RACE, MULTICULTURALISM AND DEMOCRACY

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Introduction

In this paper I bring into conversation two debates pertaining to identities in the contemporary United States. The debate about race has been prompted by the proposition that, as ordinarily conceptualized by most Americans, biological racial identities do not exist. This view is sometimes associated with the claim that historians and social scientists should expunge talk of race and racial identities from their vocabularies, a proposal that is often rejected by those who would defend a social constructionist account of racial identities. The debate about multiculturalism is less well focused, but generally concerns the justification of multicultural educational practices in the context of a so-called "politics of recognition." A central question, here, is whether multiculturalism should be embraced for the reason that it advances the self-esteem of individuals belonging to socially oppressed groups by enabling them to discover the reflection or representation of their identities in a reformed canon.[1]

Part I of the paper engages the first debate by addressing an important skeptical reply to the claim that racial identities are social constructs. Focusing in particular on black identity, I answer Walter Benn Michaels's objection that a nonbiological and social constructionist account of American racial identities is not possible because the practice of racial classification in America involves the idea that racial passing is possible.

Having met Michaels's objection, I proceed in Part II to detail a social constructionist view of black identity that builds on the work of Anna Stubblefield and Anthony Appiah. Here, I suggest that black identities have both a third-person and a first-person dimension. I also explore some of the implications of my interpretation of black identity, focusing in particular on the issues of racial authenticity, African-American identity, and mixed race identity.

In Part III of the paper I shift my attention to multiculturalism and, specifically, to a version of Afrocentrism often associated with multiculturalism. In particular, I argue that Molefi Asante's notion of Afrocentric "re-centering" suggests a model of multicultural education that, because it rests on a questionable understanding of African-American identity, should be rejected. In addition, I propose that in rejecting Asante's Afrocentrism we should refuse to exchange it for an anti-Afrocentric nationalism of the sort that Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. articulates in *The Disuniting of America*. Despite their differences, Schlesinger

and Asante each promotes an identity politics that makes identity into a form of kitsch.

Neither Afrocentric nor dependent on an argument from self-esteem, my defense of multicultural education in the fourth part of this essay rests on a normative claim about the point of public education in a democratic society. In elaborating that defense, I employ my social constructionist concept of black identity to show that multiculturalism in contemporary America should be race-conscious. More exactly, I argue for endorsing race-conscious multiculturalism as a pedagogical and research program for disseminating a "cultural capital" that fosters the capacity for democratic deliberation in contemporary America.[2]

Finally, in the fifth and concluding part of the paper, I summarize my argument for multiculturalism by recurring to W. E. B. Du Bois's seminal turn-of-the-century reflections on the nature and point of a politics of recognition.

I. Meeting the Skeptical Objection

Let me begin by stipulating that, by 'racialism,' I mean a brand of nineteenth century biological essentialism according to which "there are heritable characteristics, possessed by members of our species, which allow us to divide them into a small set of races, in such a way that all members of those races share certain traits and tendencies with each other that they do not share with members of any other race."[3] The racialist thesis that having a racial identity is a matter of embodying a biological racial "essence" or "type" is widely regarded to be false due to post-Darwinian developments in population genetics.[4] Here, I mention this thesis, because it plays a central role in Walter Benn Michaels's critique of the social constructionist approach to racial identity. To be sure, Michaels does not deny that racialism is false. Rather his point is that a prior commitment to racial essentialism is implicit in any social constructionist account of American racial identities that acknowledges the possibility of racial passing. In Michaels's view, is is not possible to give a social constructionist account of American racial identities that acknowledges this possibility but is not parasitic on the assumption that biological racial essences exist.

Michaels begins his criticism of social constructionism by reviewing Michael Omi's and Howard Winant's influential attempt to develop a theory of racial formations that conceptualizes racial identity "without biology."[5] His critique concentrates not on Omi and Winant, however, but 1) on the 1985 Louisiana Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals' ruling that "Susie Phipps, 'who had always thought she was white, had lived as white, and had twice married as white,' was not in fact white because her parents . . . had thought of themselves and of her as 'coloured'"[6] and 2) on some remarks that Adrian Piper makes in her essay, "Passing for White, Passing for Black." According to Piper, "[w]hat joins me to other blacks . . . and other blacks to another, is not a set of shared physical characteristics. Rather it is the shared experience of being visually or cognitively

identified as black by a white racist society, and the punitive and damaging effects of that identification."[7] Michaels responds to the Louisiana court ruling and to Piper's remarks as follows:

> This is the Louisiana standard: if you're *perceived* as black, you are black. [emphasis added] But Piper's account of her own experience makes the incoherence of this standard even more obvious than it is in the Phipps case. For Piper describes herself as so light skinned that she is constantly being treated as if she were white. She is thus made to feel that she is passing for white, and since passing for white seems to her 'a really authentically shameful thing to do' . . . she is led into strenuous efforts to identify herself as a black. But what consequences must these efforts have for her nonbiological definition of racial identity? The point of the definition is that being black means being identified by a white racist society as black. On what grounds, then, can someone who is not identified by that society as black be said to be black?
>
> Piper makes this dilemma even clearer by going on to remark that she has 'white friends who fit the prevailing stereotype of a black person' and thus have 'experiences' 'similar' to ones that make blacks black . . . If they really do have such experiences, what can she mean by calling these friends 'white'? That they can be white even if they are treated as black; that she can be black even if she is treated as white – these facts are tributes to, not critiques of, racial essentialism. The very idea of passing – whether it takes the form of looking like you belong to a different race or of acting like you belong to a different race – requires an understanding of race as something separate from the way you look and act. If race really were nothing but culture, that is, if race were nothing but a distinctive array of beliefs and practices, then, of course, there could be no passing, since to believe and practice what the members of any race believed and practiced would, by definition, make you a member of that race.[8]

For Michaels, Piper's suggestion that black identity is a matter of being classified and thus identified as black makes explicit the social constructionist account of racial identity that is implicit in the Louisiana Court of Appeals ruling. As I read him, the argument he adduces in criticism of both Piper and the court can be reconstructed as follows:

> 1. Premise: If racial identities in America can be coherently conceptualized as social constructs, absent the assumption that biological racial essences exist, then it is not true that the practice of racial classification in America permits the possibility of passing.
> 2. Premise: The practice of racial classification in America permits the possibility of passing.
> 3. Conclusion: It is not true that racial identities in America can be coherently conceptualized as social constructs, absent the assumption that biological racial essences exist.

Thus construed, Michaels's argument is valid. It is unsound, however, because the first premise is false. This premise is false because it is a conditional whose antecedent is true and consequent false. In other words, racial identities in

America can be coherently conceptualized as social constructs, absent the assumption that biological racial essences exist, even though the practice of racial classification in America permits the possibility of passing.

We can begin to see why Michaels's argument is unsound by noting a confusion that animates his reading of Piper in the second paragraph I cite. For Michaels, Piper's suggestion that race is "nothing but culture" amounts to the claim that someone is black if, and only if, she subscribes to certain beliefs and participates in certain practices. More exactly, he reads Piper as defining black racial identity with reference to the idea of a culture that is common to and only to persons who have been designated as black. But this is precisely what she does *not* do. On the contrary, her approach is to conceptualize black identity with reference to a practice of racial classification to which blacks have been subjected by American society. Black identity is a consequence of *that* practice, Piper implies, and not of the beliefs and practices which are shared by or distinctive to the people whom that practice designates as black. Socially constructed racial identities *are* cultural phenomena (in this sense, race *is* culture), but, *pace* Michaels, two individuals can have the same socially constructed racial identity (e.g., both can be socially constructed as black) without having what an anthropologist would call "a common culture."[9]

Michaels's response to Piper in the first paragraph I cite is more to the point, though finally flawed. Given Piper's view of black racial identity, he asks, how can it make sense to say that blacks who pass for white are not white, or that whites who pass for black are not black? Michaels is prompted to raise these questions, I think, because he ignores a significant part of Piper's conception of black racial identity. Where Piper sees the American practice of racial classification as incorporating both visual *and cognitive* identifications, Michaels pays attention only to visual identifications, that is, to the *perception* of individuals as black ("[I]f you're *perceived* as black," Michaels writes, "you are black"). Piper's reference to cognitive identification is meant, I assume, to flag the fact that the American practice of racial classification involves criteria entailing that someone perceived to be white can be black and that someone perceived to be black can be white. For Piper, then, someone who would not be classified as black on the basis of visual criteria could still *be black* because Americans' conventional (though not universal) adherence to the one-drop rule *cognitively* identifies her as black.[10] For Michaels, of course, the thought that such a person could exist is contradictory and incoherent. Because Michaels understands racial classification with reference only to visual criteria, he equates not being perceived to be black with not being classified as black. He believes, then, that Piper contradicts herself in allowing that there exist persons (e.g., blacks passing as white) who, though they are not perceived to be black, are classified as black. The appearance of contradiction disappears, I have been arguing, if one bears in mind the distinction between visual and cognitive identification. Similarly, for Piper, there is no contradiction in claiming that someone classified as white could be perceived to be black and

have experiences "similar" to those whom the American practice of racial classi-
fication counts as black.

Racial identities in America can be coherently conceptualized as social
constructs, absent the assumption that biological racial essences exist, even
though the American practice of racial classification permits the possibility of
passing. Piper shows that this is so by offering a noncontradictory, social
constructionist account of racial identities that, without presupposing the exis-
tence of racial essences, acknowledges that passing can occur. In treating black
identity as the product of a rule-governed social practice of racial classification,
Piper interprets it as a social construct.[11] Needless to say, she *does not* assert that
being black amounts to satisfying the false and often pernicious notions of black
identity that have historically informed the American practice of racial classifica-
tion. She does not claim, for example, that to be black is to be psychologically
indisposed to hard work or to be by innate constitution intellectually inferior to
whites. Neither does she propose, explicitly or otherwise, that black identity is a
consequence of satisfying the one-drop rule or of embodying a biological racial
essence. Rather Piper suggests that black identity is an effect of being *designated
as black* by a practice of racial classification that has adhered to the one-drop rule
through much of this century[12] and promoted the belief that racial essences exist.
In her view, being black is a matter of being classified as black by a particular
practice of racial classification, it is not a function of satisfying all the odd rules
and beliefs that have animated that practice.[13]

II. On Being a Black Person

Thus far, my elaboration of a view that Piper only sketches has focused on
defending that view from Michaels's critique. Here, however, I would like to
shift ground. In particular, I would like to complicate Piper's conception of
black identity by drawing a distinction between being black and being a black
person. Piper, I wish to say, defines a necessary but not a sufficient condition of
being a black person. Even if one considers her point that being black not only
involves being identified as black, but, additionally, the negative effects of
being thus identified, it seems clear that her stated "definition" of black identity
expresses a third-person perspective intended to highlight the objectification of
blacks *as blacks* by a racist society.[14] Anna Stubblefield's and Anthony Appiah's
recent treatments of racial identity point in a similar direction when, in keeping
with Piper's nominalist intuitions, they propose that racial identities result from
criteria governed practices of racial classification through the application of
racial labels.[15] In explaining the concept of a black person I aim to enrich this
perspective with a first-person point of view that notes the ways in which indi-
viduals classified as black contribute to the construction of their racial identi-
ties. Following Appiah, I draw on Ian Hacking's essay, "Making Up People,"[16]
to discuss the "identifications"[17] by which black people shape their projects in

light of the racial labelings and classifications to which they have been subjected.

Hacking's central idea is a view he calls 'dynamic nominalism.' Dynamic nominalism, he says, is the "doctrine . . . that numerous kinds of human beings and human acts come into being hand in hand with our invention of the categories labeling them . . . it contends that our spheres of possibility, and hence our selves, are to some extent made up by our naming and what that entails."[18] To be sure, Hacking is not proposing here that the sheer utterance or inscription of newly invented names suffices in itself to cause the existence of the human beings named. Rather his point is that our sense of ourselves and of the possibilities existing for us is, to a significant degree, a function of the descriptions we have available to us to conceptualize our intended actions and prospective lives. "What is curious about human action," Hacking remarks, "is that by and large what I am deliberately doing depends on the possibilities of description . . . [h]ence if new modes of description come into being, new possibilities of action come into being in consequence."[19]

Hacking's dynamic nominalism helps to explain the concept of a black person because it provides a means of conceptualizing the contributions individuals make to the construction of their racial identities. In effect, it suggests that individuals classified as black become black persons just in case they begin to act in the world under a description of themselves as racially black. As I have previously suggested, being black – that is, being racially classified as black – is a necessary but not a sufficient condition of being a black person. One becomes a black person only if (1) one begins to identify (to classify) *oneself* as black and (2) one begins to make choices, to formulate plans, to express concerns, etc., in light of one's identification of oneself as black.

Though this way of explaining the concept of a black person may seem a bit abstract, it is best understood as a philosopher's gloss on the sort of experience which is described time and again in the letters and literature of black persons. Consider, for example, the scene of visiting-card exchanges which Du Bois describes near the beginning of *The Souls of Black Folk*. Only after his card is refused, "peremptorily, with a glance," does it dawn on Du Bois that he "was different from the others."[20] Only then, moreover, does Du Bois begin to live his life in light of the fact that he has been classified as racially black and different, recognizing possibilities and making choices that he could not have recognized or made before, including, for example, the choice to prove his racial worth by competing with his white schoolmates: "But they should not keep their prizes, I said; some, all, I would wrest from them."[21] Or consider the reflections of James Weldon Johnson's protagonist in *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* as he recalls the experience of having been labelled one "fateful day at school" for the first time as a "nigger" and then as "coloured":

> I have often lived through that hour, that day, that week, in which was wrought the miracle of my transition from one world into another; for I did indeed pass into

another world. From that time I looked out through other eyes, my thoughts were coloured, my words dictated, my actions limited by one dominating, all pervading idea which constantly increased its force and weight until I finally realized in it a great, tangible fact.

And this is the dwarfing, warping, distorting influence which operates upon each and every coloured man in the United States. He is forced to take his outlook on all things, not from the point of view of a citizen, or a man, or even human being, but from the point of view of a *coloured* man.[22]

For Du Bois and Johnson's protagonist alike, a new world of new possibilities and impossibilities is born when acts of objectifying racial classification move them to understand themselves, to formulate aspirations, and to plan the future courses of their lives under descriptions of themselves as black, or colored. By acting under these descriptions, both individuals actively contribute to the construction of their identities as black persons. Johnson's ex-colored man is a particularly interesting example of a black person who *becomes* a black person at a memorable moment in his life, for he is the sort of black person who learns to pass for white in the new world into which he passes.

Elsewhere I have argued that Du Bois, notwithstanding his insight into the social construction of black persons, errs in *The Souls of Black Folk* in supposing in an Hegelian vein that a single "folk spirit" or "social mind" pervades the lives of black Americans. I have also suggested that Du Bois himself speaks persuasively against this supposition by highlighting (in *Souls*) the multiple minds and sensibilities and modes of self-understanding that polyphonically characterize black identity in America. It would be a mistake, of course, to think that a rejection of the Du Boisian idea of a collective black *Geist*, along with the older notion of a biological black racial essence, entails a rejection of the view that one can speak of black identity in general terms. Generally speaking, to be black (in America) is, simply, to be subject to a practice of racial classification that counts one as black. Corresponding to being black, however, are numerous ways of being a black person; that is, numerous ways of interpreting and assigning significance to being black.[23] In some cases, the significance one assigns to being black in identifying oneself as black bears centrally on one's view of oneself. In other cases, it does not. It should be noted, moreover, that many of the most politically salient modes of being a black person involve the assignment of a *collective* significance to being black, a fact to which I will return in my discussion of race-conscious multiculturalism.

Let me conclude my explanation of the concept of a black person by sketching a few of its consquences for our thinking about racial authenticity, African-American identity, and mixed race identity.

Racial authenticity

The distinction between *being authentically a black person* and *being inauthentically a black person* makes no sense in my view, since one becomes a

black person by, and only by, acting under certain descriptions. In other words, I postulate no black personhood *apart* from a black person's actions to which she or he could be true or untrue in the performance of those actions.[24] Put a bit differently, I do not suppose that, prior to the performance of discursively shaped actions, there exist black selves or persons that such actions could authentically or inauthentically express.[25] It would be a mistake, then, to assert that some black persons are more authentic in their black personhood than others.

The putative distinction between *being authentically black* and *being inauthentically black* requires separate consideration, given that I differentiate between being black and being a black person. In considering this distinction, it is useful to note the affinity between my notion of being black and Sartre's notion of being a Jew. According to Sartre, the anti-Semite creates the Jew by identifying him *as a Jew*. To be a Jew, Sartre proclaims, "is to be thrown into – *to be abandoned to* – the situation of a Jew."[26] Sartre posits a distinction between authentic and inauthentic Jews. I doubt the usefulness of this distinction, because I see no clearly defined criteria for distinguishing authentic choices and behaviors – said to express "a true and lucid consciousness of [one's] situation" – from the types of choices and behaviors (e.g., the Jewish rationalist's universalism) that Sartre, somewhat arbitrarily, brands as inauthentic.[27] For the same reason, I doubt the value of the distinction between being authentically black and being inauthentically black. What criteria could one persuasively invoke for distinguishing between existentially lucid and less-than-lucid responses to the fact that one has been thrown into a world shaped by a practice of racial classification classifying one as black? Even supposing that one could clearly define some such criteria, it would remain to be shown that they provided a basis for identifying some specific *types* of behavior as inauthentic.[28]

African-American identity

On my account, being African-American is coextensive neither with being black nor with being a black person. Being African-American is being a native born American who is black – who is, in other words, racially classified as black – and who typically is a black person. Yet the class of blacks and black persons in America also includes West Indian, Nigerian, Eritrean, Ghanaian, and other individuals who are not African-Americans. As I shall argue in the next part of this paper, African-American identity is culturally complex. Yet it would be false to claim that a commitment to the perpetuation of cultural forms associated with African-Americans is either a necessary or a sufficient condition of being a black person in America. As is well known, there exist black persons in America who are not committed to the perpetuation of any of these cultural forms and many non-blacks – and thus non-black persons – who are devoted to jazz and who take delight in the art of signifying.

Mixed race identity

A few words, finally, about the politics of mixed race identity, which actively contests America's current practice of racial classification. Advocates of a mixed race identity, though still classified as black by that practice, deliberately decline to live in the world as black persons. Refusing to act under descriptions of themselves as black, they act, instead, under descriptions of themselves as racially mixed. One could still say of these individuals that they *are in fact black*, meaning simply that, regardless of their self-descriptions, they remain subject to a practice of racial classification that, to the extent that it is still governed by the one-drop rule, counts them as black. Yet claims of this sort will seem increasingly odd as the politics of mixed race gathers steam, if only because an essential element of that politics is its repudiation of the one-drop rule (Such claims will seem odd in just the way that it would have seemed odd to say to Susie Guillory Phipps, in the face of *her* challenge to the one-drop rule, that she was in fact black in virtue of the rule). The politics of mixed race disturbs the current conventions of racial classification with an eye to enacting and making pervasive a new convention providing social space for the appearance of dynamic nominalist "mixed race persons."[29]

III. Multiculturalism and Kitsch

In the third part of this essay I turn my attention to multiculturalism, which I view as both an educational and a political project. In particular, I proffer a critique of the educational program implicit in Molefi Asante's Afrocentrism. I then proceed to a critical analysis of Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.'s explicitly anti-Afrocentric American nationalism.

My critique of Afrocentrism has some affinity to Anthony Appiah's repeated attack on what he describes, borrowing a term from Paulin Hountondji, as Afrocentrism's "unanimist" idea of Africa. By 'unanimism' Appiah has in mind the view "that Africa is culturally homogeneous – the belief that there is some central body of folk philosophy that is shared by black Africans quite generally."[30] Against this view, he insists on "the extraordinary diversity of Africa's peoples and its cultures," remarking that it is "surely preposterous to suppose that there is a single African culture, shared by everyone from the civilizations of the Upper Nile thousands of years ago to the thousand or so language-zones of contemporary Africa."[31] Afrocentrists embrace a simplistic vision of Africa, Appiah argues, and so obscure the radically heterogeneous character of Africa's cultural life. Here, I likewise take issue with Afrocentrism's yearning for simplicity, though not as regards its idea of Africa; rather my focus will be Afrocentrism's conception of African-American identity.

In "Racism, Consciousness, and Afrocentricity," Asante identifies himself as African-American and remarks that "a precondition of [his] fullness, a necessary

and natural part of [his] maturity [has been] the commitment to be who [he is], to be Afrocentric."[32] "One becomes Afrocentric," Asante continues, by:

> exploring connections, visiting the quiet places, and remaining connected. The furious pace of our dislocation, mislocation, displacement, off-centeredness, and marginalization, often brought on by the incredible conspiracy of the Eurocentric architecton, drives us further and further away from ourselves, reinforcing us in our dislocation and affirming us in our out-of-placeness. In such a situation, in the fringes of the European experience, pushed away from the center, we swirl around lost looking for place, for location. Afrocentricity is the active centering of the African in subject place in our historical landscape. This has always been my search; it has been a quest for sanity. Therefore, it was unthinkable for me to entertain ideas of living in the margins, being in the periphery of someone else's historical and cultural experiences. My aim was more fundamental, basic, the essential quality of being normal, uncomplicated. By being normal, I do not reject the other; I embrace that which I truly know, i.e., jazz, blues, railroads, Obatala, roots, hoodoo, soul, rhythms, sweet mommas, Dunbar and Hughes, Sanchez, Mari Evans, and Charles Fuller, and so on, in ways that I do not know the products of the other, i.e., country music, mistletoe, Valhalla, Wotan, pale blonds, Frost and Mailer. *I recognize these products as part of my experience in the large but they do not impact on me in the same way as those which seem to grow from the soil of my ancestors*. With my own products I can walk confidently toward the future knowing full well that I can grasp whatever-else is out there because my own center is secured.[33] (emphasis mine)

Eurocentrism, on this account, has alienated and de-centered the African-American subject, driving him further and further away from himself and leaving him lost and without sanity at the periphery of Europe's historical and cultural experience. The aim of an Afrocentric re-centering and, Asante suggests, re-education of the African-American subject is an identity whose defining quality, essence and foundation is a state of being that is normal and uncomplicated. One can be come "normal" and "uncomplicated," he proposes, by embracing what one *truly* knows. At first this suggestion might seem to present a problem, since what the African-American subject *appears* to know is the contents of an experience that has been *complicated* by the integration of African and European elements, of jazz and country music, of sweet mommas and pale blonds. Yet we soon discover that what the African-American subject apparently knows is a good deal more than what he truly knows, since what he truly knows is simply those elements in his experience that express his African heritage. On what basis, however, can this subject claim to know truly the African elements in his experience but *not* the European elements? Asante's answer is that the former, unlike the latter, *seem to grow from the soil of the African-American subject's ancestors*.

Although there is much to object to in Asante's argument, the issue on which I should like to focus is his rhetorical resolution of what he admits to be the phenomenological complexity of African-American experience. Asante's African-American experience is complicated, not only because it involves his

African and European heritages alike, but because his African heritage harbors complexities that he does not explicitly acknowledge, e.g., its inseparability from things European in the example of the railroads, and its patchwork combination of the originally African Obatala and the originally African-American jazz. The complexity Asante addresses he quickly disowns by appropriating the rhetoric of organic, biological growth. In other words, it is the figure of plant-like connectedness to an ancestral soil that provides Asante the epistemological vehicle he requires to bifurcate his experience into what he truly and does not truly know. Here, the effect of his language is to resurrect the specter of the nineteenth century racial sciences and their view that cultural identities express biological racial essences.[34] For Asante, the naturalizing rhetoric of biological growth is a simplifying rhetoric by which he dissociates himself from what he (putatively) fails truly to know in order to represent himself as the normal, uncomplicated and secure product of a specifically Afrocentric *Bildung*.

I can summarize my reading of Asante's rhetoric by identifying it as the rhetoric of kitsch. According to Karsten Harries, kitsch in modern art is the art of a realism that "[u]nlike most modern art, which betrays the precariousness of its project . . . seems sure of itself. Kitsch pretends to be in possession of an adequate image of man."[35] Asante speaks the language of kitsch because he invokes the imagery of a fixed biological identity to construct a putatively adequate image of African-American cultural identity. His language successfully secures a "normal" and normalizing vision of that identity by obscuring the hybrid, complex and multidimensional character of African-American life and experience.[36] We can think of Afrocentrism as an Afro-kitsch, because it sacrifices a skeptical sensibility – a sense that African-Americans are much too complicated culturally to be reduced to whitewashed (or better, "blackwashed") images of unambiguous self-possession – to the sentimental impulse to see them sure of themselves, striding "confidently" toward the future.[37] What African-American novelist Charles Johnson says of the Negritude movement – that "[l]ike fascist art in Germany . . . Negritude – all Kitsch – is a retreat from ambiguity" – can just as well be said of Asante's program for the Afrocentric re-education and re-centering of African-American subjects.[38]

If African-American identities are complicated, this is (in part) because they have been constituted not only by African-American cultures and societies, but, likewise, by a perpetual dialogue and violent engagement with the larger society to which they belong.[39] It is important to remember, moreover, that the converse is true of the identities of Americans who are not African-Americans. As Albert Murray puts the point, "American culture, even in its most rigidly segregated precincts, is patently and irrevocably composite. It is, regardless of all the hysterical protestations of those who would have it otherwise, incontestably mulatto."[40] Ralph Ellison makes a similar point when he remarks that "most American whites are culturally part Negro American without even realizing it."[41] In a more humorous vein, Ellison notes that the American language "began by merging the sounds

of many tongues, brought together in the struggle of diverse regions. And whether it is admitted or not, much of the sound of that language is derived from the timbre of the African voice and the listening habits of the African ear. So there is a de'z and do'z of slave speech sounding beneath our most polished Harvard accents, and if there is such a thing as a Yale accent, there is a Negro wail in it – doubtlessly introduced there by Old Yalie John C. Calhoun, who probably got it from his mammy."[42]

It is a significant and valuable feature of Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.'s *The Disuniting of America* that it acknowledges the mulatto character of American culture that Murray and Ellison were once at such pains to stress. "Historically and culturally," Schlesinger writes, "this republic has had an Anglo-Saxon base; but from the start that base has been modified, enriched, and reconstituted by transfusions from other continents and civilizations. The movement from exclusion to inclusion causes a constant revision in the texture of our culture. The ethnic transfusions affect all aspects of American life – our politics, our literature, our music, our painting, our movies, our cuisine, our customs, our dreams. Black Americans in particular have influenced the ever-changing national culture in many ways. They have been here for centuries . . ."[43] Still, Schlesinger is not happy with contemporary American culture, as he fears that the differences animating its perpetually changing mosaic of multiple and heterogeneous hybridities may tear it apart: "If the republic now turns away from Washington's old goal of 'one people'", he worries, "what is its future? – disintegration of the national community, apartheid, Balkanization, tribalization?"[44]

Schlesinger would fend off the threat of "Balkanization" and "tribalization" by having all Americans, despite their differences, affirm a "democratic faith" in certain common and unifying "political ideals."[45] These "ideals of democracy and human rights," which Schlesinger, following Myrdal, calls the "American Creed," "transcend ethnic, religious and political lines."[46] They are the stuff of an "overarching political commitment" that Schlesinger believes can provide "the solvent that will prevent differences from escalating into antagonism and hatred."[47] Reminiscent of Asante, whose educational proposals for strengthing the self-esteem of black students he harshly criticizes, Schlesinger's search for a solvent bespeaks a desire to dissolve the complications he associates with hybridity and difference. But where Asante seeks his solvent in a rhetoric of ancestral soil and biological growth, Schlesinger finds his in a fantastical vision of ideals that, to his mind, have a well-defined content and meaning that transcend the group-based disagreements of a complex and quarrelsome American society. No less than Asante's rhetoric, Schlesinger's vision is a kind of kitsch, precisely because its figure of a semantically fixed and stable creed abstracts from the ambiguities and, especially, the conflicts of interpretation that have historically constituted American's engagement with political ideals. The creed, and the laws Schlesinger thinks embody it – e.g., the antidiscrimination laws yielded by the civil rights movement – are not transparent in their meaning and

admit of multiple and contradictory readings reflecting the various ways Americans understand themselves.[48] Schlesinger's flight from difference cannot escape difference, because difference reproduces itself in the contest over the disputed meanings of unifying democratic ideals. Granting that these ideals are in some sense constitutive of democracy, their precise content and scope remains ever open to democratic debate.[49]

I can summarize my critique of Schlesinger by saying that he only partially acknowledges what Michael Walzer aptly depicts as the doubly hyphenated character of American identities. "[I]t is not the case that Irish-Americans, say, are culturally Irish and politically American," writes Walzer, "[r]ather, they are culturally Irish-American and politically Irish-American. Their culture has been significantly influenced by American culture, their politics is still, both in style and substance, significantly ethnic."[50] Schlesinger, though he admits and indeed insists on the American-Irish and American-African hybridity of Irish-American and African-American *ethnic* identities, still romances the prospect of an American political identity that has been purified of ethnic and racial difference, and hence cleansed of struggles over the meanings of political ideals. Somewhat like the Afrocentrist who yearns for a simple and normal African-American identity – and so refuses to embrace the cultural hybridity of African-American lives – Schlesinger yearns for a simple and normal American political identity.[51] In both cases, identity is fashioned as a safe and placid home, free of ambiguity, contradiction, and conflict.[52]

IV. Race Conscious Multiculturalism

In the fourth part of this paper I defend a version of multiculturalism that avoids the kitsch of Afro- and other ethno-centrisms, as well as the kitsch of a political nationalism that eschews difference. In particular, I make the case that multicultural education in contemporary America should be race conscious.

I begin with the assumption that fostering the capacity for democratic deliberation is a central aim of public education in a democratic society.[53] I also follow a number of contemporary political theorists in supposing that democratic deliberation is a form of public reasoning geared towards adducing considerations that all parties to a given deliberation can find compelling.[54] On this view, successful deliberation requires that co-deliberators cultivate a mutual understanding of the differences in conviction that divide them, so that they can formulate reasons (say, for implementing or not implementing a proposed policy) that will be generally acceptable despite those differences.[55] In the words of one theorist, "[d]eliberation encourages people with conflicting perspectives to understand each other's point of view, to minimize their moral disagreements, and to search for common ground."[56]

Lorenzo Simpson usefully glosses the pursuit of mutual understanding when he writes that it requires "a 'reversibility of perspectives,' not in the sense of my

collapsing into you or you into me, but in the sense that I try to understand – but not necessarily agree with – what you take your life to be about and you do the same for me . . . [i]n such a . . . mutual understanding you may come to alter the way in which you understand yourself and I . . . may find that listening to you leads me to alter my self-understanding."[57] According to Simpson, the search for common ground need not leave us with the convictions with which we began. On the contrary, the process of democratic deliberation can be a source of self-trans-formation that enriches one's view of the issues at hand and even alters one's conception of the demands of social justice.[58]

In multicultural America, multicultural public education is a good that promotes mutual understanding across cultural differences, thereby fostering and strengthening citizens' capacities for democratic deliberation. In essence, multi-cultural education is a form of pedagogy whereby students study the histories and cultures of differently cultured fellow citizens, many of whose identities have a composite, multicultural character. More exactly, it is a form of cross-cultural hermeneutical dialogue, and therefore a way of entering into conversation with those histories and cultures.[59] By disseminating the cultural capital of cross-cultural knowledge, multicultural education can cultivate citizens' abilities to "reverse perspectives." By facilitating mutual understanding, it can help them to shape shared vocabularies for understanding their moral and cultural identities and for finding common ground in their deliberations.[60]

By strengthening a student's ability to reverse perspectives, multicultural education may bolster her disposition to engage the self-understandings of differently cultured others, even if the particulars of her multicultural education have not involved an engagement with the cultures of precisely *those* others (consider, e.g., someone whose multicultural education has included courses in Asian-American literatures, but who knows nothing of American Latino subcultures). Acquiring a know-how and a feel for cross-cultural hermeneutical conversation is likely to reinforce a student's inclination to understand and learn from the self-interpretations of cultural "others" in just the way that the cultivation of an athletic skill (e.g., the ability to "head" a soccer ball) tends to reinforce one's inclination to participate in the sports for which having that skill is an advantage (e.g. playing soccer). In the case of multicultural education, one cultivates a skill which is motivationally conducive to the sort of mutual understanding that is crit-ical to the flourishing of deliberative democracy in a multicultural society.[61]

Let me summarize my argument so far. In contrast to Schlesinger, who yearns for a society in which the understanding of key political ideals remains immune from deliberative debate animated by cultural and other group differences, I have been suggesting that deliberative debate of this sort is an appropriate medium for seeking and forging common grounds and ideals. I have also been arguing (1) that a commitment to deliberative democracy in multicultural America entails a commitment to promoting the mutual understanding of differences through cross-cultural dialogue and (2) that such a commitment justifies the institution of

multicultural education. The promotion of mutual understanding avoids Schlesinger's and Asante's kitsch, because it is not predicated on an imperative to preserve an uncomplicated national or ethnic identity in the face of cultural and social complexity. Indeed, the ideal of mutual understanding invites *increasing* complexity by suggesting that cross-cultural educational insights, since they can effect changes in the self-understandings of persons who have benefitted from a multicultural education, may alter and further complicate those persons' identities, perhaps making them *more* multicultural. In what follows, I further explore the implications of this ideal by proposing that a commitment to deliberative democracy in multicultural America justifies a form of multicultural education that is, specifically, *race-conscious*.

Multicultural education in America should be race-conscious, because the mutual understanding of differences in America is impossible absent attention to race. As regards cross-cultural conversations with specifically African-American *cultures*,[62] this is perhaps obvious. To be sure, my claim here *is not* that these cultures are somehow reducible to black Americans' reactions to racial classification, or to the slavery and racism that have attended that classification. As Ralph Ellison once asked, "can a people . . . live and develop for over three hundred years simply by *reacting*?"[63] Still, it seems to me incontrovertible that any cross-cultural inquiry into African-American cultures will have to address the largely racialized character of African-Americans' self-understandings; that is, it will have to investigate the ways in which African-Americans, in describing themselves as black, have coped with racial classification and racial oppression, thereby modifying the character of African-American life, art, and politics. African-American cultures, notwithstanding their past and present diversity, have been and continue to be inflected by meanings and self-understandings that *black persons* have assigned to being black in a society that has been shaped by black slavery and antiblack racism. Because racism, the legacies of slavery, and black personhood cut across the cultural differences distinguishing African-Americans, cross-cultural education that engages the complexity of African-American cultures will *almost always* attend to the meanings that black persons, mindful of the slave past and of antiblack racism, ascribe to being black.

Let me develop this point by highlighting the role that the concept of a black person, like that of subjective gender identity, can play in historical inquiry. Using the latter concept, Joan Scott has shown how nineteenth-century French seamstresses, acting under descriptions of themselves as *women*, established a "distinctively feminine work identity" that significantly shaped their political actions. Similarly, Robin D. G. Kelley has argued that "[r]ace, particularly a sense of 'blackness,' . . . figures prominently in the collective identities of black working people." In effect, he implies that the concept of a black person – that is, of someone black who acts in the world under a description of himself as black – can make a valuable contribution to the historian's study of America's black working class, a point that he later bears out in his discussion of the African-Americans

who fought in Spain with the Abraham Lincoln Brigade "out of their concern for *black people*."[64] Kelley's work is relevant to my argument, because it offers an indication of the sort of race-conscious insight that ought to inform American multicultural education. To be precise, it suggests that students' cross-cultural study of African-American working class cultures should focus, in part, on the ways in which the racialized self-understandings of black persons have informed and continue to inform those cultures.

Kelley's example stresses the *collective* significance that working class black persons have assigned to being black. This is significant, in my view, for I suspect that race-conscious multiculturalism will enhance nonblacks' capacity to find deliberative common ground with blacks – a ground that at times seems to be sorely missing from American public life (as, for example, in discussions of the million man march and of the "not guilty" verdict in the O. J. Simpson criminal trial) – just to the extent that it emphasizes African-American views of and debates about being black that develop the insight that black identity is a collective predicament. In the same vein, one could easily envision a race-conscious multicultural curriculum that investigated African-American history and political thought with the explicit aim of making sense of such views and debates.

Consider, for example, the view held by many (though not all) African-Americans that the (comparatively) low, average socioeconomic status of African-Americans, because it is due to the cumulative effects of racial slavery and antiblack racism, is an injustice for which African Americans deserve compensation. Some white Americans will dismiss this assertion of injustice, largely because they are "reluctant to see the present social plight of blacks as the result of American slavery."[65] Still, were these whites to learn something of American racial slavery and of its impact on African-American life, they could begin to see that the argument for reparations is plausible, and begin to share with the African-Americans who advance that argument a common moral ground for further deliberations. In other words, through the study of African American social history, they could begin to acknowledge the cogency of the considerations in light of which many African-American black persons, in reflecting on that history, have insisted that being black in America involves collective injustice. Supposing that they augmented this study with inquiry into the central themes of African-American political thought[66] (as it has evolved, say, from the writings of Martin Delaney to those of Martin King), they could enlarge the common ground by beginning to recognize the range and force of African-American perspectives on other race-related issues.

It would be a mistake, of course, to think that multiculturalism needs to be race-conscious only when addressing the self-understandings of black persons or, by analogy, the self-understandings of racially classified but non-black "persons of color." America is also a nation of racially classified whites and white persons; and white personhood, we know, cuts across ethnic lines. Again, by analogy to blacks who become black persons, whites who become white persons let their

descriptions of themselves as white matter to the ways in which they live their lives. David Roediger's work on the racial formation of Irish-American workers is relevant here, as it provides a model for historical inquiry that illuminates the social construction and ethnic cultural significance of white racial identities.[67] Also important, in this context, is Toni Morrison's book, *Playing in the Dark*. Reflecting on the nature of American literature, Morrison writes:

> that cultural identities are formed and informed by a nation's literature, and . . . what seemed to be on the 'mind' of the literature of the United States was the self-conscious construction of the American as a new white man. Emerson's call for this new man in 'The American Scholar' indicates the deliberateness of the construction, the conscious necessity for establishing the difference. But the writers who responded to this call, accepting or rejecting it, did not look solely to Europe to establish a reference for difference. There was a very theatrical difference under-foot. Writers were able to celebrate and deplore an identity already existing or rapidly taking a form that was elaborated through racial difference. That difference provided a huge payout of sign, symbol, and agency in the process of organizing, separating, and consolidating identity . . .[68]

For Morrison, reading American writers after Emerson (e.g., Poe and Twain) is a matter of engaging complicated constructions of white racial identities implicated in a racial ideology ("American Africanism" is Morrison's phrase) that assigns multiple meanings to the African presence in America. Self-consciously constructing a literature in light of descriptions of themselves as white, the "founding writers of young America" were white persons (in my sense of the term) for whom the figure of the black African became a "staging ground and arena for the elaboration of the quintessential American identity."[69] For my purposes, Morrison's short study is valuable, because it affords some excellent examples of the ways multicultural inquiry can explore the cultural construction of white racial identities and their connection to the promotion of racial ideologies. In America, multicultural education cannot avoid race, because socially constructed racial identities – those of black persons and white persons alike – come into view no matter what class or ethnic perpsective one occupies in cross-cultural deliberations. And while one ought not to conflate multiculturalism with struggles gainst racism and economic injustice, or promote it as a substitute for such struggles, multicultural education, by being race conscious, can contribute to an understanding of the issues posed by these struggles.[70]

Conclusion: The Politics of Recognition

Let me conclude this essay by returning to Du Bois.

In 1897, Du Bois sketched his position on the question of cultural recognition in a paper he entitled "The Conservation of Races." In this essay, he argued that each race has a cultural or "spiritual" message for humanity, although some races,

the Negro race among them, have yet fully to deliver themselves of their messages. Among the central themes of "The Conservation of Races" is Du Bois's effort to exhort his fellow Negroes, especially his fellow American Negroes, to act in concert to cultivate and bring to fruition the Negro's message for humanity. Here, however, I wish only to emphasize Du Bois's guiding assumption in this essay, that recognizing the cultural worth of a race's spiritual message is a matter of seeing that that message has something to say to all human beings. In 1897, then, Du Bois conceptualized cultural recognition as the predication of universal value.[71]

In *The Souls of Black Folk*, published just six years after "The Conservation of Races," Du Bois develops a somewhat different notion of recognition; not recognition as the predication of universal value, but what I shall call 'self-recognition'. The self of self-recognition is not, for the Hegelian Du Bois, the self taken by itself, but the self conceived as socially mediated. For Du Bois, then, self-recognition is a form of cultural recognition that entails seeing one's own cultural identity in connection to the cultural identities of the other members of one's community. Where self-recognition is frustrated by racial prejudice, Du Bois proposes, the likely outcome is social tragedy.[72]

The emergence in Du Bois's writing of a second conception of cultural recognition marks a distinction that continues to play a role in debates about the politics of recognition. Charles Taylor, for example, in his influential essay on that topic, explicitly conceptualizes cultural recognition as the predication of universal value. For Taylor, one's hermeneutic engagement with cultures not one's own should be guided by the defeasible presumption that "all human cultures that have animated whole societies over some considerable stretch of time have something important to say to all human beings."[73] Now compare Taylor's understanding of recognition to the one Susan Wolf propounds in her critique of Taylor. According to Wolf, "[t]he politics of recognition urges us not just to make efforts to recognize the other more actively and accurately – to recognize those people and those cultures that occupy the world in addition to ourselves – it urges us to take a closer, less selective look at who is sharing our cities, the libraries, the schools we call our own. There is nothing wrong with allotting a special place in the curriculum for the study of our history, our literature, our culture. But if we are to study our culture, we had better recognize who we, as a community, are."[74] Here, like the Du Bois of *Souls*, Wolf concerns herself with *self*-recognition, suggesting that one aim of multicultural education is a knowledge of one's community in its multifaceted complexity. Recognizing who *we* are, as distinct from recognizing that *they* have something valuable to say, is the critical element in her interpretation of the politics of recognition.

Now it is clear, I hope, that the conception of the politics of recognition which I have been defending is Wolf's "self-recognition" conception. Recognition, as I conceive it, is recognition gained through multicultural education oriented towards mutual understanding. Thus understood, recognition is, as it was for Du

Bois, a matter of seeing one's cultural identity in connection to the cultural identities of other members of one's community. Sometimes this will involve seeing more clearly the point of the needs-interpretations of others; and sometimes it will lead to criticism and debate about the validity of those needs-interpretations. On still other occasions, recognition will move us to change our views of ourselves, or to see that our sense of what matters to us brings our culturally hybrid selves closer to culturally hybrid others than we ever expected. Whatever the case may be, the pursuit of socially mediated self-recognition is important to advancing the goal of deliberative democracy in America. "America's dilemma," Ronald Takaki reminds us, "has been our resistance to ourselves – our denial of our immensely varied selves."[75]

<div align="center">NOTES</div>

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    1. See Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *Loose Canons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 35.

    2. This way of formulating my argument draws inspiration from John Guillory's excellent discussion of the current canon wars in his *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 38–55.

    3. Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 13. For Appiah's more detailed discussions of racialism, see his "Racisms" in *Anatomy of Racism*, ed. David Goldberg (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990) and K. Anthony Appiah and Amy Gutmann, *Color Conscious* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 54–56.

    4. On the population geneticist's conception of races as breeding populations, see Ernst Mayr, "Typological versus Population Thinking," in *Evolution and the Diversity of Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 26–29, and Richard Goldsby, *Race and Races* (New York: MacMillian, 1971).

    5. See Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 1986), 90 and Walter Benn Michaels, "The No-Drop Rule," *Critical Inquiry* 20 (Summer 1994): 90.

    6. Ibid., 764.

    7. Adrian Piper, "Passing for White, Passing for Black," *Transition* 58 (1992): 30–31.

    8. Michaels, "The No-Drop Rule," 767–68.

    9. Appiah makes a similar point in *Color Conscious*, 85–90.

    10. See Piper, "Passing for White, Passing for Black," 18–19.

    11. Here, I do not take up the important question of what it is that makes a practice of racial classification a practice of *racial* classification. The problem, here, is to identify the concepts and beliefs that distinguish practices of racial classification from other practices of social classification (e.g., practices of gender identification). This is *not* a question that Omi and Winant take up in either the first or the revised edition of *Racial Formation in the United States*. Nor does Winant take up the issue in his recent book, *Racial Conditions* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994). Robert Miles does address the issue in his *Racism* ((New York: Routledge, 1989), 73–75), but it is

not obvious to me that his notion of racialization suffices to capture all the practices of social iden-
tification which we are inclined to call 'racial' (e.g., racial identification in Brazil, which proceeds
on the basis of principles very different from those which obtain in the United States). In the final
analysis, there may be no adequate general concept of practices of racial identification. Still, there
may be significant family resemblances (in Wittgenstein's sense) between these different practices.

12. Only in the twentieth-century does the one-drop rule become the dominant rule of racial clas-
sification in the United States. Indeed, in much of the nineteenth century, it finds itself in competi-
tion with a rule that defines mulattoes as other than black. For a detailed recounting of the social
and political history of the one-drop rule and of black and white challenges to the rule, see F. James
Davis, *Who Is Black* (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 1991). See, also, David
Hollinger, *PostEthnic America* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), pp. 32, 44–5.

13. If, for Piper, being black were a function, say, of satisfying the one-drop rule, then she would
be committed to the view that, even in the absence of a practice of racial classification wherein the
rule found application (explicitly or implicitly), America would still contain its share of black folk.
On my reconstruction of her position, this is a view she rejects.

14. This is not to deny that the bulk of Piper's powerful autobiographical essay deftly expresses
her own "first-person" perspective.

15. See Anna Stubblefield, "Racial Identity and Non-Essentialism about Race," *Social Theory
and Practice*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (Fall 1995) and Anthony Appiah, *Color Conscious*, pp. 76–83.

16. See Ian Hacking, "Making Up People," in *Reconstructing Individualism*, ed. Thomas
C. Heller, Morton Sosna, and David Wellbery (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986),
222–36.

17. By "identification," Appiah means "the process through which an individual intentionally
shapes her projects – including her plans for her own life and her conception of the good – by refer-
ence to available labels, available identities." See *Color Conscious*, 78.

18. See Hacking, "Making Up People," 236.

19. Ibid., 231.

20. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, ed. David W. Blight and Robert Gooding-
Williams (New York: Bedford Books, 1997), 38.

21. Ibid.

22. James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* (New York: Vintage,
1989), 20–21.

23. The position I sketch here is consistent, I think, with Stuart Hall's well-known remarks
regarding the "end of the innocent notion of the essential black subject." "What is at issue," Hall
argues, "is the extraordinary diversity of subject positions, social experiences, and cultural identi-
ties which compose the category 'black'." On my account, this diversity is in part a function of the
numerous ways in which one can be a "black person." See Stuart Hall, "New Ethnicities," in
"*Race*", *Culture and Difference*, ed. James Donald and Ali Rattansi (Thousand Oaks: Sage
Publications, 1992), 254.

24. In other words, I do not subscribe to the sort of philosophical realism that, as Appiah puts it,
"seems inherent in the ways questions of authenticity are normally posed." See Appiah, *Color
Conscious*, 96.

25. By 'discursively shaped' I mean, simply, description-shaped. For a similar approach to the
topic of gender identity, see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

26. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, trans. George Becker, with an introduction by
Michael Walzer (New York: Schocken, 1995), 89.

27. Ibid., 90, 111.

28. For a more detailed critique of Sartre's remarks about inauthentic Jews and about Jewish
identity in general, see Michael Walzer's introduction to the edition of *Anti-Semite and Jew* cited
above.

29. It is important to see that the politics of mixed race is, ambiguously, a politics of distur-
bance *and* enactment. To the extent that it aims to institute a new order of racial classification
conventions that still relies on a principle of descent (mixed race identity is, after all, a function of

the racial identities of one's parents), I find it difficult to see in this politics, as does David Hollinger, a "fundamental challenge to the authority of descent-defined categories." See David Hollinger, *PostEthnic America*, 165. For an interesting argument to the effect that the very heart of democratic politics is an ambiguous tension between disturbance and enactment see William E. Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 75–104.

30. Appiah, *In My Father's House*, 24.

31. Ibid. See also Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Europe Upside down: Fallacies of the New Afrocentrism," *SAPINA Newsletter* V (January–June 1993): 5. Appiah makes a similar point in the context of his critique of Afrocentrism in his "Afrocentrism, 'Difference,' Role Models and the Construction of Race," *Salmagundi* 104–105 (Fall 1994–Winter 1995): 93–94.

32. Molefi Kete Asante, "Racism, Consciousness, and Afrocentricity," *Lure and Loathing: Essays on Race, Identity, and the Ambivalence of Assimilation*, ed. Gerald Early (New York: Penguin, 1993), 142.

33. Asante, "Racism, Consciousness, and Afrocentricity," 142–43.

34. For a good discussion of the theoretical commitments of the nineteenth century racial sciences, see Michael Banton, *Racial Theories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), chap. 2.

35. Karsten Harries, *The Meaning of Modern Art* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 149.

36. The production of normalizing norms and images of African-American identity is a staple of African-American cultural nationalism. On this point, see William L. Van DeBurge, *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture 1965–1975* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 170ff.

37. Manthia Diawara has also interpreted Afrocentricity as Afro-kitsch in his "Afro-Kitsch," *Black Popular Culture*, ed. Gina Dent (Dia Center for the Arts, 1992), 285–91.

38. Charles Johnson, *Being and Race: Black Writing since 1970* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 20. Eve Sedgwick has suggested if I read her correctly, that kitsch-attribution is a supercilious gesture expressing an attitude of "self-exemption or cynicism but nothing much more interesting than that." Harries's and Johnson's use of the term 'kitsch' seem to me to be exempt from this criticism in that it relies on a clearly stated concept of kitsch (kitsch as a retreat from ambiguity) rather than on the haughty pretension simply to be able to "recognize kitsch when [one] sees it" (see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990], 155–56). For a more recent and equally persuasive critique of the ideology of "negritude," see Tsenay Serequeberhan, *The Hermeneutics of African Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 42–53. For a critique of Afrocentric education that differs from (but is complementary to) the one offered here, see Amy Gutmann, "Challenges to multiculturalism in democratic education," *Public Education In A Multicultural Society*, ed. Robert K. Fullinwider (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 158–59.

39. Appiah makes a similar point in his "Identity, Authenticity, Survival: Multicultural Societies and Social Reproduction," *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 154–55.

40. Albert Murray, *The Omni-Americans* (New York: Vintage, 1983), 22.

41. Ralph Ellison, *Going to the Territory* (New York: Vintage, 1987), 108. Murray's and Ellison's central point is that American identities are *multicultural*. For a recent sounding of a similar theme that stresses the multicultural or "mélange" character of modern identities generally, see Jeremy Waldron, "Multiculturalism and Mélange," *Public Education in a Multicultural Society*, ed. Robert K. Fullinwider (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 90–118. For a recent discussion of the hybrid and syncretic character of African-American and other "black Atlantic" cultures, see Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Double Consciousness and Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), chap 3.

42. Ellison, *Going to the Territory*, 108–109.

43. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992), 135.

44. Ibid., 118.

45. Ibid., 135–36.

46. Ibid., 27, 118.

47. Ibid., 135.

48. On the ambiguities built into antidiscrimination legislation, see Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, "Race, Reform, and Retrenchment: Transformation and Legitimation in Antidiscrimination Law," *Harvard Law Review* 101 (May 1988): 1341–46.

49. For more on this point, and on the hermeneutic circle that characterizes democratic debate about basic rights and liberties, see Seyla Benhabib, "Toward a Deliberative Model of Democratic Legitimacy," *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*, ed. Seyla Benhabib (Princeton University Press, 1996), 77–80. See, in the same volume, Chantel Mouffe, "Democracy, Power, and the 'Political', " 254. Also see Amy Gutmann, "Challenges of multiculturalism in democratic education," 168–69.

50. Michael Walzer, "What Does It Mean to Be an 'American'?," *Social Research* 57 (Fall 1990): 612.

51. For clear-sighted resistance to kitsch conceptions of American identity of the sort that Schlesinger's position represents, see Thomas L. Dumm's letter to Laurie Anderson in the first chapter of his *united states* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994) and Anne Norton's "Engendering Another American Identity" *Rhetorical Republic: Governing Representations in American Politics*, ed. Frederick M. Dolan and Thomas L. Dumm (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), 125–42.

52. Here, I mean to suggest that both Asante's Afrocentrism and Schlesinger's nationalism exemplify what Bonnie Honig has recently called "the politics of home." See Bonnie Honig, "Difference, Dilemmas, and the Politics of Home," *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*, ed. Seyla Benhabib (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 257–277.

53. Following Amy Gutmann, I use public education to refer to "all publically subsidized and publically accredited institutions that satisfy a mandatory schooling requirement, whether they are actually controlled by public or private organizations." This includes publically accredited private schools. See Amy Gutmann, "Challenges of multiculturalism in democratic education," 176, fn 1.

54. See, for example, Joshua Cohen, "Procedure and Substance in Deliberative Democracy," *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*, ed. Seyla Benhabib (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 95–119; Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, *Democracy and Disagreement* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), especially chapter 2; and Seyla Benhabib, "Towards a Deliberative Model of Democratic Legitimacy."

55. Joshua Cohen is especially clear on this point: "In an idealized deliberative setting, it will not do simply to advance reasons that one takes to be true or compelling: such considerations may be rejected by others who are themselves reasonable. One must instead find reasons that are compelling to others, acknowledging those others as equals, aware that they have alternative reasonable commitments and knowing something about the kinds of commitments that they are likely to have." See Joshua Cohen, "Procedure and Substance in Deliberative Democracy," 100.

56. Amy Gutmann, "The Challenge of Multiculturalism in Political Ethics," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 22 (Summer 1993): 199.

57. Lorenzo C. Simpson, "Community and Difference: Reflections In the Wake of Rodney King," C. C. Gould and R. S. Cohen, eds., *Artifacts, Representations and Social Practice* (Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994), 531–32. Here, it is important to note that, for Simpson, "reversing perspectives" does not entail that one be able literally to put oneself in the position of the other; or that one find a way to live the history she has lived; or even that one be able adequately to imagine her perspective as one's own – none of which possibilities are *real* possibilities according to Iris Young. On the contrary, he seems to have in mind precisely the sort of listening and learning "across differences" that Young endorses. In this essay, I use the idea of reversing perspectives as Simpson uses it. For Young's discussion of this issue, see her "Asymmetrical

Reciprocity: On Moral Respect, Wonder and Enlarged Thought," *Constellations* 3:3 (January 1997): 340–363.

58. Iris Young makes a similar point in her essay "Difference as a Resource for Democratic Communication." The essay is forthcoming in *Democracy and Deliberation*, ed. James Bohman and William Rehg (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997).

59. Here, I follow Gadamer in allowing that one can enter into dialogue, not only with persons, but with narratives and other forms of written expression.

60. See Lorenzo Simpson, "Community and Difference," 532–33.

61. For a related argument that, from a somewhat different perspective, raises the question of the connection between multicultural education and democratic citizenship, see Janet Farrell Smith, "A Critique of Adversarial Discourse: Gender as an Aspect of Cultural Difference," *Contemporary Philosophical Perspectives on Pluralism and Multiculturalism*, ed. Lawrence Foster and Patricia Herzog (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), 59–82.

62. Here, I mean to flag that fact that, like Anthony Appiah, I remain skeptical of the view that there is a single culture shared in common by all African-Americans. On this point, see Appiah's recent contribution to Appiah and Gutmann, *Color Conscious*. See, also, Bernard Boxill, *Blacks and Social Justice* (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Alenheld, 1984), 178.

63. Ralph Ellison, "An American Dilemma: A Review," *Shadow and Act* (New York: Vintage, 1972), 315.

64. See Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 44, 104, and Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels* (New York: The Free Press), 4–5, 104.

65. Bill E. Lawson, "Moral Discourse and Slavery," *Between Slavery and Freedom: Philosophy and American Slavery*, ed. Howard McGary and Bill E. Lawson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 85.

66. For a brief but excellent introduction to the central themes of African American political thought, see Bernard Boxill, "Two Traditions in African American Political Philosophy," *The Philosophical Forum* 24 (Fall–Spring 1992–93), 119–135.

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

68. Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 39.

69. Ibid., 44, 51. See also, in this vein, Karen Sánchez-Eppler, *Touching Liberty* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), especially her chapter on Walt Whitman.

70. For an insightful and valuable discussion of the differences and possible connections between multiculturalism and antiracism, see Lawrence Blum, "Multiculturalism, Racial Injustice, and Community: Reflections on Charles Taylor's 'Politics of Recognition,'" *Contemporary Philosophical Perspectives on Pluralism and Multiculturalism*, ed. Lawrence Foster and Patricia Herzog (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), 175–205. On the dangers of letting the promotion of multiculturalism substitute for struggles against racism and other forms of social injustice, see Hazel Carby, "The Multicultural Wars," *Radical History* 54 (Fall 1992): 10–11, as well as her unpublished paper "Cultural Integration/Political Apartheid" delivered at the December 2nd and 3rd "Brown at Forty" conference held at Amherst College. For a related critique of an identity politics that "caresses the better-off female, gay, and/or minority self while consigning its working class sisters and brothers to their 'richly' deserved misery," see Micaela di Leonardo, "White Ethnicities, Identity Politics, and Baby Bear's Chair," *Social Text* 41 (Winter 1994): 165–91.

71. For the full text of "The Conservation of Races" see *Negro Social and Political Thought 1850–1920*, ed. Howard Brotz (New York: Basic Books, 1966), 493–92.

72. I explore the relation between recognition and tragedy in *Souls* in chapter three of an unpublished manuscript, *Recognizing Race: Du Boisian Meditations on Black Identity in America*. A short version of this chapter appears under the title "Du Bois's Counter-Sublime," *Massachusetts Review* 35 (Summer 1994): 202–24. See also the editors' introduction to the Bedford Books edition of *The Souls of Black Folk* cited in footnote 20.

73. Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," *Multiculturalism*: *Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 66.

74. Susan Wolf, "Comment," *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 85.

75. Ronald Takaki, *A Different Mirror*: *A History of Multicultural America* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1993), 427.