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Blackophilia and Blackophobia: White Youth, the Consumption of Rap Music, and White Supremacy

This paper uses the phenomenon of White youth identification with rap music to argue that Blackophilia (manifested by White consumption of Black popular culture) is linked with Blackophobia (fear and dread of African Americans). Coexistent with White youth fascination with hip-hop culture and African American athletes and celebrities is the continuing manifestation of White youth resistance to programs that challenge institutional racism and the attraction of small but significant numbers of White youth to far-right White supremacist groups. The author argues that these phenomena may be best understood as interrelated aspects of White supremacy.

Mookie: Who's your favorite basketball player?

Pino: Magic Johnson.

Mookie: And not Larry Bird? Who's your favorite movie star?

Pino: Eddie Murphy.

Mookie: Last question: Who's your favorite rock star? Barry Manilow? Pino, no joke. C'mon, answer.

Vito: It's Prince. He's a Prince freak.

Pino: Shut up. The Boss! Bruuuuce!!!!

Mookie: Sounds funny to me. As much as you say nigger this and nigger that, all your favorite people are "niggers."

Pino: It's different. Magic, Eddie, Prince are not niggers, I mean, are not Black. I mean, they're Black but not really Black. They're more than Black. It's different.

Mookie: Pino, I think secretly that you wish you were Black. That's what I think.

Dialogue from *Do the Right Thing* (Lee, 1989)

White Love/White Hate

Whereas MTV has not been the source of many enduring social scientific theories, a recent statement from an MTV host warrants some at-

tion: "When they write the history of popular culture in the 20th century, they can sum it up in one sentence which is, 'White kids wanting to be as cool as Black kids'" (Graham, 2000). Although the phenomena of White identification with African American cultural styles has been noted since the first White performer burned a cork and darkened his face, during the last 2 decades this tendency has been most evident in the pleasure that White youth experience through the consumption of rap music and the adoption of the primarily African American linguistic and nonverbal communication customs associated with hip-hop. White youth have embraced rap music and hip-hop culture in such overwhelming numbers that by some estimates Whites are now the biggest consumers of recordings by rap artists. Dunlevy (2000) cited figures from the hip-hop magazine *The Source* that suggest that more than 70% of rap music buyers are White. Although Rose (1994) contended that the percentage of rap music that is consumed by Whites may be overstated because of several "under-the-radar" phenomena such as bootleg street sales and music that is shared among friends, there is still no question that White youth have become one of the primary demographics for both the purchase and use of rap and hip-hop cultural artifacts.

It is also clear that rap music, and other musical genres created primarily by Black artists, are a huge source of profit for America's recording industry, matching the profits generated by rock music. Dunlevy (2000) also provided figures from the Recording Industry Association of America that show that rap and R&B sales make up about 23% of the U.S. music market (\$3.2 billion) while rock represents approximately 26% of the market (\$3.6 billion). Walcott (cited in Dunlevy, 2000) pointed out that the recording industry is amply aware of the profits that can be obtained from marketing rap music to White teenagers and that they have aggressively pursued this campaign. In addition, rap music is now the ubiquitous soundtrack for advertising campaigns that push everything young people might purchase, from sporty automobiles to fizzy soft drinks. The trajectory of mainstream acceptance of rap music is thus similar to that of other forms of Black musical expression, a trajectory that moves from rejection to reluctant acceptance to full-blown incorporation and often co-optation (Rose, 1994).

Clearly there is something in rap that resonates with White suburban teenagers. The oft-cited uses and gratifications theory of media (see McQuail, 1984, for a critical review) suggests that media consumers seek out specific sorts of stimuli in order to satisfy particular needs and desires. One line of research in this tradition that seems most applicable to the phenomenon of youth identification with popular music in general has focused on how audiences utilize media for purposes of social integration (see Katz, Gurevitch, & Haas, 1973, for a paradigm example).

Another clue to how this trend has taken hold may be found in utilizing the lessons of uses and gratifications along with an adaptation of the diffusion of innovations theory (Rogers, 1995) to encompass popular culture phenomenon. Although early adopters of rap music among White youth may thus have been motivated by rebellious impulses, as more and more White youth embrace rap music, the trend takes on a momentum of its own and provides a common sort of cultural vocabulary for youths from all cultural backgrounds. It thus becomes a cultural imperative for many White youth to embrace rap music in order to fit in with their peer group.

Approaching this issue from the uses and gratifications perspective can thus aid our understanding of the motivational factors behind White youth identification with rap and hip-hop; however, this approach can take us only so far. As McQuail (1984) pointed out, uses and gratifications theory and research tend to be oriented toward individual, psychological explanations and are thus limited in terms of how well they can illuminate broad social phenomenon. Furthermore, the emphasis on how and why people use media, although helpful in investigating certain questions about audience motivations, tells us little or nothing about possible unintended consequences and impacts of the media products that consumers avidly purchase and use. McQuail (1984) noted:

The method, as typically practiced, can only increase the chances of manipulation, since it adduces psychological and social reasons why people like what they get which can easily be turned to support the view that people get what they like, thus blunting any possible critical edge in the application of new knowledge which comes from the research. (p. 182)

Analyzing the possible social implications of White youth consumption of rap music means moving beyond simply charting reasons for individuals' musical preferences. Thus in this essay I will theorize the larger social context in which this fandom is embedded. For one, it is important to note that many White teenagers and college students move beyond the music and exhibit their fascination with African American culture through the clothing and accessories that they wear as well as through the language styles that they adopt and the nonverbal expressive codes that they affect (Ledbetter, 1995). West (1994) referred to this as the "Afro-Americanization of White youth" (p. 121). As powerful as this trend seems to be today, similar manifestations of White emulation of Black culture were evident among the minstrel performers of the 19th century, the jazz hipsters of the 1920s, the beatniks of the 1950s, and the rock and rollers of the 1960s and 1970s (Lott, 1995; Walcott, cited in Dunlevy, 2000; also see Hebdidge, 1979, for an analysis of White obsession with the stylistic elements of Black culture). As the MTV sage

quoted above claims, one clear trend in the history of American popular culture is “Black = cool.” Rose (1994) pointed out the historical continuities at play here when she stated, “Like generations of white teenagers before them, white teenage rap fans are listening in on black culture, fascinated by its differences, drawn in by mainstream social constructions of black culture as a forbidden narrative, as a symbol of rebellion” (p. 5).

However, focusing in on the White embrace of popular culture created by Black artists reveals only part of the (his)story and none of the intense contradictions of America’s obsession with race. White minstrel performers in blackface, for example, were attempting to contain and soothe their unrelenting fears of Black males through ridicule, and yet they were also simultaneously acting out their fascination with Blackness (Lott, 1995). Reconsidering Lott’s proposition from the perspective of the contemporary era, I argue that White youth adoption of Black cultural forms in the 21st century is also a performance, one that allows Whites to contain their fears and animosities toward Blacks through rituals not of ridicule, as in previous eras, but of adoration. Thus, although the motives behind the performance may initially appear to be different, the act is still a manifestation of White supremacy, albeit a White supremacy that is in crisis and disarray, rife with confusion and contradiction.

The snippet of dialogue from the Spike Lee film *Do the Right Thing* (1989) that is quoted above, alludes to these internal contradictions that are often a part of contemporary White fans’ identification with Black athletes, film stars, and musicians. Regarding something or someone as “cool” is just fine, and, as West (1994) suggested, it is even possible that “when white and black kids buy the same billboard hits and laud the same athletic heroes the result is often a shared cultural space where some humane interaction takes place” (p. 121). However, no evidence to support this claim is offered by West, and whether shared cultural space will lead to shared political consciousness is open to debate.

Adopting a critical perspective on what she sees as parasitic White coolness, hooks has argued, “While it has become ‘cool’ for white folks to hang out with black people and express pleasure in black culture, most white people do not feel that this pleasure should be linked to unlearning racism” (1992, p. 17). To be fair to West, hooks does not provide any evidence for this claim about “most white people” either, but her contention that White celebration of Black culture does nothing to interrogate White supremacy if it is not articulated to an active antiracist struggle does not require an empirical test to be considered a valid proposition (see, also, Ledbetter, 1995).

Essentially hooks’s argument rests on the profound differences between acts of consumerism and acts of citizenship. Both Black and White

(and Latino, Asian, etc.) American youth grow up in a media culture that endlessly promotes the values of consumerism while mostly ignoring or devaluing citizenship (see Klein, 1999), and the differences between these conflicting impulses are profound. As Jhally (2000) argued in his discussion of the values that advertising promotes:

It [advertising] addresses us not as members of society talking about collective issues, but as individuals. It talks about our individual needs and desires. It does not talk about those things that we have to negotiate collectively, such as poverty, healthcare, housing and the homeless, the environment, and so on. The market appeals to the worst in us (greed, selfishness) and discourages what is best about us (compassion, caring, and generosity). (p. 33)

Jhally's argument can be extended beyond advertising to the entire corporate media and culture system. Thus, whereas citizenship is about active participation in the governing of society and necessitates both community involvement and working for the greater good, however that may be defined by various ideological projects, the consumerism promoted and reinforced in media culture is merely about individual self-gratification and the attempt to solve all perceived problems through the purchasing of goods in the marketplace. Even the U.S. electoral system, perhaps the most obvious venue for citizen participation, has been reduced to a retail transaction by the corporate media—which candidate projects the most “marketable” image? From this perspective, White youth consumption of forms of popular culture created primarily by Blacks, such as rap music, appears to be an apolitical trend of consumerism that is devoid of any other sociological implications. However, that assumption ignores an essential aspect of this phenomenon.

Although White consumption of Black popular culture may appear to be a somewhat benign consumerist manifestation of Blackophilia, in this article I argue that the parallel to this Blackophilia among White youth is Blackophobia—fear and dread of African Americans. Coexistent with White youth consumption of hip-hop culture and African American athletes and celebrities is the continuing manifestation of White youth resistance to programs such as affirmative action that challenge institutional racism (Lipsitz, 1998; Tuch, Sigelman, & MacDonald, 1999) and the attraction of small but significant numbers of White youth to far-right White supremacist groups. Statistics gathered by the Southern Poverty Law Center (2003) documented the existence of 708 organized hate groups in the U.S. in 2002. Membership in most of these organizations is primarily made up of young White males who are targeted through far-right record labels, Internet sites, and other forms of mass media. The number of Internet sites devoted to hate rose by 20% from 1999 to early 2000, and climbed again by 9% between 2002 and 2003. The late

owner of Resistance Records and head of the neo-Nazi group National Alliance, William Pierce (author of the notorious *Turner Diaries* that was alleged to have inspired Timothy McVeigh's bombing of the Oklahoma City federal building), claimed that his group doubled its membership in 1999. That same year Resistance Records grossed close to \$1 million from the sale of recordings by White rock groups who push a message of White supremacy, racial violence, and hate (Blythe, 2000).

The argument I will propose is that White youth consumption of cultural artifacts created by African Americans, the continuing resistance of many White youth to policies designed to fight racial inequities such as affirmative action and enforced school desegregation, and the involvement of relatively small but still significant numbers of White youth in far-right hate groups are best understood in relation to one another rather than as discrete, isolated phenomena. As Lipsitz (1998) noted, "If white racism manifested itself exclusively through hostility and exclusion it would be easier to understand and to combat" (p. 118). I argue in this essay that we should recognize the Blackophobia that lies behind much Blackophilia, and that both may be representative of the continuing ideological and cultural power of White supremacy in the 21st century.

Black? White? Racial Imaginings and Cultural Hybridity

Before developing this argument, however, some acknowledgment of the shifting ontological ground in which we are digging should be offered. Specifically, it should be acknowledged that I will utilize the terms Black and White in a reductive manner throughout this article. This is not indicative of any belief that these terms actually have such clear and simple meanings in the world that "White" and "Black" youth inhabit. In other words, I am not attempting to make any sort of essentialist argument about authenticity. What is "Black" popular culture? What is "White" popular culture? For that matter, who are "White" youth? Who are "Black" youth? What about all of the cultural forms that cannot simply be associated with only one particular group? What about youth who are neither Black nor White, but both? All of these are legitimate questions. As Smith (1998) noted, "Before we can define 'black culture' we need first to define or identify 'black people.'" (p. 180). This argument can be taken further—we must also be able to define and identify "white people" and "white culture."

The problem is none of these are easy, or even particularly worthwhile, tasks. Race is, of course, a social construction with particular political and economic intents and purposes. As such, the meanings and categories of race have varied greatly from one historical moment to the

next. Scholars who have begun to address Whiteness as a discursive construction note the shifting definitions of this term and that the groups of people who have been able to claim membership in the White race have changed from era to era (Jacobson, 1998; Lipsitz, 1998; Nakayama & Martin, 1999; Roediger, 1991). Because racial designations of people are for the most part imaginary, then racial designations of culture are also products of our imagination—arbitrary and ambiguous. Culture is actually far too complex to assign to simplistic racial categories that are themselves contingent and illusory. As Smith (1998) asked:

When Wynton Marsalis plays a Haydn concerto or Leontyne Price sings a Verdi opera, is that black culture? Similarly, when Dr. John plays the blues or Travis Tritt sings soul, is that black culture? In all these cases, our answer is probably no. Yet black people relish a game invented by James Naismith, a white man. Don't we commonly accept basketball as part of black culture? Do we exclude John Coltrane from black culture because he plays a French saxophone or spurn B.B. King's blues if his Lucille is a Gibson guitar? (p. 180)

Popular culture in particular is always hybrid culture. Popular culture borrows from whatever is available to it with no regard for imagined or real cultural barriers. When we speak of American popular culture specifically, there is actually no clear boundary between White culture and Black culture because various groups have borrowed from one another, and borrowed from the borrowings, with such frequency that the distinction becomes basically meaningless (see Gilroy, 1993; Hall, 1996; Watts & Orbe, 2002; and West, 1994, for discussions of cultural hybridity and authenticity). For the purposes of the argument I am making, however, it is necessary for some of this complexity to be tabled for the sake of what Spivak called “strategic essentialism” (cited in Hall, 1996, p. 472). Despite our recognition that race is indeed a “floating signifier” (Hall, 1997) with no fixed meaning, we must also acknowledge that in the concrete world outside of academic theory, designations of White and Black still mean something quite clear to most of us and have real consequences in our daily lives. Thus, I employ these terms somewhat simplistically, not despite, but because of, the weight of commonsense usage that they possess. Many Americans, Black, White, Latino/a, Asian, Native American, and so on, would say that they know Black popular culture when they see it, and they know when “White kids are trying to be Black” and vice versa (see Ledbetter, 1995). These unreal designations are treated as real and thus have real effects. It is with this reality that I will engage even while recognizing its basis in myth. The real effects of the unreal construction we call race is perhaps most evident in the segregated lifestyles of most American youth. This, then, is where I will begin the argument.

From Double-Consciousness to Racial Dualism

Nearly a century ago, Dubois (1990, 1903) wrote this eloquent statement about racial exclusion in American society:

I have seen a land right merry with the sun, where children sing, and rolling hills lie like passionate women wanton with harvest. And there in the King's Highway sat and sits a figure veiled and bowed, by which the traveller's footsteps hasten as they go. On the tainted air broods fear. Three centuries' thought has been the raising and unveiling of that bowed human heart, and now behold a century new for the duty and the deed. The problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line. (p. 35)

Dubois's metaphor speaks to the perilous nature of a bifurcated society that has reserved its riches and privileges for one category of people while consigning another group to the leftovers and the dregs. Dubois's prophecy certainly came true, as much of the history of the 20th century was a history of racial hatred and racial conflict (see Malik, 1996), and despite the rhetoric of conservative and neoliberal academics and politicians who attempt to locate racism as a purely historical phenomenon, America in the 21st century is still a bifurcated land. This is a society in which, despite the existence of all-too-real class barriers, Whiteness entails a particular access route to social, cultural, economic, and political power, while Blackness operates as an obstacle to these same privileges. For example, according to the U.S. Bureau of the Census, nearly half of Black children grew up in poverty during the last decade of the 20th century (44.6%), whereas this was true for less than a fifth (18.2%) of White children (figures cited in Miringoff & Miringoff, 1999, p. 86). The infant mortality rate for Blacks and Whites also serves as an indicator of unequal access to resources such as health care and nutrition. During the last few years of the last century, the infant mortality rate for Whites was 6.1 deaths per thousand and for Blacks it was more than twice as high—14.7 deaths per thousand (National Center for Health Statistics, cited in Miringoff & Miringoff, 1999, p. 50).

These and other indicators serve as evidence that the problem of the 21st century is still the problem of the color line. Contemporary America is a nation of unofficial segregation. During the last decade of the 20th century, 86% of suburban Whites lived in communities where less than 1% of their neighbors were Black (West, 1994). A poll of high school seniors revealed that only 4% of White youth believed that living in an all-White neighborhood was not acceptable. Almost 30% stated that this was indeed desirable. Sixty-three percent of these youth reported that all or almost all of their close friends were White (University of Michigan Institute for Social Research, cited in Tuch, Sigelman, & MacDonald, 1999). Thus, both the White suburban youth who voraciously consume Black culture and those who post messages of hatred

toward Blacks on websites may actually have extremely limited contact with African Americans during their daily life experiences.

Furthermore, although the essential struggle for access to resources and power is still the same, the situation is perhaps even more complex now than it was in Dubois's day. As Winant (1998) argued, although the days of codified, monolithic, White supremacy are gone, White supremacy itself still lingers as a powerful, if somewhat stealthy, force that influences social, cultural, economic, and political relationships. If anything, the terms of the battle for antiracists are more difficult now because, as America's military history and recent terrorist attacks have shown, a guerrilla army is often more dangerous than a clearly defined enemy. Despite the residual sort of White supremacy that continues to prosper in the shape of far-right extremist groups, White supremacy in the 21st century now operates primarily "under the radar," in disguised, coded, and often subtle forms.

Winant (1998) defined the contemporary situation as "a period of universal racial dualism" (p. 87). By this he meant that Americans now live in a society where White supremacy is a daily presence in all of our lives, and yet it is simultaneously proclaimed that we have achieved the "end of racism" ideal. Just as it has long been "common sense" that America is a classless society, it is now "common sense" that we have become a color-blind society. This is, however, where the notion of dualism applies, as Winant pointed out that coexistent with the commonsense notion of America as a colorless society is a deeply ingrained commonsense notion of race as a biological determinant of people's identities. As West (1994) also has argued, race continues to matter despite our wishes and proclamations that it does not. Thus, Winant (1998) pointed out:

Race matters . . . not only as a means of rendering the social world intelligible, but simultaneously as a way of making it opaque and mysterious. Race is not only real, but also illusory. Not only is it common sense; it is also common nonsense. Not only does it establish our identity; it also denies us our identity. Not only does it allocate resources, power, and privilege; it also provides means for challenging that allocation. (p. 90)

Dubois (1990) wrote of a "double-consciousness" (p. 8) that African Americans felt as they observed themselves from the perspective of White society; Winant (1998) insisted that this contemporary racial dualism afflicts all Americans, although it affects Whites and Blacks differently. Blacks must cope with a society that places barriers in their way while announcing that these barriers do not exist, while Whites struggle to retain their sense of privilege and dominant status in a political environment in which this status is challenged by contemporary movements of

resistance. Winant identifies this latter struggle as a crisis in White identity. I argue that this phenomenon of racial dualism and the crisis in White identity, working in tandem with the media and cultural industries, have led many White youth in two seemingly opposed but actually interconnected directions: retrenchment in White supremacy and voracious consumption of African American popular culture.

White Supremacy and White Consumption of Black Popular Culture

Utilizing three related theoretical frameworks I will explore the dialectical tensions behind White consumption of Black popular culture. I argue that drawing on hooks's (1992) notion of "eating the other" and Watts's (1997) formulation of "spectacular consumption" allows for a critical interrogation of the relationship between Blackophilia and Blackophobia when it comes to White consumers and Black producers of culture. Hooks and Watts are both concerned with the contradictions inherent in White consumption of Black popular culture in a White supremacist cultural context such as exists in the contemporary U.S. To further explore these contradictions I will also draw on Said's (1978) concept of Orientalism and apply it to domestic race relations in the U.S. and the consumption of Black popular culture by White audiences. While Whites and Blacks continue to be divided by the color line, while they continue to live separate and unequal lives, the fascination that Whites derive from gazing at and purchasing moments of "authentic" Black life must be understood as inherently contradictory, and, in fact, a process by which White supremacy can be further played out in the marketplace.

In sum, the argument that I wish to propose is that the more obvious tendencies of White supremacy (identifiable in both the individualized bigotry of hate groups and the institutional racism of mainstream American social structure), and the less obvious manner in which Whites may attempt to exert power by purchasing and consuming Black culture, are both a part of the same overall process of the crisis in White identity and the retrenchment to White control and domination. Thus, the understanding of White youth consumption of Black culture that I am proposing draws on hooks (1992), Watts (1997), and an adaptation of Said (1978) in suggesting that White consumption of rap and hip-hop and White retrenchment in both racist attitudes and White privilege are interrelated facets of how White supremacy is sustained through acts of communication, even when these acts may appear to be motivated by fascination rather than dread. In fact, my argument is that dread nourishes and cultivates this fascination.

Domestic Orientalism, Spectacular Consumption, and “Eating the Other”

Whereas Said's (1978) notion of Orientalism was meant to provide a theoretical perspective from which to analyze the relationship of the West to Middle Eastern and Asian societies, I would argue that certain aspects of the concept are quite applicable to the phenomenon under consideration here. Although Said was specifically concerned with the history of “Occidental” cultural imperialism in relation to the “Orient,” the theoretical substance of his work can be helpful in illuminating other historical relations. As he writes: “The construction of identity . . . involves the construction of opposites and ‘others’ whose actuality is always subject to the continuous interpretation and re-interpretation of their differences from ‘us.’ Each age and society re-creates its ‘Others’” (p. 332).

It should be noted that other scholars have argued against the implication here that there is something natural and eternal about the tendency to conceptualize the world as “them” and “us.” Thus Malik (1996) rejected the usefulness of Said's theorizing because of what he saw as a lack of historical specificity. Against this concept, Malik argued that there is nothing natural about this tendency to define oneself in relation to others, but rather that it is the inequities of modern social relationships, specifically capitalist relationships, that have resulted in racial thinking. A society that is structured along capitalist lines will inevitably engender severely stratified social relations and this stratification leads to racial differentiation: “In other words, it is not ‘race’ that gives rise to inequality but inequality that gives rise to ‘race.’ The nature of modern society has created inequalities between different social groups and these have come to be perceived in racial terms” (Malik, 1996, p. 39). The persistence of material inequality in societies that subscribe to ideologies of equality leads to inequity itself being perceived as natural and inevitable, and thus being cast racially, as race itself is thought to be natural and biological rather than socially constructed.

Malik's (1996) objections to Said's (1978) description of the origins and roles of the other was essentially focused on the questions of why Orientalist thinking originates and persists and how it is related to the concept of race. Malik argued that Said's theorizations cast racial thinking ahistorically, as part of human nature, and therefore the concept of Orientalism provides little help in understanding the historical specificities of the discourse of race. Malik tended to focus on the question of determination—he argued that Said's theory leads us to conceive of race as leading to social inequity when in actuality it is social inequity that has resulted in racial thinking. Here Malik was insisting on the Marxist perspective that “life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life” (Marx & Engels, 1981, p. 47). This is an important point that should not get lost during the following discussion: Race would not

exist if social inequity did not exist—it is the conditions of life that determine the way we perceive the world.

However, in this phase of his argument, Malik seemed to momentarily lose sight of his own devotion to Marx's dialectic. Further reading into Marx's life and work reveals that *The German Ideology*, the text from which the above quote is taken, was primarily a polemic against the Hegelian tendency to view the material world as deriving from human thought (McLellan, 1973). In fact, Marx recognized the mutual relationship between human thought and material conditions—the conditions of our existence may partially determine the way we perceive the world, but the way we perceive the world may also affect the conditions of our existence (see Marx, 1994).

Thus, rather than abandoning Said's conceptualizations entirely, as Malik implied we must do, Said's notion of the "other" can help us to understand how racial thinking is perpetuated and manifested in specific and particular historical contexts, regardless of the questions of causation on which Malik focused. Furthermore, Malik's (1996) insistence that "race emerged not so much with reference to populations that were *external* to Western society . . . but rather in relation to social gradations *within* European society" (p. 225) suggested that perhaps the concept of the other is most usefully applied in the manner in which I employ it here—to help explain distance and disconnection between members of the same domestic social configuration, in this case, Black and White American youth.

Although contemporary American society has a number of ethnic minority others that are invoked in various situations at various times (Native Americans, Arabs, Asians, Latinas/os, Jews, etc.), the most consistent and visible other in American civilization has historically been Black Americans, whose identification as a binary opposite has allowed White Americans to define their own Whiteness and justify the privileges that this Whiteness entails (see Lipsitz, 1998). Just as Said has pointed out that Orientalism flourished within the liberal culture of Enlightenment and Post-Enlightenment Europe, the American tendency of designating its Black inhabitants as others has long coexisted with the liberal sentiments of equality and justice that inform so much of American mythology.

By identifying Blacks as others, as eternal outsiders and ultimate strangers, Whites are able to justify the social, political, and economic networks that construct, maintain, and advance White privilege and White power. If Blacks are others then the insider/outsider structure of American society may be seen as natural and consistent with ideological claims that the U.S. is the home of freedom and equality. If Blacks are others, then they are consigned to outsider status not because of any essential corruption in the structure of our society itself, but because of their natural, eternal, ahistorical status as different, separate, ultimately unknow-

ing, and unknowable entities. This tautological construction—Blacks are not a true part of our society because they are others, they are others because they are not a true part of our society—is powerful ideological magic. It is magical in that it allows Whites to retain a sense of natural superiority while embracing the notion that we are a land without hierarchical, race-based structures.

As Malik (1996) pointed out, this strange contradiction has existed for as long as American society has existed. In fact it is foundational to American society as it has developed as a patriarchal, capitalist, White supremacist nation: “At the time when the founding fathers of the American Republic were declaring all men to be equal, they denied the same equality to millions of black slaves” (Malik, 1996, p. 38). All men are equal, but of course Blacks are not men—they are almost men, each slave two thirds of a man, each Black a quasi-man, and therefore considered as the other. The gendered phrasing here should also be noted as it aptly implies that women, too, in their own way, have long been regarded as others in the American mythos.

Thus, one facet of what I am calling domestic Orientalism, or the construction of American Blacks as internal others, is its value as a device that justifies exclusion and repression. There is another facet to this tendency, however, that operates a bit differently. This is what hooks (1992) described as “eating the other” (p. 21), or the tendency for cultural difference to be commodified as a source of titillation and pleasure for White consumers. Just as in Said’s descriptions of Westerners who collect Middle Eastern or Asian art and artifacts as a way of bringing the “exotic” or the “mysterious” into their domestic spheres, hooks argued that the commodification of Black culture allows Whites to soothe their guilt over Black repression, cope with the crises of White identity in latter day capitalist society, and achieve vicarious thrills, excitements, and sexual pleasures through their “transgression” into a strange and uncharted world.

Similarly, Watts (1997) and Watts and Orbe (2002) have described White fascination with gangsta rap and other forms of Black popular culture as a manifestation of spectacular consumption. By this they mean that images of “authentic” Black life are transformed into mediated spectacles that Whites can purchase in the mass-mediated marketplace. Drawing on Debord (1983) and Baudrillard (1993), Watts (1992) noted that: “Importantly, the spectacle is fully realized when the enhanced appearance of the image becomes more significant than the social world it previously represented” (p. 43). Thus, when it comes to White exchange and use of Black popular culture such as gangsta rap, whether or not the images represent the life experience of most Blacks is immaterial. What is most important is not authenticity but the appearance of authenticity.

For Whites who grow up imagining the Black world as a world of violence and chaos, the more brutal the imagery, the more true-to-life it seems to be. So when DMX lyrics glorify rape, for example, they don't just play on historically grounded White fears of Black male sexual potency, they simultaneously titillate White consumers who feel that they are being offered a peek into "real" Black life. The White gaze is thus in full effect. Even more than this, however, mediated images of violence and chaos perpetrated by Blacks may attract White consumers while reinforcing the fear and anxieties that these young people subconsciously (or not) harbor toward Blacks. In fact, as Watts and Orbe argued, the anxiety aroused is in many ways a part of the package, a key element in the spectacle.

Thus, the domestic adaptation of Said's (1978) model of Orientalism that I have proposed, as well as hooks's (1992) notion of eating the other, and the formulation of spectacular consumption offered by Watts (1997) and Watts and Orbe (2002), may all provide insight into the relationship between Blackophilia and Blackophobia represented by White youth consumption of gangsta rap, as well as other manifestations of Black popular culture—films about inner-city youth such as *Boyz n the Hood*, "bad boy" Black athletic heroes such as Allen Iverson, and so forth. Often, and importantly, the images that White youth consume most voraciously are images of Black violence, Black aggression, and Black misogyny and sexism. These are the very same images that both mainstream conservative politicians and far-right White supremacists invoke to justify regressive social policies or violent "reprisals." (When a White politician talks of "taking back our cities" or a neo-Nazi posts a website devoted to "reclaiming our heritage," similar impulses may be at work.)

Watts and Orbe (2002) thus referred frequently to the ambivalent relationship that Whites have with Black culture. This ambivalence is made manifest by what some might consider opposing impulses, such as attraction and repulsion, fascination and dread, etc. Drawing on Watts and Orbe (2002), I would argue that this ambivalence is merely the surface manifestation of a deeply conflicted love/hate relationship in which the simultaneous embrace and rejection of Black culture are both a part of the same process of White supremacy. This dialectical relationship between White consumption of Black images and musical styles and White racism is also articulated by hooks (1992), who asked:

Should we not be suspicious of the way in which white culture's fascination with black masculinity manifests itself? The very images of phallogentric black masculinity that are glorified and celebrated in rap music, videos, and movies are the representations that are evoked when white supremacists seek to gain public acceptance and support for genocidal assault on black men, particularly youth. (p. 109)

The gender issues that hooks identified here are explored more fully below, but the initial point is that young White male fans of rap music are often fans of gangsta rap, which generally tends to eschew explicit political messages and emphasize violence, drug abuse, sexism, and irresponsible sexuality, or precisely the same myths about Blacks that are blatant in far-right rhetoric and coded in conservative and neoliberal messages about race and public policy. Thus, a White male fan's emulation of an artist like DMX, or the White rapper Eminem's parroting of Black gangsta rappers, from this perspective bears much in common with earlier blackface performances, or in the contemporary era, the caricatures found on hate groups' websites. Furthermore, young males in the contemporary U.S. grow up in a culture that encourages them to equate masculinity with physical toughness, emotional distance, and violence (Katz, 2003). For White boys and young men, in particular, stereotypes of violent Black masculinity may be particularly enticing objects of identification as they speak to both their doubts about White identity, in an age when White privilege is in a state of retrenchment, and to their desires to rebel through projecting an image of danger-tinged cool.

The articulation of misogyny, homophobia, and violent behavior with Black masculinity is spurred on by the mainstream media. For example, in a review of a recording by Eminem, a writer in *Rolling Stone* first identified Eminem as "a white boy [who is] nearing the aesthetic zenith of the celebration of black maleness called hip-hop" and then goes on to quote lyrics such as the following: "We don't do drive-bys / We park in front of houses and shoot / And when the police come, we fuckin' shoot it out with 'em too!" And, "I'll stab you in the head, whether you're fag or les/ Or a homosex, a hermaph or a trans-a-ves . . . / Hate fags? The answer's yes" (quoted in Toure, 2000, pp. 135–136). These lyrics are cited in a four-star rave review of this recording by a White rapper as a "celebration of Black maleness," suggesting that the sentiments expressed by the lyrics, although written and performed by a White male, are somehow indicative of a certain essential quality of Black masculinity. Thus, even when it is Whites who are glorifying violence and hatred, Blackness can still be located as the source of this venom.

Another example of this almost automatic articulation between Blackness and violence can be found in the popular discussion of the cable television program *Oz*, a hyperviolent drama that is set inside a maximum security prison. Despite the multicultural makeup of the actors who play inmates on the program, the image of ultraviolent prisoners is also subtly, and sometimes not so subtly, articulated to images of young Black masculinity. Consider, for example, the syndicated music columnist Campbell (2001) who, in reviewing a CD of soundtrack music from *Oz*, wrote this about the rap and hip-hop music featured on the soundtrack:

At last a soundtrack that makes sense. Even though many of the characters on *Oz*, HBO's unsettling drama about prison life, probably wouldn't listen to rap music, it's the most compatible genre for the show. The soundtrack wouldn't resonate with the program's older prisoners, transvestites, somber Muslims and (especially) white supremacists, yet *who better to reflect an outlaw's life than thug rappers?* (no pagination, italics added)

Aside from the illogical essentialism lurking in this description—transvestites would not be expected to listen to rap music?—this is a fascinating example of the sometimes subtle racial articulations in discourse about popular culture. Although the author notes the diverse makeup of the inmates represented on *Oz*, he links their criminal lifestyle and violence with a musical genre most often associated with young Black males and then polishes it off with the implication that this is all just common sense: “Who better to reflect an outlaw's life?” This type of racial articulation often occurs on *Oz* semiotically, through a confluence of visual images and soundtrack music as rap, hip-hop, and even African music typically underscore graphic scenes of brutality and violence in the program.

These examples demonstrate the tendency in mainstream media to discursively equate chaos, violence, and corruption with Blackness even when the links are tenuous at best. In another recent example, the 2003 revelations of the ethical violations committed by a Black *New York Times* reporter, Jayson Blair, immediately energized antiaffirmative action forces, who focused on the race of the perpetrator, whereas in a similar case, that of Stephen Glass of the *New Republic*, his racial background (White) was a nonissue. Although the Blair/Glass case is not related to media representations of racially coded violence, it does illustrate the cultural tendency to associate Blackness with wrongdoing. Simultaneously, real links between Whiteness and social problems are usually ignored by the mainstream media. For example, when White boys go on murderous rampages in their suburban schools, race is not mentioned as a factor in the tragic violence that ensues, but one can only imagine the media discourse if the perpetrators were young Black men (see Giroux, 2000). As Rose (1994) pointed out, White youth are typically framed as the victims of the corrupting influence of heavy metal music while Black teenagers are positioned as the naturally, inherently, criminal element behind violence associated with rap music.

I would argue that this tendency to caricature and distort Black culture while voraciously consuming it is related to a profound destabilization of what White identity means in relation to the “others” of American society. At the turn of the century, many Whites seem to feel caught between a past of total and complete White domination and a future where White supremacy is sure to be resisted and challenged more and more through both collective action and individual dissent. Aware that a changing demographic climate will problematize even the power asso-

ciated with a quantifiable White majority, some Whites seem to react through identification with other cultures, whereas others react through a retrenchment into history and an attempt to hold onto the days of unchallengeable White rule and unquestioned superiority by virtue of birth-right. There is a profoundly disturbing tension that is felt by those Whites who have been socialized to think of themselves as naturally dominant and yet find this “natural” position of power being challenged by the very same individuals to whom they believe themselves inherently superior.

Thus a condition of internal crisis is created, or what classical social psychology theory might have labeled cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957), where the tension, confusion, and discomfort of Whites whose position of “natural” dominance is being challenged can be assuaged through an identification with Black resistance or a retreat into revitalized White supremacy. A third option, however, which may be manifest in White youth adoption of “Black” cultural styles, is to embrace the superficial and distorted images of “Blackness” promoted by the White owned and controlled cultural industries, while simultaneously rejecting, or simply refusing to engage with, any ideologies, social movements, or public policies that challenge the foundations of White privilege and the basis of White racism. In this way, these White youth attempt to deal with the crisis in White identity by simultaneously rejecting and embracing various aspects of that identity— rejection through the consumption of cultural signifiers of the “other,” such as music, dress, language, and iconic heroes, and embrace through the retention of the privileged status that comes from protected political, social, and economic status.

West (1994) noted this relationship between White consumption and White repression, but he framed this as ironic rather than logically consistent: “One irony of our present moment is that just as young Black men are murdered, maimed, and imprisoned in record numbers, their styles have become disproportionately influential in shaping popular culture” (1994, p. 128). Rather than an irony, one could make the argument that the cultural industries’ relentless marketing of Black male violence and corruption in television, films, and popular music makes a clear and consistent contribution to a social reality in which Black men are shot by police without provocation, people of color are jailed at rates far exceeding the incarceration rates of White criminals, and candidates win elections by preaching racially coded law-and-order messages. In fact, West briefly noted this connection when he pointed out,

The growing gangsterization of America results in part from a market-driven racial reasoning that links the White House to the ghetto projects. In this sense, George Bush, David Duke and many gangster rap artists speak the same language from different social locations. (1994, p. 48)

Thus, we must also recognize that the images of gangsta rap are actually quite consistent with the images of masculinity in American discourse as a whole. Rappers who construct violent, hypermasculine identities draw on the representations of masculinity that may be found in all of American popular culture, not simply in Black popular culture alone. American history textbooks, television dramas, and Hollywood gangster films, westerns, and war movies all provide archetypal representations from which rappers and their fans draw, as evidenced by the tendency for some rappers to name themselves after legendary White criminals, such as Scarface. Furthermore, the ambitions and goals expressed by gangsta rappers are consistent with the aspirations and strivings glorified in American mythology: the possession and control of beautiful women and material goods, money as a signifier of respect and achievement, rugged individualism, violence as a solution to conflict, glorification of self over others, disdain for “softness” in males. All of these common themes of gangsta rap represent not deviance from but conformity to a particular manifestation of the American Dream.

When White youth embrace the styles and affectations of Black gangsta rappers they may be met with dismay from their parents and teachers, thus to some degree satiating the desire for rebellion that most teenagers feel at some point in their lives. As the above analysis suggests, however, the underlying values beneath the deviant surface images are in closer harmony with the values that families, schools, churches, and the mass media in general tend to impart than appearances would suggest. As Gilroy (2000) argued, it is often a mistake to think of rap as transgressive or revolutionary in nature because this perception is primarily a marketing construction, and in fact strong conservative impulses are disguised by the “outlaw” imagery employed by artists and the recording industry. Although Gilroy’s assertion may be somewhat reductive, in that it tends to elide real differences among various rap artists (Public Enemy is one group that immediately springs to mind as contradictory to Gilroy’s argument), it is an accurate description of the rap artists who tend to be extremely popular among White youth—artists such as Jay-Z, DMX, 50-Cent, and Eminem. These artists often disguise ultraconservative messages about fearing and hating difference, worship of money and material possessions, masculine power, and individual aggrandizement beneath images and postures that seem to represent defiance and dissent. In the ideological implications of these messages we may find the link between the White consumers of rap, far-right White supremacists, and mainstream politicians—all of whom buy into, sometimes quite literally, the media image of violent, chaotic Blackness.

Eating the Other as Spectacular Sexual Consumption

The corollary to the exploitative images of violence in U.S. media culture that have been discussed above is the exploitative use of sexual imagery to promote products and to sell films, television programs, video games, music videos, and the like. Before moving to a consideration of the social and political implications of the analysis I have offered, I will thus briefly focus on the ways in which sexuality and desire are related to White youth consumption of Black culture. Here again, Said's (1978) conceptualization of Orientalism is relevant to this examination of domestic race relations as he argues that the Other is often imagined as an alluring and exotic figure of intriguing and dangerous sexuality even as this sexuality is simultaneously drawn as primitive, inferior, and uncivilized. In fact it is the presumption of savagery and wildness that makes the Other a compelling focus of sexual desire as Western ideology has both repressed human sexuality and desire and made these impulses all the more powerful by virtue of this repression.

Fanon (1967) has argued that Blackness has historically been articulated to powerful and barely controlled sexuality in White mythology, which has led to all manner of conflicting White desires and anxieties, attractions and repulsions, fears and longings. His analysis pointed out that Whites often simultaneously identify with and envy Blacks partially because of repressed sexual desires. Media and popular culture work to sustain this process by constantly reviving and reconstructing images of Blacks as possessing a sexual potency that is somehow denied to Whites. This is a process that affects both males and females, as hooks (1992) pointed out.

Black women, for example, are both revered and humiliated for their sexuality in films and popular music. Stereotypical White features are held up as the pinnacle of unattainable, unapproachable feminine beauty while Black women are simultaneously situated as not as aesthetically appealing as White women, but more sexually available and free (hooks, 1992). A comparison of mainstream advertising images and rap music videos demonstrates the contradictions at work here. Advertising is dominated by images of White women that reinforce the notion that Whiteness equates with beauty. When "Black" models are used, they often are actually women of mixed racial background or women whose features, eye color, or hairstyles come closest to White norms, for example, Vanessa Williams or Halle Berry. Simultaneously, women with darker complexions or more stereotypically "Black" features are often depicted in the background of rap music videos in graphically explicit sexual poses or engaged in blatantly sexualized dancing. Meanwhile the lyrics frequently refer to women as "bitches" and "hos." Thus through a combination of visual and verbal codes, these videos simultaneously depict dark-skinned

and overtly sexual women as both desirable and deserving of revulsion. The unhealthy consequences that these myths may have for both Blacks and Whites and males and females should be self-evident.

Black men, meanwhile, are associated with the phallus and phallogentrism in a manner that suggests that they are less cerebral but more physical, more sexually potent than White men (Fanon, 1967; hooks, 1992). Artists such as DMX are almost invariably depicted shirtless, their well-muscled torsos the focus of the visual image. On one record cover, DMX appears naked from the waist up, covered in blood. Scars from past battles are worn as badges of honors on the seminaked forms of many male rappers. Their shaved heads are defiantly phallic and the grimaces they wear on their faces represent both anger and danger. Gangsta rappers frequently refer to their sexual prowess in tandem with references to the violence that they have committed, will commit, or are capable of committing. Some female artists, like Eve, also encourage this equation of violence and sexuality by bragging that they prefer dangerous men, thugs, ruff-necks, and gangstas.

Images such as these make Black masculinity both dangerous and alluring for White males and females alike who use the images provided to them by the mass media to produce fantasies that are exciting and invigorating because they seem to be transgressive, challenging of mainstream mores against racial trespassing and miscegenation. In reality, myths of both male and female Black sexuality are in no way transgressive, as they merely recreate historical tendencies of dehumanization and exploitation. As media historians like Bogle (1993) have pointed out, images of sexually dangerous Black men have been the norm since the advent of electronic mass media in the U.S.:

The black brute was a barbaric black out to raise havoc. Audiences could assume that his physical violence served as an outlet for a man who was sexually repressed. In the *Birth of a Nation* (1915), the black brutes, subhuman and feral, are the nameless characters setting out on a rampage full of Black rage. (p. 13)

These images have continued to resonate in U.S. media and the White imagination, from Bush the Elder's Willie Horton scare tactics, to O.J. Simpson, to the endless parade of Black brutes on prime-time television dramas such as *NYPD Blue*.

All of this occurs behind a veil, however. The manner in which mediated popular images of Blacks provide sexual intrigue for White youth is a subject that does not often surface in common discourse. West (1994) noted that the sexuality that is associated with Black images in American popular culture is not dealt with explicitly because Black sexuality itself cannot be dealt with by White America: "Black sexuality is a ta-

boo subject in America principally because it is a form of Black power over which Whites have little control—yet its visible manifestations evoke the most visceral of White responses, be it one of seductive obsession or downright disgust” (p. 125).

This, then, is another aspect of the spectacular consumption of Black culture by White youth, another facet of “eating the other.” The issue is not White attraction to Blacks or vice versa, the issue is that the images of Black sexuality exploited by the media and bought up by White youth in the marketplace are distorted images that further reinforce myths about Blackness that disenable White and Black youth from relating to one another not as marketplace products but as real, complex, and nuanced human beings. White male identification with the images of Black misogyny, homophobia, and brutal, phallogocentric masculinity provided by the film, television, and recording industries, for example, does not provide material for more enlightened race and gender relations among America’s youth, but rather, reinforces and reinvigorates ancient lies and misinterpretations that can only deepen the divisions that already cut and slash through America’s social relations.

Implications and Consequences

Thus, while a superficial reading of White youth’s consumption of rap might suggest that it is only the stylistic elements that are being embraced, the analysis offered above suggests that this phenomenon can alternatively be interpreted as an embrace of both style and substance, at least as it is articulated in the products of the mainstream cultural industries. Tensions and contradictions emerge, however, because where the embrace of style would seem to lead to a rejection of White cultural supremacy, and thus be a hopeful sign for future race relations, the embrace of the substance of much of these images and messages can be seen to logically and powerfully lead White youth right back to a generalized ideology that is consistent with an acceptance of White economic, political, and social supremacy. In this manner, White youth obsession with Black culture can be read as a form of domestic Orientalism, spectacular consumption, or eating the other.

The consequences of White consumption of Black popular culture may thus ultimately be the reinforcement of White supremacy and the inequities of U.S. society. As hooks (1994) noted:

There is a direct and abiding connection between the maintenance of white supremacist patriarchy in this society and the institutionalization via mass media of specific images, representations of race, of blackness that support and maintain the oppression, exploitation and overall domination of all black people. (1992, p. 2)

Although some might argue that White youth consumption of Black popular culture may result in a reduction of racial prejudice among both White and Black youth, hooks pointed out (1994) that “contemporary commodification of Black culture by Whites in no way challenges White supremacy when it takes the form of making Blackness the ‘spice that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture’” (p. 14).

Three important inferences can be drawn from this analysis. The first is that prejudice and institutional racism are not one and the same. It is conceivable that White youth may become less prejudiced toward individual Blacks because of their appreciation of Black culture, while maintaining a high level of support for the practices and structures of institutional racism, such as unequal education systems, discrimination in housing and employment, repressive policing and criminal sentencing, and so on. In this case, the particular nature of the images that White youth are consuming—images of Black youth who are violent or hostile, often unemployed and/or involved in criminal practices—may in fact reinforce, rather than challenge, the tendency of White youth to support what hooks (1992) called “institutionalized white supremacist domination” (p. 15).

The second crucial point is that White appropriation of Black culture often takes the form of White dalliance with a culture that is valued for being oppositional and resistant, and yet this dalliance does not account for exactly what it is that catalyzes Black opposition—White supremacy and the daily suffering that many Blacks in American society must endure. In other words, it is far too easy for White youth to adopt the signifiers of Blackness when they do not have to deal with the consequences of Blackness in America. Despite the by-now widely accepted scientific understanding that race has no biological basis, the consequences of what we imagine race to be are still powerful determinants of individuals’ life experiences and social and material relations. Because of this, race cannot be reduced to a matter of personal choice (Malik, 1996). The White fan of gangsta rap has the option of dropping the affectations of “Black” style and language when he or she goes for a job interview or applies for an apartment. Blacks have neither the desire nor the option of adopting “Blackness” only when it is convenient—they must experience both the pleasure and the pain of being Black in America whereas White youth can opt for only the pleasures associated with Black music and other cultural creations. Thus, hooks (1992) argued, for example, that Madonna’s statement that she has long desired to be Black is a proclamation that ignores the realities of Black experience in exchange for a White fantasy of Black experience. In much the same way, White youth who adopt Black cultural styles may in fact be participants in a phenomenon of White fantasizing that serves to obscure or disguise the fuller picture of the Black American experience.

Finally, this analysis suggests that White consumption of Black culture cannot in any way challenge White domination if it is not linked to an activated movement of antifacist politics that actually seeks to change the structures and patterns of our society. In fact, political resistance may actually be subsumed rather than catalyzed by the consumption of commodified Blackness. In the very act of being transformed into a commodity, much of the political potential of rap and hip-hop is extracted in a number of ways. First, apolitical entertainers are provided with the largest recording contracts and high-budget promotional campaigns (Eminem, 50-Cent, DMX, etc.) while the most transgressive, politically oriented groups (Michael Franti, The Coup, Dead Prez, etc.) are often relegated to independent labels or limited distribution and promotion. Second, active involvement in social movements becomes articulated to moments of consumption (purchasing the right clothes and accessories and so on) rather than to moments of political resistance (participating in boycotts, protests, etc.).

Thus, although it is possible that White youth involvement in Black popular culture might provide at least some impetus for improved relations between White and Black youth and, eventually, a challenge to some of the foundational elements of institutional racism, an analysis of this phenomenon as one of commodification and consumption points out that it is equally likely that White desire for, and pleasure from, Black culture might lead to the retrenchment and reinforcement of White supremacy rather than resistance and challenge. A dialectical approach to this issue allows us to understand that these seeming contradictions are actually articulated to one another as part of a greater whole—the continually changing nature of White supremacy in contemporary American culture.

Continuing Questions

In this essay I have examined the relationship between two tendencies that I feel are prevalent among contemporary White American youth, what I have chosen to identify as Blackophobia and Blackophilia. I have argued that these tendencies must be recognized not as purely oppositional to one another, but as related moments of the same process—the continuing power of White supremacy to influence and shape all aspects of race and class relations in the 21st century. The domestic adaptation of Said's (1978) notion of Orientalism I have proposed, as well as Watt's (1997) theory of spectacular consumption and hooks's (1992) argument about eating the Other have all been employed to illuminate how these uncontradictory contradictions play out in White youth consumption of rap music and other forms of popular culture created by Black artists.

White youth adoption of Black cultural styles is a phenomenon that is not unique to the current era, and yet this phenomenon is particularly strong right now as White youth have become the primary consumers of what are supposedly Black musical styles—hip-hop and rap. The central question for those who are concerned about continuing segregation, divisiveness, and inequities between the races, is whether this involvement in Black culture by White youth can in any way help to improve race relations in a country that is still polarized by race in the social, political, and economic spheres. As Ledbetter (1995) puts it:

For white hip-hop artists, this means using the music as a vehicle to discuss segregation and economic blight, rather than simply as a way to provide one more commercial distraction. For the far more numerous white fans, it means screaming out that you accept the criticism of the American system offered by the likes of Ice Cube and Public Enemy, and you want the society to do something more than buy and sell their records. (p. 544)

Without empirical investigation, answers to whether this political activation is occurring can only be tentative and general. However, as I have suggested above, it may be premature to take too optimistic a perspective on this issue. In many ways White consumption of Black cultural styles can be recognized as a continuation of, rather than an intervention against, White supremacy. Furthermore, data from polls that show the continued reluctance of White youth to fully invest in antiracist politics provide some empirical support for the pessimistic stance that I have offered (see Tuch, Sigelman, & Macdonald, 1999). To fully explore this issue further would require detailed interview, survey, and ethnographic research with White youth who closely identify with Black popular culture. Comparison of these young people's attitudes on cultural, political, social, and economic issues with those of the general population could provide some clues as to the potential for cultural "transgression" to lead to political mobilization.

Finally, it should be stated that my intention is not to suggest that all White interest in Black culture is an entirely negative perpetuation of White supremacy. On the contrary, if America is ever to move forward from institutionalized racism toward the abandonment of White supremacy, cultural as well as economic, social, and political divisions, will have to be breached. The argument I propose is merely that "Black" culture that is primarily a commodity, sold to White youth by White-controlled corporations for the benefit of White shareholders, is unlikely to present those consumers with discourses that challenge the most basic inequities in our society. The argument, then, is not one of cultural separatism, but of resistance to the distortions of commodified, corporate culture, and commitment to linking political, economic, and social justice to cultural "crossover."

A century ago Dubois recognized that “Work, culture, liberty—all these we need, not singly but together, not successively but together, each growing and aiding each, and all striving toward that vaster ideal . . . the ideal of human brotherhood” (1990, p. 14). This call for economic, cultural, and political power is as needed at the beginning of the 21st century as it was at the beginning of the 20th. The point is that all of these facets of human existence must be brought together in any movement for real social progress. Any of these in the absence of the others is partial and insufficient.

Author

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