments. As Maynard Jackson, Atlanta, Georgia's first Black mayor, commented, "The level of expectations of black people when a black mayor is elected is so intensely emotional until it is almost exaggerated. It may be impossible for any human being to satisfy the level of expectations" (Bayor 2001, 181). In short, and as Nelson and Meranto (1977, 339) concluded, "The election of a black man as mayor of a major American city builds up extraordinarily high expectations from his black constituents." The advent of the twenty-first century has found those expectations to remain constant (McLin 2008; Ford 2008).

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necessarily tell us about the outcomes. Nevertheless, evidence of 'active pursuit' will provide insight into how active Black mayors are in the governing process inside their administrations and on which issues. Furthermore, an examination of differences in mayors' actions in terms of levels of active pursuit given unique governmental structures will provide new evidence about Black mayors' policy and programmatic priorities on issues relevant to their Black residents. In addition, it will help to provide a more thorough understanding of mayoral constraints and how Blacks' interests are represented in non-majority Black urban contexts.

Demographic Trends

The article's second proposition derived from the research question is based on population trends. Demographic changes in many American cities are steadily reversing the population dynamics that brought about the election of this nation's first African-American mayors. The 2000 U.S. Census indicates that major cities are losing Black population, while gaining Latinos and Whites (Frey 2006; Brookings 2001; Frasure 2007). Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, California, San Francisco, California, Seattle, Washington, New Orleans, Louisiana, Atlanta, Georgia, and Newark, New Jersey are examples of cities with significant declines in Black populations.[4] Some of these cities, Washington, D.C., for example, have been governed by Black mayors for decades. However, should this trend continue, ambitious Black politicians will increasingly find themselves running for the office of mayor in cities which do not comprise a majority of African Americans.

Theoretical Expectations

Shared Racial Experience

The primary expectation guiding this research is that Black mayors will be involved in actively pursuing Black interest issues. This expectation is founded in scholarship on Black representation in other political contexts. In the congressional literature, there are several factors that have been shown to influence members' personal policy interests (Hall 1996).   For example, despite

4 "Gentrification Changing Face of New Atlanta," New York Times, March 11, 2006; "New York City Losing Blacks, Census Shows," New York Times, April 3, 2006; "Blacks Say Life in Los Angeles Is Losing Allure," New York Times, January 8, 1995; "The Census Shows Growth in Atlanta's Population," New York Times, March 21, 2001; "Atlanta Mayor: Shrinking Black Population Court Hurt Social Policies," Cox News Service, June 2, 2007; "D.C. May Be Losing Status As a Majority-Black City; Washington Post, May 17, 2007; "San Francisco Hopes to Reverse Black Flight," USA Today, August 26, 2007; "Central District: Change Is Inevitable, But Forsaking Past is Regrettable," Seattle Times, November 6, 2002; "Study: New Orleans Could Lose 80 Percent of Black Population," Associated Press, January 26, 2006; "Major Cities Rapidly Losing Black Population: Could Have Major Negative Impact on Black Political Power," Taylor Media Services, September 25, 2007; "Black or African American Population: 1990-2000 New Jersey Municipalities" Accessed via

http://www.wnjpin.state.nj.us/OneStopCareerCenter/LaborMarketInformation/lmi25/pl94/cnty/black.PDF. Retrieved 2009-06-20

increased diversity in the Black community, Black members of Congress share the experience of being a member of a historically marginalized group (Williams 1998) and Blacks generally (Black mayors included) have a shared memory of oppression (Williams 1998, 192). Therefore, it is expected that shared history of racialized experiences will manifest in Black mayors' policy and programmatic efforts and incline Black mayors to have a personal interest in actively pursuing policies and programs that are designed to improve the quality of life of Black residents.[5]

Finally, the congressional literature provides another cue as to why it is expected that Black mayors will actively pursue Black interests in non-majority Black cities. For example, Gamble (2007) notes how many Black congressional members nationwide carry a heavy burden as they are often expected to represent not only their districts, but also "black America" (Clay 1992; Guinier 1994, 47). Additionally, Fenno (2003, 7) found that African American members of Congress often perceive their Black constituency extending beyond their geographical districts, to include Blacks nationwide, what some scholars have labeled surrogate representation. Arguably, the same may be true for Black mayors, especially those in the high-profile role of being the first Black mayor of their city. Hence, the confluence of life experience, feeling of connectedness to the group 'African American,' and commitment to represent Black interests, even within patterns of surrogate representation, makes Black mayors more likely to have strong personal interest in representing Black interests.

Critics of Shared Racial Experience

The argument for utilizing the assumption of shared racial experience as a basis to predict Black politicians' behavior has its critics. Gamble (2007) found that "theories that focus on shared experience ignore individual differences and the multiple and cross-cutting identities among members of marginalized groups,

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5 Additionally supportive scholarship suggests that African American mayors might actively pursue Black interest policies in non-majority Black cities because of their feeling of connectedness to other African Americans (Dawson 1994). Other research has found that many Blacks have that connection because of social, political, and economic differences between themselves and Whites (Tate 1993, 21–29).

locking group members into essentialized identities and fixed policy perspectives" (Phillips 1995). Additionally, some urban scholars have argued that contemporary Black mayors face more challenges than Black mayors first elected in major cities (Nelson 2006). Hence, even with shared experience and history, Black mayors, faced with greater challenges and a majority White electorate may not be willing or able to actively pursue Black interests.

Medium-Sized Cities

This research briefly examines select cities in the United States that are medium-sized and applies the representative efforts by Blacks mayors to universalize the interests of Blacks within that context. With the exception of few scholars (e.g., Bowers and Rich 2000), urbanists have long ignored the public policy impact of Black mayors in medium-sized cities, especially as it relates to their representation of Black interests. Yet according to the U.S. Census Bureau, many Americans live in medium-sized cities, cities with a population of less than 500,000:

City Populations in the United States

Number of Cities	Population Bracket
263	Over 100,000
228	100,000-500,000
203	100,000-300,000
60	300,000-8 million

Thus, limiting studies of Black mayoral governance to cities of 500,000 or more ignores generalizability for many in the population who live in cities of 100,000 or more.

Although, medium-sized cities are not often studied in urban politics, their study may help predict mayoral action given trends in other cities. To date, scholarship that has focused on mayors of medium-sized cities, has examined their leadership styles generally (Svara 1987, 1990, 1994), the impact on Black social change over time (Button 1989), or leadership in respect to a specific issue (Bowers and Rich, Eds., 2000).[6] While the authors take great skill in

6 Peter Burns' Electoral Politics Is Not Enough (2006) surveys the responsiveness of medium-sized city governments to minority interests. While the focus is on

structuring rigorous research that explains the stylistic approaches, structural conditions, and singular issue responsiveness over time under which the mayors win elections and govern, omitted is a detailed analysis of responsiveness to the concerns and issues of Blacks' quality of life.

This is increasingly significant as Black mayors govern cities that are the size of cities in which most of the world's urban population resides. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat World Population Prospects 2005 Revision found that, "almost half of humanity lives in cities" and "small cities, that is, those with a population of fewer than 500,000 people, were the place of residence of about fifty-one percent of all urban dwellers in the world in 2005. Thus, the majority of urban dwellers lived in fairly small urban settlements."[7] Their 2006 revision was even more compelling - projecting that by 2030, eighty-seven percent of residents of the United States will be urban dwellers. Currently, in the United States, nearly fifty percent live in small and medium-sized cities. Therefore, the actions of mayors who govern within these city contexts arguably have relevance to a larger number of people than studies limited to larger cities.

The Human Relations Approach Toward Governing

With a focus on medium-sized cities in the United States and considering the changing demographics, this article encourages mayors and scholars to think beyond the Black-White, 'us vs. them' dyad. Instead, with examples from two mayors, the hope is to envision the development of policies that can both integrally serve the constituencies with the most need (including, but not limited to Blacks) and everyone simultaneously. Adapting what scholar Cornel West suggests in *Race Matters* (1993) is a human relations approach to solving the pervasive problems that plague Blacks in many American cities is important in a mayor's effort to actively pursue, and implement policies and programs designed to improve

medium sized cities, the analysis is based on interviews of politicians and civic leaders beyond the mayor's office.

7 United Nations' Department of Economic and Social Affairs
Population Division accessed via http://www.un.org/esa/population/unpop.htm.
Retrieved 2009-06-20

the quality of life of Black residents. The human relations approach is best defined as governing directed with an explicit appeal to people's common humanity.

For West, a new framework is needed that views Blacks and their presence in American life as American. Such a framework should "begin with a frank acknowledgment of the basic humanness and Americanness of each of us."[8] Other scholars have also called for a full integration of Black Americans' social and economic problems into the patchwork of American society (Cunnigen 2006). While West's and Cunnigen's observations, hereby labeled a human relations approach, are conceptual in nature, they can be applied to Black mayoral representation of Black interests in non-majority Black cities. The hypothesis generated is that in their efforts to represent Blacks by universalizing their interests in the non-majority Black context, Black mayors may find success in appealing to the shared and common, human condition of life experience. This approach may allow the mayors to actively pursue Black interests without their majority White constituency feeling threatened that their interests are taking a back seat.

Additionally, this human relations approach, if embraced by mayors, could have a direct racial benefit without the specter of preferential treatment. Notably, this approach contrasts with the 'best way' suggested by some scholars to help the disadvantaged (Wilson 1990). The human relations approach, on the other hand, has the potential to help scholars understand how a Black mayor can actively pursue policies and programs that work to improve the quality of life of Black Americans in the twenty-first century. Elected in cities with comparable demographics to the nation's first Black mayors, many Black mayors in the modern era govern in the non-majority Black context with favorable race relations vis-à-vis the nation's first Black mayors. With a new century of Black mayors came a change in perspective as to how to garner support for policy and program development in the interests of Blacks.

Black Mayors and the Representation of Black Interests

There is a large body of scholarship on the governing of Black

8 Ibid, 8.

mayors and their Black communities (Nelson 1982; Woody 1982; Piliawsky 1985; Stone 1989; Sonenshein 1993; Orr 1999; Reed 1999; Rich 1999; Moore 2002; Bowers and Baker 2000; Perry 1996; Grenell and Gabris 2000; Thompson 2006). Much of the literature, however, focuses on single-issues, such as education, or housing development, for example.

While scholars recognize the structural limitations Black mayors face (Reed 1999; Keller 1978; Nelson 1992; Nelson and Meranto 1977; Preston 1976; Nelson 2006), they also have found that even given such constraints, they can impact policy. Urban scholars have attempted to ferret out those conditions that are more likely to lead to Black and White mayors having an impact on local policy. Pressman (1972) introduced a model that focused on the financial, political, and personal resources available to a mayor and found, however, that there are significant informal attributes or resources at a mayor's disposal that, when used effectively, can make up for the limited 'formal' authority of some mayors.

On the other hand, several Black mayors have been able to make some substantive changes for African-American residents within the formal constraints of the mayor's office. A number of these mayors did not enjoy many of the preconditions laid out by Pressman (1972). Harold Washington's tenure in Chicago is a vivid example. Washington is generally recognized as having put in place policies that -- had he not faced an untimely death -- could have potentially helped Blacks in Chicago. Though Washington enjoyed Pressman's preconditions such as mayoral jurisdiction to create social welfare programming, and a full time salary as mayor, in many efforts he lacked support from a key governing body, the Chicago city council. Washington also inherited a city without a financial surplus.

Nevertheless, as Judd and Swanstrom (1994, 384) note of his first term, Washington was able to "create a more open and participatory atmosphere in city government" by including numerous agencies and community organizations in his office's consultations about social policy, housing and economic development policy. Many of these groups were predominantly African American in composition. As Mier and Moe (1991, 77) found, a critical feature of Washington's

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plan for economic development involved minority participation. The number of minority firms receiving city contracts increased from nine to sixty, in a three-year period under Washington.

Jones (1978, 116) observed a similar network of support for Maynard Jackson in Atlanta after his administration's creation of an office of contract compliance. The result of this policy change was that minority participation in city contract work rose from two percent soon after Jackson took office to thirteen percent near the end of his first term. Noticeably, Jackson faced opposition, especially from Atlanta's White business elite. However, Jones notes that Jackson rebuffed some criticism and attempts at stalling the project, and others like it, in large part because of active groups who assisted his efforts. Jackson's success in reordering some of Atlanta's municipal priorities toward the benefit of the Black community was a large result of ideologically congruent, active group participation. According to Jones, mayoral constraints and limitations make it difficult for Black mayors to reorder "existing priorities." Nevertheless, "a more equitable share for the black community within existing priorities is possible."

Nelson (1982, 191) writes about Carl Stokes' ability to garner funds for the construction of 5,496 low to moderate income housing units by the end of his second term, despite the resistance from city council. Even in the face of "threats," Stokes "assisted black businesses by initiating a policy that encouraged competitive bidding by black firms for city contracts." Nelson credits Stokes' "activist-entrepreneur style of leadership." In short, many scholars have concluded that there is room for a Black mayor, even in a non-majority Black city, facing considerable financial and political opposition, to actively pursue policies that are designed to improve the lives of Black residents. In general, the literature speaks to the limitations of Black mayors to affect change in policy, but also to the possibilities, within such constraints, that are available to mayors. Whether they adopt a leadership style of Stokes' "activist-entrepreneur" approach or enjoy much of Pressman's preconditions, Black mayors are capable of producing such change for Blacks. As Reed (1999, 98) eloquently summarizes, "it is not necessarily the case that those [Black mayoral] regimes are so tightly hemmed

in by absolute paucity of fiscal resources that they have no span for intervention." To create more favorable conditions to implement such policy, we have seen that Black mayors benefit largely from soliciting the support of active groups who share their administration's goals. These supportive groups may be a key determinant of a Black mayor's success at such efforts.

The Independent Variables

Based on the literature, I was able to generate the following propositions about conditions under which Black mayors of non-majority Black cities are more or less likely to actively pursue policies and programs designed to improve the quality of life of Black residents:

More Likely

Proposition 1: Elected in liberal cities (Browning, Marshall and Tabb, 1984); Proposition 3: Institutional and formal powers of a strong-mayor system (Svara 1994; Pressman 1972); Proposition 4: African-American predecessor(s) (Nelson 2006); Proposition 6: Large White middle class population (Stone 1989); Proposition 7: Active, mobilized and organized Black community (Nelson 2006, Burns 2006); Proposition 8: Black City Council Members (Jones 1976; Karnig and Welch 1980); Proposition 9: Major Newspaper Endorsements (Tate 2004; Burns 2006); Proposition 10: Large proportion of Latinos.

Less Likely

Proposition 2: Elected in racially divided election campaign (Metz and Tate 1995, Perry 1996); Propositions 5: Large working class White population (Huckfeldt and Kohfeld 1989).

This article details Black mayors' active pursuit of Black interests by universalizing the interests of Blacks. The evidence for the universalizing claim is derived from the application of the propositions and additional factors that may impact Black mayors' efforts to address Black interests to the mayoral administrations of two Black mayors in Ohio. The selected case studies of medium-sized, non-majority Black cities of Dayton and Toledo, Ohio and the focus on the tenure of the Toledo's first Black mayor, Jack Ford (2002-2006) and Dayton's third Black mayor Rhine McLin

(2002-present), are tested examples that support the findings of universalizing Black interests within this article.

Dayton and Toledo, Ohio

The selection of Dayton and Toledo Ohio as case studies was significant. Dayton, in southwest Ohio, has an estimated population of 155,461 (45% Black), and Toledo, in northwest Ohio, has an estimated population of 316,851 (26% Black). Hence, the two cities are comparable in population to a number of cities in which many Americans live. Second, the cases of Dayton and Toledo are representative of a wave of Black mayors elected in other cities in Ohio in the twenty-first century. As the following table indicates, most every major city in the state of Ohio elected a Black mayor in the twenty-first century:

21st Century Black Mayors in Ohio

Given the noted demographics of the two cities and the regional electoral context in which Ford and McLin governed, their efforts may be representative of options available to other mayors interested in representing Black interests in cities with similar demographics.

Changing Local Demographics and their Implications for Black Mayoral Politics

Changes in the U.S. population in the last two decades have eroded or are potentially eroding a key variable in the election of Black mayors – a Black population majority. With cities losing Black population while gaining Whites and Latinos, the conditions under which Black candidates run for mayor in many U.S. cities is quite different from the experience of the first elected Black mayors. For example, Washington, D.C. lost sixteen percent of its Black population since 1990. Since 2000, the Black population decreased by six percent. Yet, during the same time period, the District experienced increases in White population, with a fourteen percent increase since 2000. As of 2007, the District had a Black population of fifty-five percent as compared to a Black population over seventy percent in 1980.[9]

9 Washington Post, "D.C. May Be Losing Status As a Majority-Black City" May

Term(s)	Mayor	City	Notes
1999-present	Michael Coleman	Columbus	City's first Black mayor.
2002-2006	Jack Ford	Toledo	City's first Black mayor
2002-present	Rhine McLin	Dayton	City's first female mayor
2006-present	Mark Mallory	Cincinnati	City's first popularly elected Black mayor
2006-present	Frank Jackson	Cleveland	City's third Black mayor
2006-present	Jay Williams	Youngstown	City's first Black mayor

Atlanta, Georgia also experienced a loss of Black population. Since 1990, the White population increased six percent, totaling thirty-seven percent of the population. Black population during the same period decreased nearly twelve percent, to fifty-five percent in 2006. Between 1990 and 2006, the Latino population also increased to 2008 levels approaching six percent. According to Atlanta mayor, Shirley Franklin, the Black population shifted from nearly a two-thirds majority of seventy percent in 1980 to less than sixty percent post 2000.[10] These data are suggestive of trends where, if they continue, ambitious Black candidates for mayor will find their electoral coalitions comprised of increased numbers of Whites and Latinos in areas where Blacks have dominated for decades.

A decline in Black population across many cities is not the entire story, however. In some cities, the total share of Black population has increased as many Whites moved out, while the White population in other cities declined (Brookings Institution 2001). The White/Black dyad concerning population suggests varying shifts – some cities lose Black population while gaining Whites; others cities lose White and Black population. In either event, the compelling story is the fluctuation of White and Black populations in many U.S. cities, coupled with an increase in Latino population – although only marginal in some cities. One of the

17, 2007.
10 "Atlanta Mayor: Shrinking Black Population Could Hurt Social Policies," Cox News Service, June 2, 2007

most important observations, then, is a loss in the share of the percentage of the total population for African Americans for many cities – whether or not Black population declines -- but especially so, when it does.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau and survey reports, Newark, New Jersey had a Black population of nearly sixty percent in 1990, yet by 2008 the Black population declined to fifty-three percent. Rising crime and Black middle class exodus out of the city limits has been cited as a possible reason for the decline. New Orleans, Louisiana is another example, where, in part due to the 2005 Hurricane Katrina, Black population declined. A survey commissioned by several state agencies and reported in the *New York Times* indicated that the city pre-Katrina had a Black population of sixty-seven percent, and post-Katrina, the population in 2008 was approximately forty-six percent. Some scholars cite Blacks' exit to the suburbs as the reason for numeric decline (Frasure 2007). For example, Blacks in Washington, D.C. are said to be moving into suburbs such as Prince George's County, Maryland, whereas Atlanta, Georgia's Blacks are said to be moving into suburbs such as Stone Mountain and Decatur. Thus, while the reasons for decline in Black populations across many cities vary, the fact of the decline in Blacks' share of the population remains.

As a result, given the changing demographics in many cities, it is expected those Black mayors will soon govern cities with non-majority Black populations, if they do not already. Thus, one reason why it is important to study two medium-sized non-majority Black cities and their Black mayors' efforts to address Black interests is to contribute to our understanding of the implications of these national trends. Given the entrenched history of Black politics in many cities nationwide, even with the pending shift to non-majority Black status, those mayors will likely be expected to continue to actively pursue Black interests.

At issue, is how, if at all, the representation of Black interests is changing. The demographic trends indicate that researchers may no longer be able to count on descriptive characteristics as a proxy for a Black politician's promotion of Black interests. With many cities changing from Black majority populations to Black minority

populations, Black mayors will increasingly find themselves having difficulty justifying promotion of Black interests, at the exclusion of White and Latino interests, for example. Given the increasing diversity of America's population, the skill of advancing one group's interests becomes more complex, especially when it comes to White v. Black or Black v. Latino relative to the allocation of resources.

Assessing Black Quality of Life

In an effort to better code and define particular mayoral efforts as substantively meaningful attempts to improve "Black quality of life," I developed a political typology that can be used to classify a given mayor's activities. The placement of activities within a particular category structures the range of representative efforts from the largely descriptive to the seminally substantive. This range serves as the frame for describing what constitutes quality-of-life improvements. I have conceptualized five essential categories. For any given mayoral effort, a value of one is low, indicating that the mayor made only a relatively symbolic attempt to improve Black quality of life, while a value of five is high, since activities placed in category five are presumably the more difficult to pursue. Each category provides a context describing how a mayor might achieve his or her goals and indicates how he or she has prioritized policy decisions through administrative management.

1. The Politics of Shared Racial Experience. Evidence of mayoral responsiveness and recognition of Black constituent concerns is manifested in symbolic gestures situated within the context of shared racial experience. One example in which a mayor expresses his or her shared racial experience with his or her constituents is Harold Washington's 1983 campaign slogan, "It's our turn" (Kleppner 1985, 155). Another might be the mayor's officiating in the marriage ceremony of his Black constituents (Lane 2001, 61). Noticeably, in these examples, the mayor and his constituents are drawn together by Black Americans' common experience of slavery and institutionalized racism, not by their class or other life attributes. It is difficult to measure how strongly such shared Black experiences are reflected in a mayor's active pursuit of certain policy priorities, however. Within this context, Blacks

are also diverse, and there are obviously individual differences in how much intensity Black mayors will exercise in addressing Black constituent interests.

2. Access and Opportunity: The Policy Incorporation of Black Interests. Evidence of Black mayors' attempts at incorporating and mobilizing Blacks most notably includes their appointment and hiring of qualified African Americans in visible, significant positions across the spectrum of city government. In the example of hiring practices, the Black mayor is presumably making a political and economic contribution to the lived experiences of qualified African Americans. Establishing employment opportunities for some Blacks is an expression of shared racial experience, particularly when Blacks were not given the same level of access and opportunity in prior or subsequent administrations of White mayors. A mayor's active pursuit of hiring and appointing qualified Black men and women, then, makes a difference for politics and power.

3. The Politics of Constituent Service. In this context, evidence of a Black mayor's active pursuit of policies and programs that are designed to improve the quality of life of Black residents is more concrete. Constituent services include the bulk of municipal service, including but not limited to, neighborhood street-cleaning, paving, and development, trash removal, snow plowing, tree stump removals and improved street lights and signs.

4. Programs for Black Middle-Class and/or Low-Income Residents. Evidence in this policy or programmatic arena is multilayered, as the beneficiaries might extend beyond the Black community. In the allocation of city contracts, for example, are contracts awarded according to the city percentage requirement by the city's good faith goals? Does the mayor monitor the allocation of the contracts in a way that is fair and equitable to ensure minority contractors have access and opportunity to apply?[11] In a community where African

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11 For example, according to Mier and Moe (1991), Harold Washington increased the contracts awarded to minority firms in the city of Chicago from 9 to 60 in a three-year period. However, we have no idea to what extent this meets a city ordinance or good faith goal that requires a certain percentage of minority participation in the contracting process. Without that clear understanding, the stated increase during those three Washington years could be substantively meaningful or simply symbolic. It could be significant, for example, if minority contractors received the average of the total dollar amount relative to their

Americans are disproportionately poor, moreover, what programs has the mayor introduced that may have broad appeal and at the same time strongly meet the particular interests of Blacks? Policies that are designed to provide neighborhood redevelopment and renovation, for example, such as HUD's HOPE VI programs, may have broad appeal to low-income residents and at same time significantly meet the interests of Blacks. This area of policy concern might largely be considered community development. Brown (2007, 26) is an example of scholarship that focuses on such social welfare–defined policies and programs.

5. *Substantive Management Priorities.* Finally, mayors may actively pursue expensive social welfare policies and programs that work to improve the quality of life of African Americans. These policies and programs may improve access to health care, (such as the introduction of a health care network for the uninsured or a citywide smoking ban), or they may include increased employment opportunities for minority youth, or the substantive support of the financial and academic status of the city's public school system.

Each category in the typology reflects a different level of responsiveness to Black citizens' interests. The typology provides a structured mechanism from which to evaluate the extent and breadth of mayors such as Ford and McLin and their active pursuit of policies and programs that work to improve the quality of life of Black residents.

Evaluating the Propositions

Earlier, I generated ten propositions derived from the literature review that are designed to gage the conditions under which Black mayors would actively pursue the interests of Blacks in non-majority Black cities. My analysis of the mayoral efforts of Ford and McLin identified that some of these propositions were confirmed, while others remained unconfirmed. Moreover, findings were unearthed that were not originally expected.

Confirmed Propositions

The evidence from the case studies of Dayton and Toledo supports three propositions. Proposition three, that Black mayors

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proportion within the city's population.

who have the institutional and formal powers of a strong-mayor system are more likely to actively pursue policies designed to improve the quality of life of Black residents, was demonstrated. While both Ford and McLin pursued Black interests, Ford did so more substantively, and it seems this difference was due to the presence of the institutional and formal powers of a strong-mayor system in Toledo but not in Dayton.

Proposition six, that Black mayors who govern in cities with a large White middle-class population are more likely to actively pursue policies designed to improve the quality of life of Black residents, was also confirmed. Toledo had a higher household median income and higher White median family income (in 1999 dollars) than Dayton, Ohio. While the findings do not tell us whether it was this variable that determined Ford's greater pursuit of Black interests, the fact of the larger White middle-class population in the city where the mayor was found to have more actively pursued Black interests is notable.

Finally, proposition eight, that Black mayors who serve on city councils in which African-Americans are a majority or a substantial minority are more likely to actively pursue policies designed to improve the quality of life of Black residents, was confirmed. When Ford was mayor of Toledo, the city council had three Black members, two elected from districts and one elected at-large. The presence of Black members of council had a significant impact on the passage of the few mayoral agenda items that needed council approval, though Ford did also needed the support of White liberal members of council. For McLin, the city commission had two additional Black council members, though one was not an avid supporter of her 2001 election. Additionally, on some issues, the Black commission members did not support McLin's agenda, whereas two liberal White members did. Hence, the presence of Black council members is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for mayors of non-majority Black cities to actively pursue Black interests.

Four Additional Findings

In addition to the confirmation of three propositions, four

additional findings were determined to be significant. The four major conditions under which a Black mayor of a non-majority Black city actively pursues policies and programs that work to improve the quality of life of African Americans are: the presence of a strong mayor form of government, the presence of ideologically congruent council members, the existence of effective business relationships, and a mayoral personality and style that is beneficial to community members' perception of the mayor.

The finding of the importance of a strong-mayor form of government confirms much previous research. The finding is significant in the case studies; it confirms the importance of mayoral structure in medium-sized cities, as well as the limitations of a weak-mayor system, the system of government under which most Black mayors govern.[12] The finding also helps to explain the consequences of high expectations. If a majority of Black mayors govern within a system where the mayor is structurally unable to make significant strides to meet Black expectations, Blacks may continue to grade Black mayors less favorably than their White predecessors.

The finding that ideology trumps race to some extent in respect to council members' support of mayoral agenda items is significant because it demonstrates the usefulness of the political representation debate in political science literature. One school argues that race trumps party (Tate 2004), while the other argues that party trumps race (Swain 1996). The finding in Toledo and Dayton, however, was that the presence of minority councilors mattered, but not as an end of itself. Rather, mayors needed the support of ideologically congruent councilors of other racial groups to ensure enough votes to pass agenda items. Thereby, the finding, in part, confirms both of the opposing arguments within the political representation debate.

The finding that the presence of effective business relationships

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12 For more information, see "The Future of Local Government Administration: The Hansell Symposium," Washington, D.C.: International City and County Management Association, 2002; and Svara, J. "Effective mayoral leadership in council-manager cities: Reassessing the facilitative model," National Civic Review, July 2003 Volume 92 Issue 2, Pages 157 - 172; Statement regarding the number of Black mayors in weak mayor systems is based on November 2008 data from the National Conference of Black Mayors website indicating the number of Black mayors of cities with population over 50,000.

plays a significant role in whether or not a Black mayor advocates for Black interests in non-majority Black cities confirms earlier scholarship which found that the business community was integral to a Black mayor's success (Stone 1989). Additionally significant is the finding that Black mayors who are not perceived to have an understanding of business will be limited in their ability to finance desired city programs or a re-election campaign. The fact that the business community, including union leadership, can be a large contributor to mayoral campaigns in medium-sized cities with union cultures like Toledo and Dayton is important, as it pinpoints the electoral and governing coalitions necessary for substantive change: both coalitions benefit from having business members playing active, supportive roles.

Finally, the finding that the mayor's personality style and approach toward governing plays a significant role in efforts to impact Black quality of life is significant because it confirms previous scholarship on the roles and different types of mayors, given varying governmental power structures (Kotter and Lawrence 1974; Svara 1994). Additionally, the finding suggests that the extent to which a Black mayor is able to advocate for Black interests is largely within the mayor's own control. While structural impediments are often insurmountable within a term or two, a mayor does have the ability to affect the way he or she is perceived by others.

The Focus on Common Humanity: Universalizing the Interests of Blacks

Jack Ford and Rhine McLin are found to be examples of mayors who did not explicitly advocate for race policies. However, neither did they seek the fulfillment of race-specific policies by deemphasizing race (or replacing a racial label with the 'urban' label) — through deracialization.[13] Rather, Ford and McLin are examples of twenty-first-century Black mayors of non-majority Black cities who were successful in their active pursuit of policies and programs designed to improve the quality of life of Blacks because they noted the racial significance

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13 For an example of how the Deracialization approach was and is used by scholars to explain the political behavior of Black elected officials see McCormick II and Jones (1993: 66-84) and for a more recent examination see Persons (2007, 92-94).

of supported policies and programs where appropriate.[14]

The Universalism and Targeted Policy Debate

The question of how best to implement social welfare and urban public policy initiatives has most recently been debated in terms of initiatives' universal or targeted impact and has received much scholarly attention.[15] Sociologist William Julius Wilson and political scientist/sociologist Theda Skocpol are often cited as supporting a universalistic approach to public policy implementation (Midgley, et al 2000; Greenstein 1991). Economically based, universally applied social programs, Wilson argues, will address racially disparate problems in inner-city communities and the "substantive inequality" that would remain if the policy focus was limited to race-specific policies and means-tested goals and objectives.[16] Consequently, universalistic policies and programs can have targeted benefits for African Americans in the urban context.[17]

Focusing largely on Social Security and Medicare, Skocpol (1991, 1995) has agreed with Wilson that social welfare and urban public policy programs require universalistic benefits. Hence, scholars who champion the universalism approach toward social welfare and urban public policy programs that may benefit particular constituencies like Blacks allege that policymakers' efforts should

14 A thorough analysis of Ford and McLin's policy actions and program developments on behalf of Black interests is detailed in my dissertation.

15 See, for example, Grogan and Patashnik 2003; Anttonen 2002; Manza 2000; Mkandawire 2005; Barnett, et al 2004; Baker and Feldman 2004; Dynarski 2002; Roberts 1996; Skocpol 1990, 1991, 1995; Wilson 1987, 1991, 1996; Greenstein 1991; Wilkins 1989; Massey and Denton 1988, 1989, 1994; Massey and Eggers 1990; Boger 2000; Hasenfeld 1997; Midgley, et al 2000; Rosanvallon and Harshav 2000.

16 Ibid, 146.

17 In the urban context, Stone's (1989) regime theory perhaps is comparable. Regime theory assumes a political economy perspective and maintains that class is the leading variable to consider in urban politics. It follows, then, that proponents of regime theory may favor a class-based approach to solve urban social problems, including those which disproportionately plague Black urban constituencies. However, Stone's view is not uniformly followed. For example, the views of scholars such as Nelson (2000) and Kraus (2004), who find that the approach does not adequately address the racial variable prevalent in the urban context, are perhaps most comparable with scholars like Greenstein (1991) who finds universal policies to address national social problems through public policy are limited.

be guided by fundamental values and moral obligations that are alleged to be monolithically understood or accepted.

Not all scholars agree with Skocpol and Wilson.[18] For example, Greenstein (1991) argues that Skocpol makes incongruent comparisons between universal programs that provide entitlements to targeted programs that do not. Greenstein finds that Skocpol overstates the success of universal programs by "using programs for the elderly as her primary example and describes how Skocpol compares programs that provide entitlements for the elderly with programs that are not focused on the elderly and "are not considered earned benefits."[19]

Opponents of Universalism: Universalism within Targeting or Targeted Universalism

Similar to Greenstein's proposal to combine the targeted and universal approaches in an effort to substantively address social welfare policies, powell (2008) has argued that universal laws and policies do not effectively address the needs of Black and urban communities. powell argues for targeted universalism in race politics, in which arguments are made in way that is racially inclusive rather than polarizing. powell's reference to "targeted universalism" is similar to Skocpol's notion of "targeting within universalism," wherein extra benefits are directed to low-income groups within the context of a universal policy design (Skocpol 1991: 414; Midgley et al. 2000; Grogan and Patashnik 2003).[20] As an example of targeting within universalism, Skocpol cites the hypothetical development of a family security program as an extension of pre-existing social security programs for the elderly (429).

powell's (sic) targeted universalism has a different focus. He describes why universal, race-neutral policies are ineffective in race politics:

18 For example, see Wilkins (1989), Massey and Denton (1988, 1989, 1994), and Massey and Eggers (1990).

19 Greenstein, 444.

20 The inverse of 'targeting within universalism' is 'universalism within targeting,' "a pattern that can arise whenever a targeted program's threshold of means-tested income is set high enough that a significant number of people from mainstream backgrounds qualify" (Grogan and Patashnik 2003; Gilbert 2001). An example of such a program, cited by Grogan and Patashnik, is the reliance of senior citizens in nursing homes on Medicaid.

Policies that are designed to be universal too often fail to acknowledge that different people are situated differently. For racially marginalized populations, particularly those who live in concentrated-poverty neighborhoods, there are multiple reinforcing constraints. For any given issue — whether it is employment rates, housing, incarceration, or health care — the challenge is to appreciate how these issues interact and accumulate over time, with place as the linchpin holding these arrangements together. Universal policies that are nominally race-neutral and that focus on specific issues such as school reform will rarely be effective because of the cumulative cascade of issues that encompass these neighborhoods.[21]

Thus, powell argues for the necessity of a policy and programmatic approach that acknowledges that any social problems affect more than just Blacks, yet still require targeted implementation.

In addition, proposed remedies, such as affirmative action, should examine a broader array of factors than race alone.[22] powell's "targeted universalism" is a strategy that achieves what racialized politics attempted in the 1960s and 1970s with, for example, programs focused on urban renewal. In a new era in which scholars at least question how a preference for diversity in the job sector may negatively impact Blacks (Jaynes and McKinney 2003), powell (2008) recognizes that racialized efforts are ineffective and that universal interests deny the specter of race.

powell's concept of targeted universalism is a political strategy and governing approach that recognizes the need for a universal platform that is simultaneously responsive to the needs of the particular. By extension, then, targeted universalism is a rhetorical strategy and also potentially a public policy program development strategy wherein policy output is determined in part by how a program effectively can be described as benefiting all citizens, yet

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21 john a. powell, "Race, Place and Opportunity" The American Prospect, September 22, 2008
22 "Revisiting 'The Rage of a Privileged Class," Ellis Cose, Newsweek, February 2, 2009

with a targeted focus toward the problems of specific groups.

powell cites Los Angeles mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and Chicago mayor Harold Washington as examples of public officials who actively utilized the approach successfully: both of these men "built broad-based multi-racial, multi-class coalitions and succeeded by keeping both race and class issues in focus . . . There has never been–at least in 20th Century America–a progressive political movement built solely on class. To inoculate such efforts from divisive race-baiting, there must be discourse to inspire whites to link their fates to nonwhites" (powell and Menendian 2006).[23] What powell considers targeted universalism I characterize as Toledo Mayor Jack Ford's and Dayton Mayor Rhine McLin's efforts to universalize the interests of Blacks. In these attempts, the mayors garnered White support for seemingly racialized initiatives. In the context of cities with similar demographics, similar evidences of these mayors' efforts may be found in other cities. If followed, the Black mayors' reelection may be threatened, as McCormick and Jones (1993, 78) note, however, at the very least they have initiated a discourse on racial equal opportunity that potentially can affect the city culture for years to come.

As proponents of targeted universalism have argued, though, while an opportunity for positive discourse may develop out of a targeted universalistic approach, the approach has significant problems. As Young (1990) has indicated, notions of what is universal are understood insofar as they stand in contrast to background assumptions that are particular, or non-universal. When it comes to universal public policies and how best to implement them, however, often such policies, even if targeted under the framework of universalism, tend to be perceived as racially polarizing.

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23 I cannot definitely describe the examples of the mayors' efforts powell lists. However, Washington's neighborhood improvement program in Chicago and William A. Johnson, Jr.'s similar program in Rochester appears to be examples of universal programs that benefited all city neighborhoods, but also provided resources to Black neighborhoods as well. For more information of Washington's neighborhood efforts, see Clavel and Wiewel (1991). For more information on Johnson's neighborhood efforts, see Clavel (2007). In both texts, the authors cite how the universal neighborhood programming, like Johnson's creation of Neighbors Building Neighborhoods, improved the quality of life in the city's minority neighborhoods.

President Johnson's aforementioned War on Poverty programs are one example: though these programs were promoted in universal language, many White citizens felt their tax dollars were being spent to benefit Black people. Some scholars have noted, moreover, that Aid to Families with Dependent Children, a universal program, came to be perceived as predominantly for the Black urban poor (Gilen 1999). Even though Blacks were disproportionately excluded from the program when it was first established, demographic changes and changes in the development of media led many Americans to believe poor Blacks were the dominant group affected by poverty. Thus, according to some scholars, most universal programs are de facto targeted or particular, either because of how they are perceived or in terms of how their benefits are implemented (see Lieberman 2001, 227-28). In the final analysis, then, it appears that particularly at the implementation stage, targeted universalism can become racialized.

What remains is that the practice of universalizing the interests of Blacks is not the same thing as deracialization, and as a result, is conceivably a better option for mayors, even if its targeted focus is not perfect. The universalizing approach is different, as the process includes Black elected officials that take the interests of Black constituents, develop particularized policy actions and program developments, and popularize them by rhetorically advocating for these interests in a way that does not deemphasize race or alienate all Whites. The context in which this process functioned in the case studies was one in which the mayors emphasized citizens' common humanity. Hence, in addition to noting the significance of race while supporting certain policies and programs, the mayors carefully tapped into the common humanity of city residents through strategic rhetorical framing, mainly in State of the City addresses and related speeches. As a result, the mayors received support for their causes in neighborhoods and groups not their own. Their approach is a good example of how to maintain some White electoral and governing support in a non-majority Black city while at the same time, advocating for Black interests.[24]

24 The alternative approaches to universalizing the interests of Blacks are racialization and deracialization. However, the universalizing approach is likely the most effective of these three options. The racialization approach is largely ineffective not because it fails to produce substantive results but rather, due

While McCormick and Jones (1993) note that White support is necessary to implement a Black elected official's race-specific policies, the variable of political ideology is omitted in their analysis. As the case studies within this article showed when Black elected officials defuse race in their pursuit of public office, yet not in their policy implementation after they win, White liberals may support a Black mayor's Black interest agenda items. In the modern era, shared ideology between a Black politician and a White politician may trump Whites' supposed race-based opposition to Black-friendly policies. Ford and McLin's ability to court White support for their efforts on minority contracting and housing, respectively, stand out as examples of White support for programs and policies that had the effect of improving Black quality of life.

Though the racialization approach may be more effective at substantively addressing Black interests (Cruse 1990), the social and political climate of the twenty-first century largely makes the effective utilization of that approach impossible. Moreover, while the deracialization approach is likely the most popular among Black elected officials, it has been shown, at least in the case of Atlanta, to have limited effects on disadvantaged Blacks (Sjoquist 1988; Stone 1989; Jones 1990). Additionally, the approach inherently assumes that Whites in general are against race-specific policies, which ignores the ideological congruence of some Whites and Blacks. In other words, liberal White policy makers and voters have supported the implementation of Black programs directly through public policy or indirectly by supporting a Black candidate whom they perceived might implement such policies (Browning,

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to a cultural and demographic shift that has occurred since the 1970s. The deracialization, or race-neutral, universal perspective, suggests that race-specific issues are polarizing in campaign rhetoric and governance and that race-specific rhetoric must be defused and avoided by political actors. I argue that this approach is increasingly exhausted as well. The fact that this approach attempts to transcend race-specific policy in favor of mobilizing a diverse coalition of electoral and governing support suggests that it places any direct attention to racial disparities and municipal problems that may disproportionately affect one race more than another out of bounds. Yet deracialized policies often manage to help the Black community only to a limited extent. For example, the approach, to which is famously attributed the rise of the Black middle class and Black political governance in Atlanta, has noticeably had little effect on the city's poorer Black community (Sjoquist 1988; Stone 1989; Jones 1990).

Marshall, and Tabb 1984, 220). Hence, while Kinder and Sanders (1996), Feldman and Huddy (2005), and others have noted Whites' "racial resentment" of race-specific policies, some Whites who can be defined as ideologically liberal have in fact supported race-specific policies and programming.[25]

The Genesis of the Humanity-Based Approach

Cornel West arguably began the common-humanity, human-relations theoretical reasoning for public policy in *Race Matters* (1993). West argued that a new framework was needed in order to effectively engage in a serious discussion of race in America. He noted that, "we must begin not with the problems of black people, but with the flaws of American society" (6). To that end, West suggested that the new framework must include reference to our common humanity and he commented that any serious discussion of race in America should not be limited to the Black experience.

West suggested that to ignore race would be perilous, but he also understood that explicit racial appeals had exhausted themselves in favor of a process that invokes the shared human experience. Thus, he argued that a new framework must recognize the role of race while not exploiting it. In his estimation, what is to be done is to

> admit that the most valuable sources for help, hope, and power consist of ourselves, and our common history . . .

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25 Other scholars have noted how Whites may find themselves supporting Black programs. Steele (1990) and Harvey and Oswald (2000), for example, found that Whites' guilt can lead to their support of programs, policies, and laws that support Blacks. Feldman and Huddy (2005), though, have more recently noted the connection between racial resentment and ideology, finding that "conservatives are more likely than liberals to hold highly individualistic beliefs" and that "there are fundamental differences in the character of racial resentment for liberals and conservatives" (178). In the final analysis, however, they maintain that "it is difficult to conclude that resentment constitutes a clear measure of ideology among conservatives." That finding is based on the fact that the authors found no evidence that "resentment was more closely tied to values like individualism and limited government for conservatives than for liberals." Yet the authors did find that conservative ideology "apparently [had] ideological effects on opposition [to a college scholarship program that is targeted at specific racial groups]." Consequently, while the correlation between racial resentment and prejudice remains undetermined, it remains the case that conservatives oppose race-specific policies and programs more than do liberals.

We must focus our attention on the public square — the common good that undergirds our national and global identities. The vitality of any public square ultimately depends on how much we *care* about the quality of our lives together. The neglect of our public infrastructure, for example . . . reflects not only our myopic economic policies, which impede productivity, but also the low priority we place on our common life."[26]

Perhaps without knowing it, West wrote the handbook for twenty-first-century Black mayors in non-majority Black cities in respect to how they might use the power of their positions to impact the substantive quality of life of Blacks.

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26   Ibid, 11-12.

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ETHNIC POLITICS, POLITICAL CORRUPTION AND POVERTY: PERSPECTIVES ON CONTENDING ISSUES AND NIGERIA'S DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESS

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Introduction

It is common to interpret African politics in tribal or ethnic terms. In the case of Nigeria, the dominant political behaviour can be defined, on the one hand, in terms of "incessant pressures on the state and the consequent fragmentation or prebendalizing of state-power" (Joseph, 1991:5). On the other hand, such practices can also be related to "a certain articulation of the factors of class and ethnicity" (ibid). For a better understanding of the essentials of Nigerian politics and its dynamics, it is necessary to develop a clearer perspective on the relationship between the two social categories mentioned above and their effects on such issues as political corruption and poverty.

In order to do the necessary formulation that we pointed out in the foregoing, we need to know a bit about the history of Nigeria's birth. Designed by alien occupiers, through the amalgamation of diverse ethnic nationalities in 1914, Nigeria, as it is, cannot be

called a nation-state. Although Nigerians are often encouraged to think of the country before their diverse ethnic origins, this seems to be an unattainable desire. Such a desire, if accomplished, will make Nigeria a unique African nation. However, behind the façade of ethnic politics in Nigeria, there are such other vested interests as class and personal considerations. Undoubtedly, all these combine to undermine the autonomy and functionality of the state in Nigeria. This, according to AbdulRazaq Olopoenia (1998:5), is so because "when the basis of social groups and their interest-group politics is ethnic fractionalization, a shared view of the imperative objectives of the power of the state will be difficult to establish".

Successive administrations in Nigeria have grappled with the challenge of overcoming the problems posed by this threat to democracy and development. Sadly, the net effect of the politics of ethnic fractionalization and its attendant consequences, especially political corruption, is the neglect of the mass of the Nigerian people. Hence, the country, which is ranked as a "developing nation" by the World Bank, United Nations (UN) and other international agencies, lacks the characteristics of a truly developing economy. I argued somewhere else that "despite the over $200 billion that the country has generated from the exportation of crude oil since the late 1950s, more than half of its citizens live in abject poverty" (D.A. Yagboyaju, 2005:69). The people lack access to clean water, electricity, health facilities, transportation, communications and are largely unemployed because of the inefficient and ineffective management of sensitive public institutions. Majority of Nigerians are, therefore, disenchanted, while some others have confronted the various illegitimate and illegal regimes that existed in the country's entire civil-military political cycle. And in response, the various administrations dealt either lightly or heavily with such expressions. While some cajoled, others harassed, intimidated or, even, crushed by maiming or eliminating the brains behind such opposition.

In the light of the foregoing, this paper seeks to examine the exploitation of ethnic politics by the political and power elites in Nigeria. Notably, it will critically analyze the seizure of the state by the privileged few who; in a civilian administration, should be the representatives of the people, and under military rule, claim to

intervene in order to correct certain anomalies caused by an inept civilian administration. In essence, it will discuss the endemic nature of political corruption and diversion of developmental funds, which have contributed to the soaring level of hunger, unemployment and poverty that characterize contemporary Nigeria.

Having done with the introductory aspect of the paper, the rest of the work is divided into four parts. These are namely, Definitional and Conceptual Issues; Characterization of the State and Politics in Nigeria; Matters Arising in the Fourth Republic; and Concluding Remarks.

Definitional and Conceptual Issues

The main concern of the paper in this section is the clarification of some relevant terms and concepts. These include ethnicity, political corruption and poverty. Such terms as "tribe", "inter tribal", "ethnic" and "ethnic nationalities" are, however, used interchangeably in the paper because of their closeness in meaning and interpretation. Perhaps the commonest explanation of what an ethnic group means is that which says that it comprises people with a common ancestry. In other words, this refers to people who can trace their pedigrees to one ancestor. Apparently, most definitions and explanations on the term, by social scientists, seem to draw from this perspective. Max Weber (1968:389), for instance, describes the ethnic group as "those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent".

However, more importantly and of greater relevance to this paper is its attribute which provokes deep emotions, "especially among people who belong to the same group within a bigger political community" (Yagboyaju, op cit). It is, for instance, not unusual to find members of a particular group evaluating other groups in terms of the standards of the former's own group. G.K. Nukunya (2003:21) describes this as "the subjective ascription of positive or negative attributes or characteristics to certain ethnic or tribal groups". In more specific terms, it means ascribing positive attributes to one's tribe or ethnic group and negative ones to others. When such attitudes are brought into the political arena, it is called ethnic politics.

Obviously, such attitudes pose debilitating threats to nation

building and national integration. And, in the case of Nigeria, with about 250 ethnic nationalities, the politics of ethnicity has contributed more than any other factor to mutual fear of domination and general suspicion that have pervaded the landscape. We shall discuss more of this later in the paper.

It may be useful to begin our explanations on the concept of political corruption by borrowing from the folklore method of explaining corruption. It describes corruption as a kind of behaviour which deviates from the norm actually prevalent or desired in a given context. In this sense, many of the popular explanations of scholars on the subject are useful and informative. Per Bairamian (1995:30), for instance, defines "something corrupt" as "receiving or offering some benefit as a reward or inducement to sway or deflect the receiver from the honest and impartial discharge of his duties". For Andrei Shleifer and Robert Vishny (1993:599), the "sale of government property for personal gain by public officers" constitutes corruption. The foregoing explanations, no doubt are a bit narrow for obvious reasons. A more encapsulating definition is that given by Morris Szeftel (1998:221). He defines corruption as the "misuse of public office and public responsibility for private (personal or sectional) gain". Apparently, all these explanations and many similar others can be placed under Femi Odekunle's (1991:13) broad classificatory model which includes "economic/ commercial corruption", "administrative/professional corruption", "bureaucratic corruption" etc. Although most of these types of corruption have unique features, they often overlap.

In specific terms, political corruption can be defined as:

> *any act of a political elite, civilian or military, or any other highly placed public official, aimed at changing the normal or lawful course of events especially when the perpetrator uses such a position of authority for the purpose of a personal or group interest (such as acquiring wealth, status or power), at the expense of other interested parties* (Yagboyaju, Op. Cit).

Our operational definition of political corruption is quite instructive. It crystallizes the abuse of public office and such other

privileges by public officials for their own personal benefits or for those of some other narrow interest groups that they may represent. It takes different shapes and dimensions, which include intimidation, cajoling and, even, elimination of any form of opposition to the various illegitimate and illegal administrations that have been in place since political independence in Nigeria.

The two main concepts discussed in the foregoings are, undoubtedly, at the core of the intimidating challenge posed by poverty in contemporary Nigeria. But before we analyse this, we need to have a clear understanding of what constitutes poverty. According to the World Bank and United Nations (UN), in 1990 and 1995 respectively, poverty has various manifestations which include "lack of income and productive resources sufficient to ensure sustainable livelihood, or prevent hunger, malnutrition, ill health, limited or lack of access to education and other basic services". Others include the prevention of "increased morbidity and mortality from illness, homelessness, unsafe and degraded environment, social discrimination and exclusion" (ibid).

Several other view points have extended the explanations on poverty beyond the level of lack of sustainable livelihood, that is so common, to that of disempowerment. A popular explanation in this respect is the one offered by J. Friedmann (1996:161 – 172). He argues that the issue of poverty as it relates to disempowerment can be viewed from three angles, namely "social, political and psychological". He expatiates on the various dimensions thus:

> *Social disempowerment refers to poor people's relative lack of access to the resources essential for the self-production of their livelihood; political disempowerment refers to poor people's lack of a clear political agenda and voice; and psychological disempowerment refers to poor people's internalized sense of worthlessness and passive submission to authority.*

Although the foregoing explanations on the subject of poverty may be clear enough, they are insufficient in measuring the level and other challenges of poverty. Undoubtedly, this latter aspect of the subject matter of poverty, is important for some reasons. One

of such reasons is that it should enable developmental efforts to be channeled to the right groups and locations.

In line with the foregoing, J. Foster, et al (1984:761-765) explain that the most frequently used measures include:

(i) the head count poverty index given by the percentage of the population that lives in the household with a consumption per capital less than the poverty line; (ii) poverty gap index which reflects the depth of poverty by taking into account, how far the average poor person's income is from the poverty line; and (iii) the distributional sensitive measure of squares poverty gap defined as the mean of the squared proportionate poverty gap which reflects the severity of poverty.

Incidentally, this position on the methods of measurement buttresses some past efforts, while it is also supported by other more recent ones. In these respects, S. Aluko (1975), E.C. Edozien (1975) and M.L. Ferreira (1996) are quite relevant. Similarly, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) applies the Human Poverty Index (HPI) and Capability Poverty Measure (CPM) for the same purpose of measuring poverty level.

For instance, UNDP adopted the HPI in a 1997 report, which covered three dimensions of poverty in Nigeria.

These are namely:

Survival deprivation: measured as percent of people not expected to survive to age 40;

Deprivation in education and knowledge: percent of adults who are illiterate and;

Deprivation in economic provisioning: a weighted average of percentage population without access to safe water and health services, and percentage of underweight children under five years of age.

In more specific terms, the composite index showed that over the period 1990 – 96 "the intensity of deprivation and poverty in Nigeria was about the average for sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and was further away from the best performing SSA country (Mauritius) than was to the worst performer (Niger Republic)".

In effect, the foregoing, according to Olopoenia (1998:9), means that "the higher a country's HPI the more intensive is the degree of deprivation and hence poverty". In other words it means that Nigeria, in spite of its "phenomenal earnings from the exploration and exportation of crude oil, its great human resources and other extensive potentialities, is still predominantly poor" (Yagboyaju, op cit). Undoubtedly, this position of things depicts the character of a country that is yet to properly penetrate its society, and one which is also confronted by the challenge of democratic consolidation. We can have a better understanding by analyzing the character of Nigeria itself.

Characterization of the State and Politics in Nigeria

It may be appropriate to ask whether there is a nexus between the character of a state and such contending issues as ethnic politics, political corruption and poverty. Certainly there is a direct connection between the character of a state and the latter issues.

In the case of Nigeria, the character of the state cannot be discussed without referring to its colonial beginning. Historically, it was formed by the amalgamation of different ethnic nationalities, which may not have been possible without the superior fire-power and diplomacy of the British colonial authorities. In simple terms, the Nigerian state was an alien or artificial creation. This also means that the state, right from its birth, lacked some significant legitimating ideals.

In line with its forceful creation, it was not surprising that authoritarianism became a defining characteristic of the state. This, in addition to the fact that the colonial government hardly took any interest in social welfare, contributed to the raising of ethnic consciousness to more dangerous levels. Apparently, this was partly because some of the ethnic groups, unlike the colonial government, contributed in various ways; like education and social services, to the development of their indigenes.

Although ethnic consciousness may not be necessarily bad, various forms of abuse of the ethnic factor manifested with time. Some of the most disturbing have been analyzed by various scholars. These include K.W.J. Post (1973), Peter Ekeh (1975),

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Richard Joseph (1991), Claude Ake (1996) and Ukannah Ikpe (2000). A common line in the arguments and explanations of these scholars is anchored on the gradual emergence of such features as clientelism, prebendalism, patrimonialism and godfatherism in the operation of public affairs in Nigeria. The dangers associated with the features highlighted above include nepotism, administrative inefficiency, political corruption, poverty and political instability.

In a more concise form, Ake (op cit) summarizes the foregoings as the political questions n the character of the Nigerian state. This, he argues, has the following dimensions:

- A form of political competition in which people seek political power by all means, legal or not, with the result that politics is debased to warfare and the political system tends to break down.

- The prevalence of ethnic and sectional loyalties which prevent the emergence of national identity and collective purpose.

- A political leadership alienated from the masses and which maintains power without mandate and accountability.

- Political instability often manifest in disorderly and violent changes of the government in office.

Curiously, forty-eight years after its political independence in 1960, the Nigeria state is also negatively characterized by the social class factor. As this become more visible, it is also more deductible to argue that the Nigerian political elite and bourgeoisie may have fought the colonial system not only to change it, but, probably, also to inherit it for its own economic benefits. With its initial economic weakness, this group relied on politics and "used mass mobilization to come to power" (Ake, ibid).

Relatedly, the pervasiveness of state power in Nigeria, which makes its presence felt in almost all aspects of life, also makes its capture quite important. Amazingly, this is largely personalized and, expectedly, grossly abused by successive regimes in the country.

For a better understanding, we can apply two paradigms to explain this abuse. First, Frank Parkin's (1982) conceptualization of

social closure is relevant. According to him, social closure is:

> *The process by which social collectivities seek to maximize rewards by restricting access to resources and opportunities to a limited circle of eligibles. This entails the singling out of certain physical attributes as the justificatory basis of exclusion. Virtually all group attributes – race, language, social origin, religion – may be seized upon provided it can be used for the monopolization of specific, usually economic opportunities… its purpose is always the closure of social and economic opportunities to outsiders.*

Secondly, and probably, more appropriately, the World Bank illustrates this practice by its conceptualization of the term, state capture. According to the World Bank (2000:xv), state capture is:

> *The actions of individuals, groups, or firms both in the public and private sectors to influence the formation of laws, regulations, decrees and other government policies to their own advantage as a result of the illicit and non-transparent provision of private benefits to public officials.*

The most important lessons to be drawn from the foregoings are two. First and foremost, ethnic consciousness and, by extension, ethnic politics, is mostly exploited by the Nigerian political and power elite, especially in contemporary times, for their own selfish and economic interests. Secondly, because the state is not able to maintain the position of an impartial public institution, it has, over the years, gradually lost its functionality and moderating role. This, in effect, means that it is unable to properly mediate the competition of political contestants and social classes; with the result that the privileged few continuously live in opulence, while the masses suffer abject poverty.

We are now well placed to understand the dynamics of socio-political and economic events, which have contributed to the endemicity of political corruption and soaring level of poverty, as we discuss matters arising in the present Fourth Republic.

Matters Arising in the Fourth Republic

Although so much has been documented on the negative effects

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of the annulled results of the 1993 presidential election in Nigeria, it is not surprising that it reverberates whenever the challenge of democratic consolidation, in the country, is being discussed. This, among other reasons, is that the annulment appeared to be the greatest threat, since after the civil war, to the continued existence of the country as a single entity.

Indeed, the June 12, 1993 election debacle, which started as a national issue, but which later had an ethnic colouration, was the most important among the major factors and forces that operated on the country's political scene in the mid and late 1990s. The struggle for the revalidation of the result of that election did not enjoy enough support from outside the winner, the late Chief M.K.O. Abiola's South-West ancestral home. Even with the "participation of some prominent Northerners, such as Adamu Ciroma, Balarabe Musa, Shehu Sanni, Dan Suleiman, Colonel Abubakar Umar (rtd), and a few others, in this struggle" the passivity of the generality of the Northerners created a negative impression" (Yagboyaju, Ibid). What this appeared to be, was that the average Northerner was unperturbed because Abiola's victory meant more political relevance for his Yoruba ethnic group. This was in spite of Abiola's transversing philanthropic gestures and expansive business links which, expectedly, should make him acceptable across the country. Therefore, it was not surprising that the Yorubas, Abiola's kinsmen, insisted that General Ibrahim Babangida, a Northerner, cancelled the election result just because the former was not from the Hausa/ Fulani dominated Northern zone of the country.

But, beyond this, there was another factor, which was, probably, known to the critical and analytical minds alone. And this was undeclared personal interest of the then military President, Babangida, to hang on to power for as long as he desired. Although unspoken, this interest was, probably, a major reason why the activities of the proponents of "Babangida must stay in office" were not checked by the then military ruler. However, the unrelenting efforts of pro-democracy activists and other professionals contributed, in no small measures, to the stepping-aside of the latter in November 1993. The Interim National Government (ING), a contraption left behind by the Babangida regime, was also forced

to resign shortly after.

Amazingly, this multi-ethnic, divisive and conflictual nature of the country, which also evoked memories of the pre civil war days of 1967 was handled in a way that did not lead to another major crisis. However, rather than seize this great opportunity for the political development of the country, the succeeding General Sani Abacha military regime acted otherwise. The late Abacha, a Northerner, outlawed the then existing two political parties, called for the establishment of new ones and plotted a transmutation plan for himself. This plan ended with the death of Abacha in June 1998. While his death may have brought some relief to the country's political landscape, the mysterious death of Chief M.K.O. Abiola, shortly afterwards, renewed the apprehension in the country.

These operating forces and factors, therefore, provided the immediate background for some crucial decisions taken by the General Abdulsalami Abubakar military regime that took over after Abacha's death. Among other issues the regime contended with, three appeared more prominent. These were, namely the nagging problem of sharing and rotating political power among the ethnic groups, the sagging image of the military and the age-long struggle for genuine democratic rule in the country. It was noticeable, for instance, that even the military, whose privileged members benefited from its unduly long stay in power, knew that the entrenched nature of rule by successive military regimes proved exceedingly dysfunctional. For instance, Adekanye (2005:8) argues that the long stay "brought about not only a considerable distortion in the organisation's rank structure, hierarchy, system of discipline, and espirit de corps, but also a complete replacement of the ideals of asceticism, commitment to duty and patriotism, with money making and sheer careerism".

Apparently, in conformity with an aspect of most transitions from authoritarian rule, the then disengaging Abubakar military regime and the cartels of elite group interests engaged in some negotiated arrangements that led to the emergence of the then President Olusegun Obasanjo in 1999. Although the choice of Obasanjo, a Yoruba from the South-Western part of the country, should have ordinarily pacified this ethnic group; which was more affected by

the controversial annulment of the 1993 election result, some other factors slightly affected it. First, Obasanjo did not identify with the struggle for the revalidation of that election result. Secondly, as a retired Army General, he was, most probably, chosen to protect the vested interests of the military. Incidentally, Obasanjo is the only Yoruba (Southwesterner), military officer among the various military rulers the country had between 1966 and 1999.

Based on the foregoing reasons and other similar ones, it may be appropriate to argue that the mere reintroduction of civil rule, the inauguration of the Obasanjo administration and its replacement, after eight years, by the Umaru Yar'Adua-led administration cannot automatically eradicate certain divisive tendencies that have, over the years, emanated from Nigeria's ethnic oriented politics. Rather, the challenge of managing the diversity of ethno-religious and cultural factors grows higher with the freedom of expression and association granted by liberal democracy and participatory governance. Certainly, this is a cross-cultural trend from which Nigeria cannot be excluded.

In the light of the foregoing, it is not surprising that pressures from the demands for recognition and attention from the different ethnic nationalities continued unabated. Even the South-West, the zone that largely benefited from the power rotation arrangement, at the inception of the Fourth Republic, also clamoured for the convocation of a national conference for the resolution of the national question. The comments made by Chief Emeka Anyaoku, former Secretary-General of the Commonwealth at that point in time were, therefore, instructive. According to him:

The pressures are already manifesting in a variety of forms. In the Niger Delta region of the country we have had agitations and violent campaigns resulting in significant loss of live and a measure of insecurity of the oil industry. In parts of the country especially the South-West zone, we have had calls and demonstrations for a sovereign National Conference with the aim of looking for a new basis for the co-existence of the country's different ethnic nationalities. And in the South-East zone, we see reports of complaints of alleged marginalization by the Federal Government (The

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Guardian, December 22, 2000, p.7).

Undoubtedly, these inter-tribal and ethnic pressures and the conflicts, which they generate occasionally, are disturbing and worrisome. But, the intra-ethnic and communal clashes that have been witnessed in many parts of the country, since the return of civil rule in 1999, are more alarming. Some available records show the dangerous dimensions of such communal clashes in the North-Central states of Benue, Taraba, Kaduna, Plateau, Nassarawa, Bauchi and Adamawa between 2000 and 2002. In fact, the violent nature of these conflicts between communities, who had hitherto co-existed peacefully, was the focal point of the then President Obasanjo's opening speech at a three day retreat on conflict resolution, in January 2002. In spite of this and several other similar efforts, intra-state and communal clashes were the major factors that were pronounced when, in 2003, emergency rule was declared in Plateau state.

If the continuously declining feeling of belonging, from the ordinary citizens, to the Nigerian state, is traceable to their ethnic attachments and other primordial sentiments, what then accounts for the intra-ethnic clashes? Can it be the economic interest of the power and political elite that we analyzed in a preceding section, or any other vested interest? According to Sam Egwu (2006:10), the underlying explanation for this "can be found in a number of factors that are embedded in the very nature of the Nigerian political economy". The one that is directly related to our own focus, out of these factors as listed by Egwu, links the use of state power by the political elites for primitive accumulation. What we are saying, in effect, is that political conflicts, violence and such others in Nigeria have shifting boundaries, and are only determined by the political elites who choose the appropriate strategy in the struggle for power.

In summary, the dimensions and forms that this politicization of ethnicity take include:

- *North/South dichotomy which can be useful in the analysis of political violence at the national level.*
- *Inter-ethnic conflict which can be useful at both national and*

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local (state) level, arising from the history of inter-group relations and the whole question of domination and exclusion in the exercise of power.

- *Intra-ethnic conflict which can be useful in local conflicts. It can, however, be also as significant as inter-ethnic animosity. Among the Yoruba (Egba, Ijesha, Owo, Ekiti, etc; among the Igbo (Orlu, Onitsha, Enugu East, Enugu West, etc), for example.*
- *Religious cleavages in some instances tend to reinforce ethnic and regional divisions because of overlap between ethnic and religious boundaries* (Egwu, ibid).

In line with our thesis on the nexus between the politicization of ethnicity and perpetration of political corruption in the country; it may be useful to cite instances, during the present Fourth Republic, where politicians and other political elites from different ethnic backgrounds were involved in salacious deals. First, right from 1999 through the two terms of the then Obasanjo administration, and up till after the inauguration of the Third National Assembly in 2007, legislators at the national and local levels literally fought for huge allowances, salaries and other benefits that do not correspond with the present economic realities in the country. Yet, they belong to different ethnic groups and, sometime, political parties.

Secondly, the numerous financial scandals in the National Assembly, commencement of the Fourth Republic have cut across ethno-religious boundaries. These include the contract scandal that led to the removal of the late Dr. Chuba Okadigbo, Senators Gbenga Aluko, Khairat Gwadabe and a few others, as Senate President, Committee Chairman and members respectively in 2000; the bribe-for-budget approval scandal, which involved the then Education Minister, Professor Fabian Osuji, Chief Adolphus Wabara, then Senate President and other members of the Senate Committee on education in 2005; the National Identity Card Project scandal, which led to the removal of Chief S.M. Afolabi, one time Internal Affairs Minster, some PDP stalwarts and other officials in the State Assemblies, Executive Councils and other public institutions since the ministry; and several other cases like the ones that involved Mr. Tafa Balogun, one time Inspector-General of Police; the dismissal of Rear Admirals Francis Agbiti and

Babatunde Kolawole, senior officers of the Nigeria Navy, in 2004; and many others.

But, of more relevance to our discussion were some cases that involved State Governors. For instance, D.S.P. Alamieyesiegha of Bayelsa state, one of the states in the troubled Niger Delta region, was removed for corruption in 2006. Although the process of his removal was criticized for being selective and patchy, it was still manifestly clear that the huge special allocations for Bayelsa, just like such other states in the region as Edo, Rivers and Delta were not judiciously applied. The widely reported investigations of Chiefs Lucky Igbinedion, Peter Odili and James Ibori, immediate past Governors of the latter states respectively, also justify our position here. These instances highlighted above are, no doubt, just few of the numerous ones across the country, but they are of a peculiar nature. This peculiarity draws from the fact that they are all states from the oil-rich Niger Delta region where a prudent and equitable application of resources may have, probably, reduced the tension and threat to national security that have characterized the activities of ethnic minority and militia groups, over the years.

On a higher scale, however, the numerous allegations of corruption against Chief Obasanjo, the immediate past President; if they are eventually established, may have graver consequences for the country's democratization process, its national unity and the ruling PDP's special zoning arrangement which produced the incumbent Vice President, Goodluck Jonathan, from the ethnic minorities of the Niger Delta region. This is particularly so because, by implication, it can be applied to justify all the allegations of bribery that were levelled against the former President on the botched attempt to illegally elongate his tenure, in the twilight of his stay in power.

Relatedly, the fluidity of the party system and "the associated complexity in the political pacts and alliances of the ruling elite" (Egwu, op cit), also define the nature of the politicization of ethnicity and the accompanying abuse of privileges in the country. This, for instance, is characterized by two contradictory tendencies. First, is the multi-polar tendency that is reflected in the emergence of a multiparty system during periods of electoral politics; as was

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the case in the First, Second and the present Fourth Republics. Secondly, there is the usual tendency for political re-alignments after a party has been declared winner. It is usually the fusion of prominent members of the losers parties with the victorious party, or the formation of two broad coalitions of competing political elite. Apparently, one recurring negative feature of the party system is its winner-takes-all character. And this, in conformity with Paul Collier's (2007) analysis of "performance politics and identity politics", worsens deprivation and poverty.

For a better understanding, Collier's analysis on these types of politics emphasises that:

> Performance politics is associated with genuine democracy in which free and fair elections are the norm. The system ensures, among other things, that all those qualified to vote can obtain voters cards; and voters are guided by issues and principles, not personalities.

> In contrast to this, in identity politics, citizens are reminded of their differences. Their loyalty to a party is maintained, irrespective of the performance and reputation of the party. Governments, on the other hand, deliver patronage to loyalists rather than services to the generality of the people.

Although there are elements of identity politics in some developed democracies too, they are not significant to the extent of making profound impacts on the systems. For instance, in the United States of America (USA) where issues of ethnic minorities also generate concern, the victory of Barack Obama, as the presidential candidate of the Democrats, is enough to show that performance eventually over-shadowed sentiments. And, for Obama himself, change and better service delivery to all, have been the watch words. Certainly, all of these make the difference in the developed world. Nonetheless, the final outcome of the US presidential elections in November 2008 poses a great challenge to that country's political life.

In Nigeria, poverty level is worsening as unemployment is soaring. This negates reports by such international agencies as the

Paris Club and World Bank, which asserted economic growth, in the country, in recent times. Even if the claim of macro economic growth is justifiable, there is no correspondent human capital development. While the quality of education, health and other social services is dwindling all over the country, the agriculture, general merchandising and other similar sectors which, hitherto, provided employment for the ordinary citizens have become very unattractive. In a similar vein, the crushing effects of the various economic reforms initiated by the immediate past Obasanjo administration, and partly continued by its successor, have also contributed to the hardship experienced by the masses. Amazingly, government has also not deemed it fit to review the salaries of ordinary workers in the public sector. Similarly, it is yet to fully resolve the perennial problem of pension arrears in the country.

Finally, a particularly worrisome aspect of the issue of poverty in Nigeria has to do with the country's apparent ill-preparedness for the impending global food and financial crises. The net effect of this is that more and more Nigerians will, most probably, be pilloried into docility, wherein they will further lose interest in participating in public affairs. In effect, democratic rule and its consolidation are further exposed to threats as exploiters and predatory rulers shall continue to predominate the political landscape.

Concluding Remarks

The extensive literature on the politicization of ethnicity in Nigeria, part of which we consulted in the foregoing discussion, confirms the abuse of public office and the accompanying privileges, through such practices as clientelism, patrimonialism, prebendalism, godfatherism and cronyism, by the political elite and other high-ranking public officials. Although ethnic consciousness may necessarily not be negative, its application for some narrow vested interests has, over the years, worsened various socio-political and economic problems. Among these, political corruption and poverty stand out. Incidentally, they are both serious threats to national integration and the democratization process in the country.

In our own opinion, this situation may deteriorate except urgent and concerted efforts are made in the following directions:

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- Convocation of a plebiscite or a referendum on the preparation of a people-oriented constitution to replace the present one.
- Restructuring of the present components of the federation in such a way that local governments and other sub-units, that are closer to the ordinary people, are granted more powers.
- Restoring the autonomy and functionality of public institutions by separating them from the personalities of office holders.
- Encouragement of more and more enlightened Nigerians in participating in public affairs, right from the grassroots.
- Renewed encouragement of such institutions as the National Football Team, National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), Nigeria Army, etc.

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