BEING APART: THE AFRICAN DIASPORA AND THE EXISTENTIAL

by

LAROSE T. PARRIS

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
The City University of New York

2008

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in English in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Robert F. Reid-Pharr

_____
Date

_____
Chair of Examining Committee

Steven Kruger

_____
Date

_____
Executive Officer

Robert F. Reid-Pharr

Ammiel Alcalay

Peter Hitchcock
Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Abstract

BEING APART: THE AFRICAN DIASPORA AND THE EXISTENTIAL

by

LaRose T. Parris

Advisor: Professor Robert Reid-Pharr

This dissertation is a theoretical study of Western and Africana literatures that challenges the epistemic erasure of Africana historiography, philosophy and literature in the Western canon – an erasure that has created a blind spot towards Africana texts possessing existentialist themes that, in some cases, predate and in all cases reinterpret modern existentialist thought.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries European theorists David Hume, Georg Wilhelm Friederich Hegel, and Thomas Jefferson establish theories of African sub-humanity and ahistoricality. Yet as early as the nineteenth-century, Africana scholars David Walker and Frederick Douglass challenged Hume, Hegel, and Jefferson by citing both ancient and modern Western historical sources that verified the African racial identity of the ancient Egyptians, whose culture and civilization shaped those of ancient Greece and Rome. In Douglass and Walker's works, both scholars explore two principal existentialist themes: Being and Freedom. While Walker and Douglass interrogate classical history to verify African culture and civilization, Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction* and James's *The Black Jacobins* hold that Western chattel slavery gave birth to the development of Western modernity, global capitalism, and Empire. Both Du Bois

and James enrich their studies of nineteenth-century America and Haiti by using the materiality of slavery to dovetail into nuanced readings of Africana Being and Freedom.

This exploration of Being and Freedom is taken even further in Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*. Fanon's discussion of the colonized subject's lived experience of racism provides the text's center; yet he delves into this lived experience of racism to tease out theoretical linkages among seemingly divergent schools of thought: existentialism, materialism, dialectics, and psychoanalysis. The result is a work posits the colonials subject's quest for Freedom as the apotheosis of existential actualization.

While Fanon's work explores the loss of the colonial subject's native tongue, he offers no corrective. One generation later, however, Barbajan historian, critic, and poet Kamau Brathwaite proffers his theory of Nation Language as the answer to Fanon's question of colonial alienation and European cultural imperialism. Nation Language seamlessly combines both theory and praxis, as Africana orature and music become the cultural conduit for Africana liberation.

Acknowledgements

I began this work during the early years of graduate study, however its seed took root during my youth. Having been born in St. Thomas, Jamaica and raised in the Bronx during the height of the Black Power and Decolonization Movements of the 1960's, my parents taught us that we Parrises were just one branch of a much larger family tree. Our physical homes were split between Jamaica and the Bronx; our ancestral home was Africa; and our global family was located throughout the African Diaspora. Related to this historical and cultural awareness was an acute consciousness of anti-African racism, for even as a young girl I experienced racism on a visceral level. I felt both hyper-visibility and invisibility at different points in my life, so I sought answers. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* initially opened my eyes to the psychology of anti-African racism in America.

In the early 1980's, I attended high school at an elite institution in Connecticut. We read Albert Camus' *No Exit* in English class and something stirred. I was sure that there was something inherently existential in my own experience of racism so I searched again and found Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* on the bookshelves of my father's study. I read Fanon and knew my instincts were right. Fanon explained my angst as the vexing phenomenological problem of "lived racism."

One year after graduating from Darien High School I taught English in Taipei, Taiwan and traveled throughout East Asia. Darien and Taipei could not have been more different, yet these vastly dissimilar cities shared one constant:

me, the unmistakably Black Other. My invisibility/hyper-visibility was present in the willfully blank stares of my privileged high school classmates, and it was there in the pointed fingers and gaping mouths of Taiwanese school children on the streets of Taipei, who eerily echoed Fanon's now famous declaration *in Black Skin, White Masks*, "Look a Negro!"

Back then, I knew that my identity as an Afro-Caribbean woman would never change just as I knew that society's perception of my "blackness" would not change. I was a willfully unique young woman eager to carve out my identity, yet daily I confronted a world that aimed to flatten me into a submissive Negro. I proceeded to wage a battle for my identity – to win it I knew that deeper studies of history, literature, and philosophy would be necessary. The following study is the result of that exploration.

This work would not have been possible without the uncompromising vision and wisdom of my dissertation committee: Robert Reid-Pharr, Ammiel Alcalay, and Peter Hitchcock. And without the home schooling of my parents, Dulcie and Canute Parris, I would never know the unfettered joy nor experienced the inner strength garnered from studying Africana history. Thank you so much, Ma and Dad, for teaching me to seek the truth.

Dedication

For the Ancestors

Table of Contents

Any theory that fails to address the existential phenomenological dimension of racism suffers from a failure to address the situational dimension, what Fanon called l'experience vecue ('lived experience') of race.

Lewis Gordon

The history of Afro-American literature furnishes an illuminating account of the nature of freedom, its extents and limits…Afro-American literature incorporated the consciousness of a people who have been continually denied entrance into the real world of freedom, a people whose struggles and aspirations have exposed the inadequacies not only of the practice of freedom, but also of its very theoretical formulations.

Angela Y. Davis

Introduction

Africana scholar-activists' historiography of ancient African civilizations; the Trans-Atlantic slave trade; Western chattel slavery[1], imperialism and colonialism; and ideological racism is the principal inspiration for this theoretical work. The writings and speeches of David Walker, Frederick Douglass, Martin Delany, Sojourner Truth, Ana Julia Cooper, Marcus Garvey, Claude McKay, W.E.B Du Bois, Ida B. Wells, George Padmore, C.L.R. James, Aimee Cesaire, Frantz Fanon, Walter Rodney, John Hope Franklin, Yosef Ben-Jochannan, Malcolm X, Toni Morrison, Audre Lorde, Kamau Brathwaite, Amiri Baraka, Cheik Anta Diop, Alice Walker, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Edward Said, Cedric J. Robinson, Angela Davis, Paul Gilroy, Lewis Gordon, Robert Reid-Pharr, Ammiel Alcalay, Peter Hitchcock, and Robin D.G. Kelley, among others, have inspired me to no end.

[1] Henceforth, I will refer to Western slavery as Western chattel slavery or chattel slavery, so as to foreground the manner in which the eighteenth and nineteenth-century ideologies of anti-African racism altered the institution of slavery itself by codifying anti-African racism and African dehumanization, thereby making chattel slavery historically distinct from slavery during antiquity.

DuBois, James, Fanon, Davis, and Robinson's reinvigoration of Marxist historicism has compelled me to define this study as an historical and philosophical reconciliation of Marxist and existential theories, while Robinson's ground-breaking work in *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* behooves me to highlight the ontological and existential imperative, if you will, behind Black Radical resistance to Western oppression. Consequently, this study will advance and explicate a critical merging of Marxism's historical objectivity (dialectical materialism), Black Radicalism's collective ontological totality, and existentialism's self-reflective subjectivity (individual ontology) that attempts to situate Africana history as central to the development of Western modernity, capitalism, and Empire; while emphasizing the Africana history of deracination, dispossession, and dispersal in terms that signify a collective struggle for Freedom, *and* the individual and collective actualization of said Freedom.

In my definition of Freedom, I defer once again to those Africana scholar-activists whose commitment to the unequivocal actualization of Freedom has defined the scope of their work. Walker, Douglass, Du Bois, James, Fanon, Morrison, Brathwaite, Davis, and Gilroy, in particular, use interdisciplinary methods to explore historical, literary, and philosophical expressions of Freedom that have shaped the Africana experience. As Davis pointedly remarks in her essay "Unfinished Lecture on Liberation – II" (the essay from which this introduction's epigraph is drawn), African American literature reveals the theoretical shortcomings inherent to Western conceptualizations of Freedom.

Freedom should not be apprehended as a static abstraction; rather it should and must be perceived as an active process of actualization, one that is evinced by a four-centuries long tradition of Africana resistance to Western oppression (Freedom as a process of actualization will be further explored in the upcoming chapters).

In terms of Western thought, existentialism seems the only branch of philosophy that articulates the societal alienation *and* self-alienation intrinsic to the lived experience of anti-African racism. Nevertheless, I must stress that four decades before existentialism is formalized as a branch of philosophy, W.E.B. Du Bois' *The Souls of Black Folk* (1904) presents a seminal proto-existentialist theory of bifurcated ontology that he aptly termed double-consciousness.

The Souls of Black Folks explicates an impenetrable system of racial oppression under which Negro-Americans were forced to live during Reconstruction; it also initiates an ontological analysis through the historical lens of Negro-American disenfranchisement. Du Bois seemingly begins with a materialist critique of Negro-American dispossession, yet he enriches this analysis with questions of individual ontology through the metaphor of The Veil and his concept of double-consciousness[2]:

> …the Negro is…born with a Veil…in this American world -, a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes

[2] For a detailed discussion of how Du Bois's formulation of double consciousness was influenced by Hegel's "unhappy consciousness" in *Phenomenology of Spirit* see Shamoon Zamir, *Dark Voices: W.E.B. Du Bois and American Thought, 1888-1903* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); and Winifred Siemeling, "W.E.B. Du Bois, Hegel, and the Staging of Alterity" in *Callaloo*. 24.1 (Winter 2001): 325-333.

> others, of measuring oneself by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. (215)

For the Negro-American of Du Bois' era, "the world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" is one where political disenfranchisement, socio-economic exploitation, and social terror shaped a material reality that spawned a bifurcated consciousness: one half Negro; the other half American – a conditional citizenship that afforded no true citizenship rights. At this period in American history, the designation Negro-American was an oxymoron, for if one were a Negro one could not truly be an American who enjoyed the very rights of citizenship that defined the American ethos. Du Boisian double-consciousness, or "looking at oneself through the eyes of others," represents a true crisis of consciousness for Negro-Americans: A uniform, autonomous sense of Being cannot exist in a society steeped in the tenets of ideological racism. This double-consciousness represents a twin sense of Being, one part defined by the white racist stereotypes of Negro identity and the other defined by the self. One part Negro, one part American, no parts reconciled. Again, I must emphasize that the materiality of Negro oppression gives rise to the ontological bifurcation of double-consciousness.

Five decades after the publication of *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois' theory of a bifurcated ontology is seemingly echoed, albeit in a much lengthier phenomenological tome, in Heidegger's *Being and Time*. Heidegger's concepts of "being-in-the world" and "being-for-others" offer striking similarities to the societal alienation and self-alienation of Du Boisian double-consciousness.

Building upon Du Bois' theory of double-consciousness, drawing from Heidegger's similar concepts of being in the world and being for others, and expanding upon Robinson's Black Radical action, this study represents a material, ontological, and phenomenological exegesis on two principle existentialist themes – Being and Freedom – that lie at the heart of Africana history and African diasporic literature.

Like Du Bois's theory of double-consciousness, these explorations of Being and Freedom in nineteenth and twentieth-century Africana literature have, quite ironically, been formulated in response to what I have termed the tri-partite crux of Western discourse, three related ideological trends in Western history that effectively cast the African apart from Western historical development and canonical influence: the elision of ancient Africa's contribution to the development of classical Greek and Roman civilizations; the dehumanization of the African and the creation/equation of the Negro slave; and the denial of Western chattel slavery's centrality to the birth of modernity, capitalism, and Empire.[3] This historical, ontological, and epistemic erasure of Africana peoples in the narrative of Western development represents what I have termed Being Apart – an existential condition of dehumanization, born of epochal historical events and their attendant anti-African philosophical discourses: the sixteenth-century Trans-Atlantic slave trade and the creation of the bestial Negro; eighteenth-century Western chattel slavery and the doctrines of scientific racism during the Enlightenment; nineteenth-century Western imperialism, Hegelian discourse, and

[3] In formulating this tri-partite crux of Western hegemonic discourse, I am indebted to Cedric J. Robinson's groundbreaking study, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1983) 1-5.

the codification of racism; and twentieth-century institutionalized racism and social Darwinism.

Thus, this study is also a response to the four-centuries long history of ideological racism that lies at the heart of the Western canon, an ideology that has, indeed, become hegemonic. In this regard, I will employ Antonio Gramsci and Louis Althusser's definition of hegemony as the predominant Western ideology, grafted upon every aspect of society and culture through institutional, cultural, and political dissemination, and the conscious and unconscious complicity of the general populace. I will also use the Althusserian construct of the Ideological State Apparatus(es) to denote the social institutions that maintain hegemony: the educational system, the church, and government. Thus, Western hegemonic discourse will refer to the tomes of the Western canon and to the ideologies of anti-African racism delineated therein, and disseminated through the afore-cited Ideological State Apparatuses.

In this vein, then, I posit Being Apart as an existentialist encapsulation of the Africana experience of anti-African racism; it is as an ethos of existence and resistance as these have been historically linked to the material manifestations of ideological racism in both theory and praxis. Thus, this study offers a theoretical critique as it does a canonical critique. Canonically speaking, Being Apart may explain why Du Bois's theory of double-consciousness is not widely considered an existentialist theory of ontology, which delves into the psychosocial condition of nineteenth and twentieth-century African Americans and provides great insight into Fanon's "lived experience of racism" while simultaneously offering a

scathing critique of American socio-political practices during and after Reconstruction.

Such a critique also underscores the reason why Frederick Douglass' autobiographies, detailing the material, ontological, and psychological, and horrors of Western chattel slavery, are not required reading in world history and philosophy courses when Plato's treatment of the Greek slave system in the *Republic* still is, several millennia after its original publication. In stark contrast to Plato, Douglass does not glorify the slave system's role in the development of Western society. Douglass experienced his life as a slave, as one of Fanon's "wretched of the earth." He rose from the depths of oppression to learn to read and write – an act that could have cost him his very life. Yet risk his life he did, and he penned his life story on three separate occasions so that he, a slave reborn as a philosopher[4], could testify to the evils of African dehumanization endemic to and upon which the system of Western chattel slavery was built.

The theoretical and canonical critique of Being Apart may be used to analyze the literature of the African Diaspora in a manner that gives equal weight to the objective dimension of Africana history – Western slavery, imperialism, and colonialism – *and* the subjective dimension of individual experience – physical and psychological enslavement, cultural imperialism, and mental colonization – so that the interrelationship between the material and the ontological may be thoroughly interrogated. For the enslaved and/or colonized

[4] For a discussion of Douglass's role as a philosopher and Western reticence to acknowledging said role, see Broadus Butler, "Frederick Douglass: The Black Philosopher in the United States: A Commentary" in *Philosophy Born of Struggle: Anthology of Afro-American Philosophy from 1917*, ed. Leonard Harris (Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1983) 1-11.

Africana subject, the subjective experience of Being is bound to the objective materiality of enslavement and/or colonization. Being a slave and/or colonial subject means experiencing the enslavement/colonization of the body and the mind. Thus, the facticity of anti-African racism becomes a historical and societal reality that directly impacts the subjective experience of Being; in other words, materiality becomes a window onto the "lived experience of racism."

Reinterpreting the objectivity of Marxist materialism[5] and expanding the subjectivity of existential ontology to include a collective ontological totality defines this study as a bridging of Marxism and existentialism; one that attempts to expand upon Cedric Robinson's incisive analysis of anti-white violence in *Black Marxism*. Here, Robinson urges the reader to consider the comparatively small number of white casualties during slave rebellions as evidence that:

> This violence was not inspired by an external object…*it was the renunciation of actual being for historical being; the preservation of the ontological totality granted by a metaphysical system that never allowed for property in either the physical, philosophical, temporal, legal, social of psychic senses*. (168) (emphasis added)

Robinson holds that while enslaved and/or colonized Africans in the New World were fighting for Freedom, the number of slain white victims could not measure their battles' success. On the contrary, in their determination to defy Western capitalist oppression they boldly reassert their humanity within a system founded on their perceived bestiality – a system specifically created to annihilate

[5] I have taken this cue from several Africana scholar-activists who have reinterpreted Western radical theory, citing its failure to adequately address the issue of race since it problematizes the Marxist formulation of a white European bourgeoisie vis a vis a white European proletariat. Like, W.E.B. Du Bois and C.L.R. James (who will be discussed at length in chapter two), Aimee Cesaire was extremely critical of Marxist theory's blind spot towards Africana people who, in his words, were "doubly proletarianized and alienated" as workers and as black people. See Aimee Cesaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972) 78-79.

any form of self-identification that extended beyond chattel. Thus, in examining the political and philosophical issues attendant to African diasporic literature it is absolutely necessary to interrogate and reconcile both materiality and ontology in the manner that Robinson so forcefully does and in the manner that I, now, am attempting.

This philosophical reconciliation between Marxism and existentialism is also necessary when analyzing the African diasporic subject's historical and literary treatment of the Africana experience, because as Fredric Jameson rather cursorily notes: "Marxism is a way of understanding the objective dimension of history from the outside; existentialism is a way of understanding the subjective, individual experience" (208). Ostensibly Jameson's critique of what many scholars consider diametrically opposed philosophies appears plausible; however it fails to consider the potential imbrications of Marxist materiality and existential ontology within any number of given historical contexts, particularly as this imbrication occurs in historical events outside of their traditional Western settings.

Jameson, like most other Western critics, fails to consider Marxism (and existentialism's) intrinsic Eurocentricity – a bias that is made stark in both W.E.B. Du Bois' *Black Reconstruction* and C.L.R. James *The Black Jacobins* Du Bois and James's work prove that Marxist theory is neither objective nor external in its analysis of slavery's direct relationship to modern capitalist accumulation (as

opposed to the Marxian definition of slavery as the peak of primitive accumulation)[6] and growth of Empire.

Like Du Bois, James, and the other authors under consideration in this study, I have been greatly influenced by the manner in which Africana scholar-activists have consistently positioned their works as tools of counter-hegemonic discourse. But before delving into the explorations of Being and Freedom that lie at the heart of Africana scholars' counter-hegemonic letters, I wish to tease out the ties among existentialism, materialism, and Africana literature.

Humankind's existence at the center of a godless universe represents the quintessence of modern existentialist thought; in such a world human agency becomes the sole determinant in the course of world events. In post World War II Europe, this existentialist precept was viewed as the only rational explanation for the Nazi's systematic genocide of millions of Jews, gypsies, homosexuals, and other "undesirables." Prior to the Jewish holocaust, however, the annals of history prove that the systematic extermination of particular ethnic populations was not unique to the society and culture of twentieth-century Europe.[7] The antecedents of modern ethnic cleansing, indeed, its more "prosaic" origins, lay in the genocide of native peoples throughout North America, the Caribbean, and South America during Europe's fifteenth and sixteenth-century quest for New

[6] Oliver Crummel Cox, *Capitalism as a System* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1964) 212-222.

[7] I do not wish to imply that African, Asian and native peoples are innocent of ethnic cleansing; rather I am stressing that the European exploitation and extermination of particular racial groups was seen as necessary to the establishment and perpetuity of Western Empire and global capitalism.

World empires.[8] This imperial mission continued through the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries in Africa and Asia and, as it did, the numbers of its victims increased as well.

As Aime Cesaire notes in *Discourse on Colonialism*, the legacy of European savagery under colonialism laid the ideological and quasi-ethical foundation for twentieth-century Nazism:

> People are surprised, they become indignant. They say: 'How strange! But never mind – it's Nazism, it will pass!' And they wait…and they hide the truth from themselves, that it is barbarism, but the supreme barbarism, the crowning barbarism that sums up all the daily barbarisms; that *it is Nazism, yes, but that before they were its victims they were its accomplices; that they tolerated that Nazism before it was inflicted on them, that they absolved it, shut their eyes to it, legitimized it, because, until then it had been applied only to non-European peoples; that they have cultivated that Nazism, and that they are responsible for it…it is the crime against the white man, the humiliation of the white man, and the fact that he applied to Europe colonialist procedures which until then had been reserved exclusively for the Arabs of Algeria, the coolies of India, and the blacks of Africa*. (14-15) (emphasis added)

As Cesaire so forcefully notes, the shock of the Jewish holocaust was not its occurrence; rather, it was in the unthinkable reality that genocidal practices reserved for the darker (hence inferior) races were now being inflicted upon white Europeans.

In the decades following the Jewish holocaust, French existentialism took on a decidedly more materialist cast, as French and French colonial intellectuals Jean-Paul Sartre, Aimee Cesaire, and Frantz Fanon responded politically and

---

[8] See Ward Churchill's *A Little Matter of Genocide: Holocaust and Denial in the Americas 1492 to the Present* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1997).

philosophically to the French-Algerian War of the mid-1950's and early 1960's.[9] Despite Sartre, Cesaire, and Fanon's more radical application of existentialism to the liberationist ideologies of Third World decolonization, existentialist thought is primarily associated with European culture and modern European alienation.

Cesaire, Fanon, and Sartre use existential philosophy to elucidate the colonial subject's ontological transition from dependency complex to a liberated consciousness, however it is my contention that existentialism's preoccupation with Being and Freedom render this philosophy applicable to an examination of Africana scholar-activists' historiography of watershed moments in Western history that precede twentieth-century decolonization.

Writings by Africana scholars-activists on the existentialist themes of Being and Freedom, in some cases, predate modern existentialist thought and, in all cases, reinterpret existential philosophy. The fact that existentialism is generally perceived as a distinctly European cultural and philosophical phenomenon reveals the degree to which counter-hegemonic Africana texts have been ignored by the arbiters of Western canonical influence. This unfortunate blind spot will be properly analyzed in this study by examining the protracted means by which Africans and their descendants have been set apart from the historical narrative of Western development from the sixteenth century onwards.

This study, then, must be understood within the larger context of seminal ideological developments in Western history; it is a critique of the Western canon

---

[9] For a comprehensive analysis of the French and French colonial intellectual response to the French-Algerian War and the decolonization of Algeria, see James D. Le Sueur's *Uncivil War: Intellectuals and Identity Politics During the Decolonization of Algeria*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001).

just as it is an intervention into existentialist thought, for even though Africana thinkers have for four centuries continued to refute the Western canon's blatant Eurocentricity, its proponents refuse to concede the speciousness of their claims. Thus Being Apart, *must* be understood as a causative and paradoxical condition, for how do Africana people unequivocally prove their contributions to a Western world that consistently chooses to debase and erase them as well as their literary and philosophical productions? The very fact that four centuries of Africana *and* Western scholarship on the incontrovertible African contribution to classical and modern civilization has still not thwarted widely held theories of African ahistoricality and inferiority speaks to the intractable nature of hegemonic power structures that exacerbate millennia-old tendencies toward racialism in the West.[10]

While many Africana scholars primarily use the literary tradition as their medium of choice to protest their assigned marginality, several also embrace the oral tradition, or the voice, to carry their message of resistance. Many, like Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, Marcus Garvey, and Malcolm X among others are known for their great oratory skills, for their uncanny ability to turn a metaphor into a slogan or world-view. Most of the Africana scholars under consideration in this study – Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. Du Bois, C.L.R. James, and Kamau Brathwaite – also attribute great importance to the survival of the African oral tradition in the Americas and its crucial role in the creation of an

[10] For an in-depth analysis of Western capitalist civilization and its exacerbation of racial differences among Europeans as well as non-Europeans from the 15th-19th centuries, see Cedric Robinson's *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983 chapters one and two.

African diasporic culture of resistance; thus their views on Africana orature will also be explored in this study.

In chapter one, I begin by charting the iconographic beginnings of anti-African sentiment in the 16th century British imperial portraiture of the pristinely white Virgin Queen, Elizabeth I. The Drake Jewel, in particular, juxtaposes the portrait of an exceedingly white Queen Elizabeth to an anonymous "black subject," whose African ethnic, tribal, and cultural distinctions are flattened into the Western pejorative of Negro, or black. These artistic and literary images of the sublimely superior European and the essentially inferior (or bestial) Negro/black establish a proto-white supremacist racial dualism, which is then formalized philosophically into the eighteenth and nineteenth-century Enlightenment discourses of David Hume and Georg Wilhelm Friederich Hegel that proclaim chattel slavery the antidote for African bestiality.

I then demonstrate how Frederick Douglass, David Walker, George Washington Williams, and Leila Amos Pendelton, among others, take on Enlightenment and Hegelian discourses by refuting the first two aspects of the Western canon's tripartite crux: the erasure of ancient Africa's civilizational influences on ancient Greece and Rome, and the transmogrification of the African into the bestial Negro slave. To counter the anti-African racism behind Western chauvinism and chattel slavery, these Africana abolitionists and scholars cite the writings of classical and modern European historians on the African racial identity of the ancient Egyptians as proof of African historicality, humanity, and culture.

Douglass's epic battle with slave-breaker Covey is treated as a rewriting of Georg Wilhelm Friederich Hegel's master-slave dialectic, which is rife with materialist and existentialist themes. Douglass, a former slave, inserts himself as an actualized historical agent in his revision of the classic Hegelian dialectic. In this chapter, I will also analyze how Douglass' moving account of the slave song highlights the import of the African American oral tradition.

Chapter two initiates a contrapuntal reading of W.E.B. Du Bois' *Black Reconstruction in America* and C.L.R. James' *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*. Du Bois and James' works are central to this study because they effectively rename enslaved Africans black workers and a black proletariat respectively, and as the progenitors of Western modernity, capitalism, and Empire. Both Du Bois, and African American, and James, an Afro-Trinidadian, credit the African oral tradition for establishing the beginnings of a distinctly African American culture among the black workers of what I have termed, an African diasporic proletariat.

Since Du Bois and James recontextualize the entire enslaved African population of the Americas as workers and members of an African diasporic proletariat, these two Black Radical philosophers reinterpret Marxist historiography by highlighting the enslaved African's role in the birth of modernity and global capitalism, thereby continuing the Africana project of challenging Western hegemonic discourse[11], while employing anti-imperialism,

[11] The late nineteenth century finds several Africana scholar-activists engaged in political work focusing on engendering Pan-Africanist and diasporic awareness. See Robin D.G. Kelley, "But a Local Phase of a World Problem": Black History's Global Vision, 1883-1950 in *The Journal of American History*. 86.3 (December 1999): 1-37.

Pan-Africanism, and an incipient African diasporic consciousness to destabilize Western hegemonic discourse. In so doing, Du Bois and James take on the third aspect of anti-Africanism at the heart of Western discourse – the denial of enslaved African labor's centrality to the creation of Western modernity, capitalism, and Empire.

In this chapter, I also argue that the theoretical shifts created in Du Bois and James's re-writing of history are their use of Western slavery's material conditions to effectively segue into its existential implications for the enslaved. *Black Reconstruction* and *The Black Jacobins'* analyses of Being and Freedom are far ahead of their time. Where Du Bois and James are primarily concerned with recasting the enslaved African as an agent of history, Frantz Fanon envisions the liberated postcolonial subject as the creator of a new world. Being and Freedom are probed even further in Martinican political philosopher Frantz Fanon's interdisciplinary study *Black Skin, White Masks,* which defines postcolonial liberation as the instance for existential actualization.

In chapter three, the existential will be reinterpreted through Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* – the text that is commonly viewed as Fanon's least revolutionary. Here, I argue that Fanon's employment of theoretically opposed, and divergent, schools of Western thought leads to the creation of a distinctly Fanonian hermeneutic method that unfolds layers of material, psychoanalytic, dialectic, and existential complexity to Fanon's colonial subject and her Manichean colonial world. Fanon, ultimately, positions the black native's attainment of Freedom as the highest expression of existential self-actualization.

Quite ironically, however, Fanon details the colonial subject's liberation through Georg Wilhelm Friederich Hegel's dialectic of recognition and struggle, without ever addressing Hegel's blatant anti-African racism.

Where Fanon argues that existential actualization occurs as a result of the colonial subject's violent struggle for recognition, Barbajan poet, historian, and theorist Kamau Brathwaite charges that existential actualization must be won on the battlefield of linguistic discourse itself. By critiquing Fanon's discussion in "The Negro and Language," I aim to problematize Fanon's proscriptions against the native's use of Martinican Creole and clear the way for Kamau Brathwaite's interpretation of nation language as a discourse that identifies New World Africana cultural productions, including orature and music, as representative of a creative protest tradition against Western hegemony. Brathwaite's theory of nation language outlines a corrective to the deleterious effects of cultural and linguistic imperialism outlined by Fanon and others.

Chapter four presents Barbajan historian and poet Kamau Brathwaite's theory of nation language as the philosophical and literary encapsulation of his literary predecessors' various foci. Nation language seemingly combines Du Bois and James' drive to foreground the enslaved African's impact on the history and culture of the Americas with Fanon's interpretation of language as a socio-linguistic and cultural outgrowth of collective and individual ontology. Yet Brathwaite takes these theoretical shifts further by declaring nation language, itself a form of orature, as just one aspect of a larger African diasporic mode of expression and Being that bespeaks the African's adapted presence in the New

World. He also continues to push the bounds of Western theory through his formulation of tidalectics, what Brathwaite has termed "dialectics with my difference."[12] Brathwaite's theoretical intervention departs from those of his predecessors' because he does not name literary production as the pinnacle of cultural achievement; on the contrary, Brathwaite names Africana orature and music as the originary source of a counter-hegemonic creative protest tradition in the Americas.

Using Brathwaite's diasporic thrust in "History of the Voice," I will also propose a African diasporic-existentialist critique that will effectively contest the rigid disciplinary divide between Postcolonial and African American literatures, as Brathwaite's work, and the work of his predecessors, reveal shared historical and philosophical themes that belie cultural, regional, and disciplinary divides.

Throughout this work, I use the terms Africana, African diasporic, and people of African descent adjectivally, in some cases, and interchangeably in all cases. However, the terms Black and Negro (in either lower or upper case) will be used to maintain an author's original usage as well as his/her contemporary terminology. The terms African American oral tradition, orature, and the vernacular are used interchangeably, as are the terms America, American, and African American. These latter terms are used in the hemispheric sense of "the Americas" to connote the United States and the Caribbean for the principal works under consideration are all by authors from the Americas.

---

[12] Nathaniel Mackey, *Paracritical Hinge: Essays,Talks, Notes, Interviews* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005) 9.

Needless to say, this study is not definitive; however, it is a careful analysis of Western and Africana history, philosophy, and literature that foregrounds the manner in which Western hegemonic discourse has systematically diminished the ideological impact of Africana letters within the greater Western canon.

For several generations the South has been taught to look upon the Negro as a thing apart. He was different from other human beings. The system of slave labor, under which he was employed, was radically different from all other systems of labor.

W.E.B. Du Bois

As far as ideology is concerned, the capitalists proceed in a normal way; that is to say, they develop and exploit ethnocentrism and show by any irrational or logical means available that…peoples of other races, whose labor they are bent on exploiting, are something apart: a) not human at all, b) only part human, c) inferior humans, and so on…

Oliver Cromwell Cox

It is extremely important in a "study" of any aspect of the history of the American Negro to emphasize how strange and unnatural the initial contacts with Western slavery were for the African, in order to show how the black man was set apart throughout the New World from the start.

LeRoi Jones

Chapter One: Being Apart

With aesthetic origins in antiquity, Western conceptualizations of the sub-human, bestial African remain an integral aspect of Western hegemonic discourse and the crucible of anti-African racism.[13] The Trans-Atlantic slave trade, Western chattel slavery, imperialism and colonialism represent epochal developments in world history as the exploitation of African labor was legitimized by the dualistic trope of ideological racism: the sublimely superior European and the essentially inferior African.[14] Anti-African, Eurocentric discourse has defined Western history, while forging seemingly intractable linkages among Western hegemony, the Western canon, and Western discourse. This ideological triumvirate has, in turn, positioned Africana history, literature, and philosophy apart from the scope

[13] While a historical overview of anti-African racism is not the expressed purpose of this study, my focus on the phenomenological and ontological effects of anti-African racism behooves an introduction on the Western history of African antipathy. For a more detailed discussion of the Western depiction of the "bestial" African during antiquity, see Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982) 177-178.

[14] Here, I would like to acknowledge the counter-tradition of the "noble savage" in Western literature as it represents an attendant strain of anti-African discourse, however this manifestation of Western racism will not be the focus of this particular study.

of Western canonical influence by effectively perpetuating ideological racism through three interrelated projects of Western canonical history which I have termed the tri-partite crux of Western discourse: the dehumanization of the African and the creation of the Negro, the elision of ancient Africa's contributions to Western civilization, and the denial of African slave labor's centrality to the birth of Western modernity, capitalism, and Empire.

This tri-partite crux of Western hegemonic discourse has not gone unchallenged. The past four centuries have seen Africana scholar-activists refute the Western canon's fallacious claims of African ahistoricality and sub-humanity. David Walker, Frederick Douglass, and other nineteenth and twentieth-century Africana thinkers created a counter-hegemonic discourse that places African civilization, the African and her literary and cultural productions, at the center of Western history. In the nineteenth century this Africana-centered discourse, interestingly, presents proto-existentialist exegeses on the themes of Being and Freedom; those that follow in the twentieth-century reinterpret both existentialism and Marxism.

Before analyzing Africana thinkers' exploration of Being and Freedom, I will contextualize how Western hegemonic discourse's concordant thread of anti-African racism has set Africana peoples apart from humanity. I will do this by emphasizing the first part of the tri-partite crux of Western discourse – African dehumanization and the creation of the Negro (or the essential black). This stripping of African humanity began during the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade's beginnings in the Early Modern period and will be charted through the imperial

iconography of Elizabethan England and, later, in the development of ideological racism during the Enlightenment.

As monarchies establish a country's national ethos through the corporeality of divinely ordained rulers, English national and imperial consciousness in the Early Modern period came to be associated with the figure of Elizabeth I. Indeed, it was during Elizabeth I's reign that Ireland, a formerly problematic region under England's two previous monarchs, was thoroughly incorporated into the British empire and transformed into a plantation colony as a means of controlling the "savage" Irish masses.[15] England's empire expanded during Elizabeth I's rule and the imperial portraiture it inspired provides insight into the manner in which English artistic iconography has become synonymous with English/white imperial might and colonial subjugation that extended into the West Indies. In particular, the Drake Jewel's portrait of an exceedingly white Queen Elizabeth juxtaposed to an anonymous African slave/colonial subject valorizes European whiteness while erasing African ethnic individuality and humanity.

According to Kim F. Hall, sixteenth century England's quest for imperial dominance is captured in the portraiture of Queen Elizabeth I. The Queen's excessive whiteness symbolizes English/European cultural superiority, which was used to justify the oppression of its African slaves and colonial subjects (464-

[15] The attainment of New World empires was not the sole form of colonization to create a distinctly English imperial ethos; the sixteenth century finds Elizabeth I establishing a then unprecedented plan for the colonization Ireland that served two equally important functions: Ireland would be colonized as a means to subdue the "wild" Irish masses; and the country would be divided up into a network of plantations, modeled after those in the Virginia colony. See Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983) Chapter 2.

466). Elizabeth I's many portraits offered English subjects artistic representations of their esteemed ruler whose glaring white likeness came to represent her nation's quest for imperial dominance. The Drake Jewel (a miniature cameo portrait of Elizabeth I and a slave/colonial subject), as well as the Armada and Ditchley portraits of Elizabeth I are considered artistic encapsulations of the interrelated discourses of race, anti-African racism, and English imperial hegemony.[16] Regarding the manner in which the Drake Jewel creates a black white binary that privileges whiteness, Hall asserts that:

> The Drake Jewel is particularly useful for contextualizing the concepts of race and beauty in Renaissance England because the cameo itself juxtaposes white and black faces and is explicitly associated with Elizabeth's court…the combination of black cameo with miniature portrait also draws attention to skin color in a way that may reinforce the value of whiteness. (464)

The valence of whiteness may easily be read as one half of a dualistic black-white binary. Here, I emphasize black rather than African because Hall does not mention whether the cultural, ethnic, or tribal origins of the African model was made known to the royal court or those segments of the English buying public who could afford such decorous symbols of Empire. Furthermore, whether a model was, in fact, used for this particular artistic rendition of African identity, or the African face was etched through some act of imagination is also unmentioned. Thus, in the Drake Jewel, one may see the beginnings of a racialized iconographic discourse in which the African is reduced to the black – a non-identity based solely on the African's skin color. The fact of the anonymous, ethnically indistinct African (subject) is extremely relevant for black, a mere

[16] Kim F. Hall, "Beauty and the Beast of Whiteness: Teaching Race and Gender" in *Shakespeare Quarterly*: *Teaching Judith Shakespeare*. 47.4 (Winter 1996): 461-466.

color, becomes the all-encompassing, yet vacuous, representation for an entire continent of culturally and ethnically diverse peoples. Tribes as diverse as Masai and Dogon, religions as distinct as Islam and Animism, become categorized under the flat, essentialized pejorative of black.

Indeed the transmogrification, of the African into the sub-human Negro is one central feature of Western discourse. Robert Birt's analysis of Western chattel slavery's transmogrification of the African into the Negro is useful in analyzing how the Trans-Atlantic slave trade furthered African dehumanization. This same process seamlessly created the anonymous black slave/colonial subject of the Drake Jewel since:

> Following upon the physical uprooting of the African from his/her native land, this was the first radical attack on the human identity of black people – a fundamental deracination of the human spirit…*As 'Negroes,' blacks ceased to be Africans (Wolof, Ashanti, and so forth), to become virtual non-persons (losing even their original names and families), and were relegated to the status of subhumans as 'blackness' itself became identical to the total degradation of chattel slavery*. (209-210) (Emphasis added)

Part and parcel of chattel slavery's degradation, according to Birt and implied by Hall, is the designation of blackness as the symbolic color of an inferior, or only partial humanity. Thus, as England transports enslaved Africans to the Americas in the sixteenth century, multitudinous African identities are reduced into a singular iconic color that is equated with a the singular subjugation of chattel slavery: Black (or Negro) [17].

[17] Although the term Negro is generally associated with Africans and their descendants, it is important to note that the term was also applied to the Indians of the Americas in the sixteenth century, who preceded the Africans as the first slave labor force in the Americas. For a detailed discussion on the Spanish, Portuguese, English, Dutch, and German designation of Indians as

Through the Drake Jewel's anonymous African model, blackness enters into a dualistic relationship with whiteness so as to foreground the latter's perceived supremacy. The Drake Jewel offers historical and ideological proof that once blackness (Africa, bestiality, evil) is related to whiteness (England, humanity, good), the former exists solely as the negative, binary counterpart of the latter. This dualism, according to John L. Hodge, became the theoretical basis for African oppression because:

> The dualism of good over evil is a necessary part of the justification of oppression…Dualism and cultural bias produce a deadly combination…When the English first encountered Africans in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the English assumed without serious question that the blacks were inferior beings…(96-97)

Within this socio-cultural and historical context, the whiteness of Elizabeth I signifies an aspect of English national identity that is predicated upon African inferiority, and what the monarchy viewed as the natural consequence of said inferiority – African enslavement and exploitation through English colonial rule. Further attesting to the interrelated discourses of whiteness, racialism, and imperialism, Hall concludes that in the Armada and Ditchley portraits:

> …Elizabeth herself is excessively white in a way that becomes representative of a group identity. For example, the whiteness of her bejeweled dress and 'cosmetically enhanced features combine…to evoke virgin purity and Christian grace and thus associate Elizabeth with 'the good.' The visual identification of Elizabeth with her kingdom suggests that England shares her whiteness. (466)

Negroes, see Jack D. Forbes, *Africans and Native Americans: The Language of Race and Evolution of Red-Black Peoples* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993) Chapter 3. And on the European's fifteenth-century enslavement of the Indians in the Americas see Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* 1944 (New York: Capricorn Books, 1966) Chapter 1.

Thus, whiteness becomes a necessary component of English national and imperial identity, and although this aesthetic and cultural discourse of white/English identity is not tantamount to modern forms of ideological racism, it creates a paradigm in which English culture and identity is deemed superior to African culture and identity: "While not grafted onto an understanding of racial difference which could be identified as biological, whiteness melds with a projection of national solidarity and superiority which portends such future associations" (466).

With a proto-white supremacist dualism portending the "future associations" of England's role in the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and its imperial project in the Caribbean, and later on the African continent, it becomes quite clear that Elizabethan conceptions of superior whiteness contributed to a racial paradigm in which blackness could only be apprehended as the dualistic negation of whiteness and all that whiteness represented. This dualism, according to Hall, is further emphasized in the Armada and Ditchley portraits of Elizabeth I where: "a dark/light dichotomy plays out which shows Elizabeth/England as key to a larger, cosmic triumph of good over evil" (465).

The exaggerated whiteness (goodness) of English monarch, Queen Elizabeth becomes the iconography of a Western aesthetic, moral, and racial superiority; the iconography of a nascent Western discourse that would be supported by fallacious theories of African sub-humanity and ahistoricality during the Enlightenment.

The eighteenth-century writings of Enlightenment theorist David Hume and the nineteenth-century writings of Georg Wilhelm Friederich Hegel provided further ideological rationale for the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and chattel slavery by entrenching claims of African sub-humanity and ahistoricality within the Western canon.[18] Indeed, it is quite clear that the creation of the sub-human, ahistorical Negro/slave was imperative to the merging of anti-African racism and Western canonical discourse. The bestial African had to exist so that the unbridled exploitation of her slave labor could continue to feed the burgeoning capitalist economies of the West. The African was effectively transformed into the ahistorical Negro from whom:

> …not even the suspicion of tradition needed to be entertained. In its stead was the…slave, a consequence masqueraded as an anthropology and a history. *The creation of the Negro was obviously at the cost of immense expenditures of psychic and intellectual energies in the West. The exercise was obligatory. It was an effort commensurate with the importance Black labour power possessed for the World economy sculpted and dominated by the ruling and mercantile classes of Western Europe. The Atlantic slave trade and the slavery of the New World were integral to the modern world economy*. (Robinson 3) (Emphasis added)

Black labor power under chattel slavery defined Western economic growth from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century and, as Eric Williams stresses, the enormous capital profits form triangular trade financed England's banking, insurance, iron, railway, and steam engine industries thereby stimulating the

[18] See David Hume, "Of National Characters" in *Selected Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of World History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975) 179-185.

country's entire economy.[19] For modern Western economies, like England's, to prosper, chattel slavery became the cornerstone of capitalism; thus it had to be systematically rationalized and legitimized in an ideological manner. The Enlightenment philosophies of eighteenth and nineteenth-century Western thinkers provided the formal means for anti-African discourse to negate chattel slavery's injustices and perpetuate its blatant capitalist exploitation of the enslaved.

In Enlightenment philosopher David Hume's essay, "Of National Character," first published in 1777, Hume lays the theoretical foundation for nineteenth-century Hegelianism and twentieth-century social Darwinism by asserting the essential inferiority of Negroes and all other non-white peoples. Hume declares that he is:

> …apt to suspect the Negroes, and in general all the other species of men (for there are four or five different kinds) to be naturally inferior to the whites. There never was a civilized nation of any other complexion than white, nor any individual eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufacturers amongst them, no arts, no sciences. (143)

Hume's theories on the inferiority of all non-whites is indicative of how the authors of Enlightenment discourse began to systematically erase documented evidence of ancient African and Asian civilizational influences on the development of Greece and Rome.

This elision of Africa from the narrative of Western civilization is the second aspect of Western discourse's tri-partite crux. As Cheikh Anta Diop's *The*

[19] Williams, Op. Cit., 99-107. This point will be further explored in relation to the United States and French economies through chapter two's analysis of W.E.B. Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction* and C.L.R. James's *The Black Jacobins*.

African Origin of Civilization attests, it was during the Enlightenment that European philosophers, like Hume, initiated their revisionist history on the origins of Western civilization. These eighteenth-century scholars successfully supplanted the Afro-Asiatic roots of classical civilization with dubious evidence of pristine Greco-Roman origins.[20] By successfully erasing the African's contributions to the tide of Western civilization, by creating the myth of a hellocentric ancient world, and by transforming the African into a sub-human brute, Enlightenment discourses like Hume's successfully exiled the African from the stage of world civilization while glorifying European culture as the pinnacle of human achievement.

Propelled by these theories of modern rationality, the framers of the United States Constitutions sought to secure white America's highly profitable plantation economy through the guiding principles and language of the United States' Constitution, which codified and ensured the perpetuation of chattel slavery. It is common knowledge that while composing the lofty democratic ideals of freedom and equality in the United States Constitution, Thomas Jefferson and other "Founding Fathers" were slaveholders who originated the infamous 3/5 compromise to benefit members of the slave-holding class.

Enlightenment theories on the natural rights of man drove American patriots like Thomas Jefferson and his co-authors of the Constitution. Jefferson saw himself as an American revolutionary, a tried and true patriot who overthrew the yoke of British colonial tyranny. Yet, as a privileged white American whose

---

[20] Cheikh Anta Diop, *The African Origins of Civilization: Myth or Reality* (New York: Lawrence Hill & Company, 1974).

identity depended upon the highly theorized "veracity" of African inferiority, he was unwilling to conceptualize that owning slaves represented an even more egregious form of the same oppression that Americans had recently overcome. Toni Morrison holds that the "Founding Fathers'" belief in the Enlightenment rights of man doctrine served as the principal theoretical underpinning to their dual roles as holders of slaves and originators of democracy.[21] In *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination,* she emphasizes that:

> The rights of man, for example, an organizing principle upon which the nation was founded, was inevitably yoked to Africanism. Its history, its origin, is permanently allied to another seductive concept: the hierarchy of race. As the sociologist Orlando Patterson has noted, we should not be surprised that the Enlightenment could accommodate slavery; we should be surprised if it had not. *The concept of freedom did not emerge in a vacuum. Nothing highlighted freedom – if it did not in fact create it – like slavery*. (38) (emphasis added)

Morrison's contention that the conceptualization of freedom was made possible by the existence and practice of Western chattel slavery is crucial on several counts. First, by highlighting the dialectical relationship between Western freedom and African enslavement, Morrison shows that slavery had to exist in order for Western philosophers to delineate the very meaning of Freedom itself. Second, Morrison proves that the framers of Western ideology were dependent upon the exigencies of capitalism and slavery to create their lauded theories of liberty. Third, Morrison, like Du Bois and James before her, continues the counter-hegemonic project of highlighting the African's centrality to the birth of

[21] French Enlightenment theorists were equally racist and hypocritical in their failure to see the Haitian Revolution as the material manifestation of their lauded principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity. See Louis Sala-Molinas, *Dark Side of the Light: Slavery and the French Enlightenment*. Trans. John Conteh-Morgan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

Western modernity by stressing that the ideal of Freedom could not exist without the reality of chattel slavery.

In Western canonical history, Thomas Jefferson remains one of many liberators of the American people, yet through his contradictory position as slaveholder and freedom fighter one may easily apprehend the growing intractability of ideological racism. Jefferson was unwilling to understand that the actualization of American freedom from British colonial rule was, in principle, equal to the liberation of African Americans from chattel slavery because he was steeped in the racist discourse of his day.

This hypocrisy did not go unnoticed by African American abolitionist David Walker. Walker's *Appeal in Four Articles; Together with a Preamble, to the Coloured Citizens of the World* (1829) challenges the scientific racism of Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1787) by decrying the unprecedented inhumanity of Western chattel slavery. In Article I, Walker critiques modern slavery by asking readers to recall that even the ancient Egyptians did not degrade their Israelite slaves by declaring them less than human. Walker boldly challenges his readers to:

> …show me a page of history, either sacred or profane, on which a verse can be found, which maintains, that the Egyptians heaped the *insupportable insult* upon the children of Israel, by telling them that they were not of the *human family*. Can the whites deny this charge? Have they not …reduced us to the deplorable condition of slaves under their feet, held us up as descending originally from tribes of *Monkeys* or *Orang-Outangs*?...Has Mr. Jefferson declared to the world, that we are inferior to the whites, both in the endowments of our bodies and our minds? (233)

Walker's aim is clear – Western slavery must be challenged. Culturally, it represents an aberration of power as it continued to thrive during an "enlightened" era and, historically, Western chattel slavery is unprecedented in its dehumanization of the African race.

Jefferson's racism is equally obvious in *Notes'* specious criticism of Phillis Wheatley's *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* (1773). Jefferson acknowledges that enslaved Africans in America have suffered, but he refuses to believe that this suffering could be channeled into poetic expression since:

> Misery is often the parent of the most affecting touches in poetry. Among the blacks is misery enough, God knows, but not poetry. Love is the peculiar oestrum of the poet. Their love is ardent, but it kindles the senses only, not the imagination. Religion, indeed, has produced a Phillis Wheatley; but it could not produce a poet. The compositions published under her name are below the dignity of criticism. (xli)

Here, Jefferson claims that he would not deign to critique Wheatley's poetry; yet his disparaging comments, rife with the circular illogic of irrational bias, offer the very criticism from which he vows to abstain. The existence, indeed, the international presence, of a young girl who was dubbed "The African Genius" for having mastered the English language after only four years in the United States; who was able to compose an entire volume of classical English verse seemingly posed too much of a threat to Jefferson's white supremacist sensibilities.

The scholarship of Phillis Wheately, Francis Williams, Jacobus Capitien, Wilhelm Amo, and Ignatius Sancho – all of whom were the subjects of Western

experiments on African intellectual ability – did not deter the tide of scientific racism during the Enlightenment. Eighteenth and nineteenth-century Western thinkers, and the canon they created, became further steeped in the fallacious tenets of African inferiority that legitimized chattel slavery. [22] The resultant conflation of African identity and slave identity was made possible, according to Peter Erickson, by the symbiosis of ideological and institutionalized racism under Western chattel slavery. Erickson argues that while situating the slave trade during the sixteenth century is crucial to any discussion of racialist discourse, it is equally important to note how the hegemonic (hence institutionalized) aspects of anti-African racism mark a chasm in the development of slavery as a system in Western history itself:

> …the Atlantic slave trade and plantation economy in the Americas signify a decisive change in the institution of slavery. *The systematic racism associated with its structural development cannot be said to exist in the historical stages that precede, and lead up to this moment.* (500) (Emphasis added)

So influential were Western thinkers like Hume and Jefferson in their philosophical rationales for African enslavement, the institution of slavery has come to be almost exclusively associated with peoples of African descent more than it has with any other racial or ethnic group. The exclusive yoking of slavery to the African represents a two-fold problem. First, Enlightenment philosophies are not generally perceived as furthering discourses of racial difference

[22] Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "The Perception of Black Literature As a Necessary Road to Membership in the Human Community." *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 22 (1998-1999): 108-109.

established as early as the thirteenth century[23] and peaking in sixteenth-century imperial English artistic iconography. And second, the institution of slavery is not perceived as one of many cultural developments in Western history; instead it is understood as the distinct lot of the African. Gilroy confirms that:

> There is scant sense that the universality and rationality of enlightened Europe and America were used to sustain and relocate…an order of racial difference inherited from the premodern era…In this setting, it is hardly surprising that…the history of slavery is somehow assigned to blacks. It becomes our special property rather than a part of the ethical and intellectual heritage of the West as a whole. (49)

The European antipathy towards the African must be understood as having roots prior to and during the Early Modern Period. Thus as my critique of Elizabethan portraiture reveals this ideology of racial dualism, based on the presumed superiority of whiteness, laid the foundation for the canonized anti-African racism of Hume and Jefferson. The link between aesthetic antipathy to the African and a contemporary Western ideology formed around anti-African racism becomes clear, as the African has come to represent the quintessence of the slave. This fixed equation of African and slave is a direct result of this five-centuries long development in Western thought, a development that reaches its peak in the writings of nineteenth-century theorist Georg Wilhelm Friederich Hegel. In order to properly appreciate the influence of Hegelian discourse on Western thought, we must first address German historicism's impact on American historical thought and, in doing so, we will necessarily revisit the first and second aspects of the Western canon's tri-partite crux of ideological racism – the erasure

[23] Cedric Robinson Op. Cit. Chapter 1.

of ancient Africa's contribution to the West and the dehumanization of the African.

The nineteenth century finds Western history becoming a formal academic discipline; therefore, the burgeoning anti-African racism of Western discourse is concomitant with and integral to three significant academic and political developments: the nineteenth-century formalization of history as a discipline, German historicism's influence on Western historical discourse, and the emergence of the European and American nation-state. History emerges as a formally recognized and legitimized field of study in the early nineteenth century just as the Western nation-state is born. According to Ian Tyrell, and Benedict Anderson before him, the early nineteenth-century formalization of history made possible the nation-state's myth of origin and the emergent nation-state's contemporary narrative:

> History with a capital H was present at the creation of nation-states. It seems more than accidental, says Benedict Anderson, that the notion of history as a critical body of thinking about the past appeared in the 1820's in Europe and that an organized discipline arose there and then to provide a genealogy for newly emergent nationalism. (1015)

In the same manner that Enlightenment annalists were instrumental in perpetuating the legend of a purely Hellenic Western civilization, the annalists of modern nineteenth-century history became indispensable to the nation-state's creation and perpetuity. Nineteenth-century American historians defined the institutions of the nation-state as they, "…forged powerful institutional and intellectual connections with state structures" whereas previous generations of

American historians, "did not privilege the nation-state over sectional, regional, and local themes" (Tyrell 1016).

Integral to this merging of history, nationalist ideology, and political systems in the West, according to Tyrell, is the impact of German historicism on nineteenth-century American historians who were greatly swayed by the German conceptualization of "Herrenvolk." In Germany, the bourgeoisie used the patriotic call of Herrenvolk to mobilize "…national social forces (peasants, farmers, workers, clerics, professional classes, the aristocracy, and the state)…[through] the ideological phantasmagoria of race, Herrenvolk, and nationalism" so as to establish nationalized economic and militaristic forces against economic rivals and political enemies within Europe. (Robinson 27). Herrenvolk, with its mythology of a heroic Germanic race, becomes yet another cornerstone of Western racialism among German intellectuals, like Herder, Fichte, and Hegel; just as it does among American thinkers Thomas Jefferson and John Adams (Robinson 27).

It seems a matter of course, then, that the American scholarly adherence to the unmistakably racialist and chauvinistic German universal history methodology of Georg W.F. Hegel sets the epistemological foundation for the American historiography of the nineteenth-century nation-state. The intellectuals and policy-makers of the American nation-state, whose socio-political economy was defined by chattel slavery and Southern plantation culture, were compelled to solidify the ideological and historical rationale that would ensure the slave system's perpetuity.

Consequently, it behooved these American historians to simplify "…the German's method to an unreflective empiricism…[yet] they did not abandon aspirations for universal history."[24] American historians would find a universal history legitimizing the dehumanizing institution of chattel slavery in Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* (published in the original German in 1827 and 1857 in English).

Hegel's philosophy of historical development in *Lectures*, which banishes Africa and Africans from the annals of human civilization, would begin its lasting impact on Western discourse in the nineteenth century as chattel in America slavery peaked. Hegel's analysis of world history in *Lectures* is so blatantly anti-African and rife with European chauvinism that he lauds the brutally oppressive system of chattel slavery as a civilizing measure that instilled within Africans their negligible humanity since their:

> …condition is capable of no development or Culture, and as we see them at this day, such they have always been. The only essential connection between Negroes and the Europeans is slavery…we may conclude slavery to have been the occasion of the increase in human feeling among the Negroes. (Hegel 177)

For Hegel to contend an increased humanity in Africans under the brutality of chattel slavery is beyond absurd; it is completely illogical. It is quite clear that Hegel's anti-African position represents a continuation of Enlightenment discourses, like Hume's, that aver African inferiority and

---

[24] Ian Tyrell, "Making Nations/Making States: American Historians in the context of Empire" in *The Journal of American History*. 86.3, The Nation and Beyond: Transnational Perspectives on United States History: A Special Issue. (1999): 1015-1044.

European superiority. Hegel, however, goes even further. He establishes his theory of world history with the development of the human spirit, but his theory of collective human ontological development is tainted in its treatment of the African continent as a civilizational void (as many critics have named it) that is, and will ever remain, apart from the advancing tide of world history and culture.

Hegel's highly influential philosophy of world history in *Lectures* also establishes claims of African non-Being. As though his thesis had not sufficiently debased African civilization and culture, he elaborates upon this proposition by stating that Africans are bereft of that which separates human beings from animals – the conscious awareness of Being: "The characteristic feature of the Negroes is that their consciousness has not yet reached an awareness of any substantial objectivity…*in which the will of man could participate and in which he could become aware of his own being*" (177) (Emphasis added).

Hegel's insistence on the absence of consciousness among Africans is central to Western hegemonic ideology as his staunch racism provides further canonical evidence of African dehumanization. In *Lectures*, a work that is widely considered a peak in Western letters, Hegel has relegated the African to the status of an animal, a non-human being. His theory of African non-Being furthers the dualism of anti-African and Eurocentric discourses by establishing a negative ontological rubric in which African identity, or blackness, has no a priori significance. For Hegel (and his legion of followers within the Western

academy), blackness becomes merely a reflexive point of white self-reference, not an ontogenic reality in its own right.[25]

David Hume, Thomas Jefferson, and G.W.F. Hegel's staunch insistence on European cultural, moral, and intellectual superiority and an all-encompassing African inferiority reveals the degree to which eighteenth and nineteenth-century Western philosophy became defined by a hegemonic imperative: to historicize Africans and African enslavement in terms that would further the interdependent discourses of anti-African racism, chattel slavery, and Western capitalism. Nevertheless Hume, Jefferson, and Hegel did not go unchallenged. Africana scholars were creating a counter-hegemonic discourse that directly challenged the exclusion of Africa and peoples of African descent from the narrative of Western civilization's development. David Walker, Frederick Douglass, George Washington Williams and several others addressed the erasure of ancient Egypt's contributions to Greece and Rome by citing both ancient and modern European historical sources on the Egyptian's Negroid racial identity.

David Walker and Frederick Douglass published works that identify ancient Egypt as the civilization that nurtured the nascent cultures of Greece and later Rome. Originally published in 1829, Walker's *Appeal* urged its Negro-American readers to remember their ancient Egyptian forbearers as those who brought the sciences to Greece and later Rome.[26] Paul Gilroy's *The Black*

[25] This position is reinterpreted and reinvigorated in the existentialist writings of Frantz Fanon, which will be explores at length in chapter three.
[26] Dickson D. Bruce, Jr., "Ancient Africa and the Early Black American Historians" in *American Quarterly*, 36.5 (1984): 684-699.

Atlantic also highlights Frederick Douglass' commitment to challenging G.W.F. Hegel's anti-African bias as Douglass:

> …advocated the humanity of African slaves and attacked the exclusion of Africa from history in a celebrated ethnological lecture which he delivered in various venues from 1854 on. Later published as "The Claims of the Negro Ethnologically Considered," this piece offered a coherent challenge to the scientific racism of Douglass' own time…It also conveyed the precision of Douglass' own attack on the hellenomaniacal excision of Africa from the narrative of civilization's development. (59-60)

Though Douglass' writings do not mention Hegel by name, it is clear that the above-cited speech challenges the presumptions of African sub-humanity posited by Hegel's *Lectures*. Furthermore, Douglass' relationship with Ottilia Assing, the German translator of *My Bondage, My Freedom*, suggests that Douglass and Assing discussed Hegel's works, among the works of other influential German philosophers.[27]

The counter-hegemonic literary tradition of interpellating ancient Egyptian history as proof of both African humanity and the evils of Western slavery does not end with abolitionists Walker and Douglass. Eleven years after Walker's *Appeal*, George Washington Williams published his two-volume work, *History of the Negro Race in America* in 1838, citing the ancient writings of Greek historian Herodotus and the more modern accounts of French writer Volney as evidence of both the ancient Egyptians' African identity and the African contribution to Western civilization:

> …ancient Egypt had been a setting for great achievements by blacks, who had lived there in a state of perfect equality with other

[27] See Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), p.60.

> races…Thus he cited Herodotus' claim that eighteen of the kings of Egypt had been Ethiopians, and provided an extended description of a Negro princess who was served by an army of slaves, both black and white. (Bruce 687)

While Williams' work was considered the first significant work of historical scholarship by an African American author, and was widely reviewed, other less-celebrated texts, like Edward Augustus Johnson's *A School History of the Negro Race* (1891) and Lelia Amos Pendleton's *Narrative of the Negro* (1912), invoked ancient Egypt as the cradle of civilization whose influence spread northward to Greece. These groundbreaking works were used as standard textbooks for Negro schools in North Carolina and Washington, D.C. respectively in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[28] Clearly, these early African American historians' works were embraced as tacit proof of African and African American achievement; they dispelled popular notions of African racial inferiority and ahistoricality while providing concrete evidence of modern African American scholarly capabilities. Young school children growing up amidst the daily humiliations and terrors of the post-Reconstruction South would have benefited greatly from the message of race pride that were implicit in these works.

Several critical studies have delved further into the links between the Western canon's anti-African narrative of world history and the enslavement of Africans; [29] however, the specter of Hegel has been raised once again for his

---

[28] Bruce, Op. Cit., 688

[29] See Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization, vol. 1: The Fabrication of Ancient Greece, 1785-1985* (London: Free Association Books, 1987); Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Lewis Gordon, *Existentia Africana: Understanding Black Existential Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2000); Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963); and Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Random House, 1993).

enduring philosophical legacy has established the theoretical, canonical, and theoretical basis for Being Apart on the ideological and material levels. Ideologically, it is Hegelian discourse that is most noted for its derision of African humanity and civilization; and canonically Hegel's impact on Western discourse has dictated the manner in which anti-African racism has become hegemonic, thereby manifesting itself in the material spheres of Western society: the dominant culture, the body politic, and the quotidian.

The influence of Enlightenment and Hegelian discourses is present in the codification of white supremacy in nineteenth-century America, and particularly during Reconstruction. Ideological racism became manifest in every facet of society, thereby becoming a manifestation of hegemony:

> Changes in laws and practices were buttressed by an intellectual and popular racism that vigorously asserted the inferiority of black people to whites. This racism pervaded everything from the major American magazines to academic history and the social sciences. As the historian Rayford Logan said, this era may quite justifiably be labeled the 'nadir' of post-emancipation black American history. (Bruce 684)

Based on the entrenchment of anti-African racism in late nineteenth-century Western discourse, it is logical that just as the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and the chattel slavery approached their nadir, European imperial fervor reached its peak at the 1884 Berlin Conference, the site for the "Scramble for Africa." European nations, armed with the tenets of social Darwinism, sought to further expand their colonial dominions as they perceived imperial expansion their racial birthright. Western philosophy and culture deemed them the "master" races upon whose shoulders rested the obligation of creating world order from chaos by

exploiting Africans, among other subject races. Consequently, European imperialists ruled, governed, and defined Africans, and others, in terms of their subordinate position to Western colonial powers:

> Such assertions about European superiority, as strained as they were, also constituted arguments for white supremacy. The ideology of empire thus incorporated the so-called feeble races into elaborate systems of hard labor: the institution of slavery in the United States and colonial workforces elsewhere around the world. (Miller 331)

Ironically, by positioning Africans, and other subject races, at the bottom of the racial hierarchy, social Darwinists who followed Hume, Jefferson, and Hegel's theoretical lead, created an existential paradox premised upon the very "problem" of African non-Being. The paradox lies in the fact that just as these proponents of ideological racism were busily proclaiming Africana peoples incapable of thought, Africana scholars were at work, consistently expanding a counter canon that disproved the Western thinkers' specious claims.

Not only did Hume, Jefferson, and Hegel force the very intellectual response of which they believed Africana peoples incapable, but they also inspired a four-centuries long legacy of literary resistance that compelled Africana thinkers to ponder questions of Being and Freedom, questions that the infamous three never thought Africana peoples remotely capable of understanding, never-mind expostulating. Thus Lewis Gordon rightfully notes that Africana scholars' inheritance of Western canonical discourse is, itself, existentially situated since:

> Africana philosophers already have a reason to raise existential questions of liberation and questions of identity…by virtue of the historical fact of racial oppression manifested most vividly in the European… slave trades and the European colonization of the

> African continent…What those events brought about was not only a period of intense suffering for black peoples, but also the hegemonic symbolic order of Western civilization itself, a symbolic order whose 'place' for the black…has been fundamentally negative as far back as the Middle Ages and antiquity. (3)

Gordon's "hegemonic symbolic order of Western civilization" is exceedingly apparent in the afore-mentioned Enlightenment discourses of Hume, Jefferson, and Hegel. Their works embody a loaded existential proposition because these Western philosophers were directly responsible for categorizing Africans as sub-humans lacking the very self-consciousness that Africana thinkers of their day were committed to exploring. As a result of being labeled unconscious and unaware of Being, African diasporic thinkers have been compelled to address the very theories and theorists who deemed them incapable of thought. The irony is thick, for self-conscious awareness of Being and Freedom, paradoxically, become primary points of exploration in Frederick Douglass' nineteenth-century slave narrative. [30]

Douglass's explorations of Being and Freedom may be analyzed in his infamous battle with slave-breaker Edward Covey in what is widely considered the preeminent slave narrative trilogy – *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick*

[30] Several years before Douglass wrote his first autobiography in 1835, William Apess, a Pequot Indian wrote his autobiography *A Son of the Forest*, which was published in 1829. Pequot's autobiography offers many thematic parallels to Douglass's autobiographies, particularly in Apess's condemnation of white supremacy and Native American genocide, and in Apess's existential questioning of nineteenth-century scientific racist doctrines espousing Native American inferiority and barbarity. See William Apess, *On Our Ground: The Complete Writings of William Apess, A Pequot*. Ed. Barry O'Connell (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992).

Douglass; My Bondage, My Freedom; and *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*.[31]

Douglass opens the *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* by challenging prevailing Western notions on the predetermination of Africans to be slaves: "Why am I a slave? Why are some people slaves and others masters?" (67). With this question the then young Douglass asserts his agency by questioning contemporary theories of African inferiority; he actively challenges the aforementioned equation of African and slave, thereby beginning his individual quest for liberation on all levels – psychological, physical, and existential. This quest for Freedom is placed in high relief by Douglass' infamous battle with slave-breaker Edward Covey; indeed, it is one of, if not the most, memorable passage in all three of Douglass' autobiographies.

Douglass' struggle with Covey, according to Paul Gilroy, is a pointed revision of G.W.F. Hegel's master-slave dialectic:

> In a rich account of the bitter trial of strength with Edward Covey…Douglass can be read as if he is systematically reworking the encounter between master and slave in a striking manner which inverts Hegel's own allegorical scheme. It is the slave rather than the master who emerges from Douglass' account possessed of 'consciousness that exists for itself'…Douglass' transformation of Hegel's metanarrative of power into a metanarrative of emancipation is all the more striking…(60)

Douglass' battle with Covey inverts the traditional Hegelian model into a metanarrative of emancipation by presenting a parable that depicts the self-

[31] For a detailed discussion of Douglass' autobiographies see *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature* Eds. Gates and McKay (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997); Lewis Gordon, *Existentia Africana* (New York: Routledge, 2000); and Angela Y. Davis, "An Unfinished Lecture on Liberation," *Philosophy Born of Struggle: Anthology of Afro-American Philosophy from 1917*. Ed. Leonard Harris (Dubuque: Kendall Hunt Publishing Company, 1983).

actualization of Freedom. Douglass – the slave – no longer sees himself through the master, as Hegel would have it; instead, Douglass apprehends the gravity of agency through his willful act of defiance.

Though Gilroy offers a rich reading of Douglass' work and life, I do not completely agree with his assessment that Douglass' writings: "…answer metaphysical questions 'Who am I?' and 'When am I most myself?'" (70). I would argue that Douglass' are existential questions on the nature of Being, particularly on the nature of his existence as a slave, trained to deny his individual ontology and succumb to the inter-subjectivity of the master-slave relationship. Douglass' actualization of Freedom is apparent in the highly emphatic narration of this struggle in *My Bondage, My Freedom*:

> Well, my dear reader, this battle with Covey…was the turning point in my 'life as a slave.' It rekindled in my breast the smouldering embers of liberty…and revived a sense of my own manhood. I was a changed being after that fight. I was *nothing* before; I WAS A MAN NOW…It recalled to my life my crushed self-respect and my self-confidence, and inspired me with a renewed determination to be A FREEMAN. (186)

It is no accident that Douglass describes this fight as the "turning point" in his life as a slave, for after defying Covey he has reclaimed his personhood, indeed, his inalienable right to exist as an autonomous human being. No longer another man's chattel, but a free man and historical agent who alone defines his existence. In his struggle with Covey, Douglass reclaims his sense of Being; for as he states in his own words: "I was nothing before." As Cynthia Willet remarks in "The Master-Slave Dialectic: Hegel v. Douglass," Douglass developed a necessary: "…education for freedom…what Douglass identified as the 'force' of

'manhood' and what we might understand more broadly to include the existential dimensions of the self" (168).

Douglass' struggle offers an existential triumph: in his victory over Covey he regains his Being, thereby reclaiming his existence as a human being, no longer living what Orlando Patterson has termed the "social death" of a slave.[32] He also declares himself a central historical agent in the battle for abolition, the cause that Douglass dedicated his life to fighting. It seems that Douglass was so compelled to emphasize the philosophical implications of his resistance to enslavement that he recounts the incident in all three of his autobiographies. The graphic details of Douglass' battle are laid bare in *My Bondage*, *My Freedom*, and his battle for Freedom illuminates the existential war Douglass wages to reclaim his Being:

> After resisting him, I felt as I had never before. It was a resurrection from the dark and pestiferous tomb of slavery, to the heaven of comparative freedom…I had reached the point, at which I was *not afraid to die*. This spirit made me a freeman *in fact*, while I remained a slave *in fo*rm. (186-187)

Douglass' "resurrection from the tomb" of slavery is contingent upon his reclaiming his self-identification as a man, not a slave. No longer Covey's slave, he is a free man; free from his social identification as another man's property. Douglass' use of italics and capitals for emphasis makes the import of his rebirth quite clear. Specifically, the greater significance of his physical battle with Covey lies in Douglass' ontological and phenomenological emancipation from the institution of slavery itself. He frees his Being by ending the lived experience as a slave.

---

[32] Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982)

Angela Davis holds that Douglass and all slaves who struggle to attain their Freedom recognize Freedom not as an abstract concept, but as an active process:

> The slave could thus become conscious of the fact that freedom is not a static quality, a given, but rather is the goal of an active process, something to be fought for, something to be gained in and through the process of struggle. (132)

Like Davis, I agree that Freedom represents an active struggle; however, I would argue that the struggle for Freedom is a process of actualization rather than a process of creation. In this regard, I take my theoretical cue from Jean-Paul Sartre, who holds that: "…there is no determinism, man is free, man is freedom" (22). Freedom exists with or without its physical, or concrete, manifestation. Freedom can neither be granted, nor taken away for it exists as pure potentiality; it exists whether or not one is free in the physical or psychological sense because Freedom can also be made actual. Therefore, Douglass' struggle for liberation is an existential struggle to actualize his Freedom. As a slave, Douglass knows full well that to resist is to court death, yet he does so to actualize his quest for Freedom, regardless of the outcome.

Prior to detailing his struggle with Covey as a turning point in his life as a slave in his *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, Douglass takes great pains to dispel another fiction of American history – the myth of the happy slave. Douglass counters the misconception held by northerners that the prevalence of song among slaves is,"…evidence of their contentment and happiness" (263). He tells readers that, "It is impossible to conceive of a greater mistake. Slaves sing most when they are most unhappy. The songs of the slave represent the sorrows

of his heart; and he is relieved by them, only as his aching heart is relieved by tears" (263). Douglass tells his readers that slave songs still haunt his memories as an adult; that the songs voiced the hell that was slavery and gave him his earliest understanding of chattel slavery's inhumanity:

> I have sometimes thought that the mere hearing of those songs would do more to impress some minds with the horrible character of slavery, than the reading of whole volumes of philosophy on the subject could do…To those songs I trace my first glimmering conception of the dehumanizing character of slavery. I can never get rid of that conception. Those songs still follow me, to deepen my hatred of slavery…(263)

That Douglass identifies the slave song, African American orature, as a potentially greater abolitionist tool than philosophy itself is quite telling. With this stance Douglass privileges the oral tradition's expressive and enduring nature. Indeed, George Yancy notes that Douglass' analysis of slave songs indicates an awareness of African American orature's ability to change the consciousness of the enslaved. Yancy argues that Douglass not only shatters the myth of the "happy darkie," but that the slave song:

> …was a powerful semiotic maker of our enduring ability to create visions of counterreality, solidarity, memory, and agency, was an illocutionary form of expression, communicating discontentment and protestation, which had a significant percolutionary impact on the psychology of the enslaved. (287)

Yancy's insistence that the oral tradition inspired remembrance, unity, and action among enslaved Africans speaks to orature's cultural and psychological impact; that although these songs from Douglass' memory held unspeakable pain, they also articulated a collective vision for the "counterreality" of Being and

Freedom, whose apprehension among the enslaved the chattel slave system sought to obliterate.

In *Existentia Africana* Lewis Gordon classifies Douglass as a philosopher of existence. Gordon asserts that philosophies of existence are intrinsic to the African diasporic experience of slavery and racism, thereby warranting a field of inquiry separate from European existentialism. I do not believe this to be entirely correct. It is my contention that Gordon's insistence upon this intra-disciplinary discretion should be challenged. He avers that existentialism should be considered a discrete category of literature separate from existential philosophy, since:

> There is… a distinction that should be borne in mind. We can regard *existentialism* – the popularly named ideology – as a fundamentally European historical phenomenon. On the other hand, we can regard *philosophy of existence* (the specialized term that will also sometimes be referred to in this volume as *existential philosophy*) as philosophical questions premised upon concerns of freedom, anguish, responsibility, embodied agency, sociality, and liberation…(Gordon 3)

While Gordon's specifications between existentialism and existential philosophy appear instructive, they actually create confusion where none need exist for in *Existentialism and Human Emotions*, Jean-Paul Sartre defines Existentialism in terms very similar to Gordon's:

> Thus, existentialism's first move is to make everyman aware of what he is and to make the full responsibility of his existence rest on him…The doctrine I am presenting is the very opposite of quietism, since it declares, 'There is no reality except in action'…Man is nothing else than his plan; he exists only to the extent that he fulfills himself; he is therefore nothing else than the ensemble of his acts, nothing else than his life. (16, 32)

Jean-Paul Sartre specifies existentialism as a philosophy of responsibility, action, and active engagement; Lewis Gordon states that existential philosophy is comprised of the issues of freedom, responsibility, and embodied agency – all of which are stated in Sartre's own definition. Since Sartre, and Gordon inadvertently, equates existentialism and existential philosophy, it is clear that each may be read into the other; that both existentialism and existential philosophy, for all intents and purposes, originate from the same conceptual and philosophical root.

Gordon's classification of Africana existentialism should also be challenged because the very canonical texts of Western hegemonic discourse established Africa as apart from historical development and its people as non-Beings. This categorical banishment of Africana peoples – and their historical, cultural, literary, and philosophical productions – has been precisely what led African diasporic writers to theorize on existential matters that not only pre-date modern existentialism but also create a counter-hegemonic discourse. These counter-hegemonic works have continually positioned Africana people as central to the historical and theoretical spheres from which they were exiled. Thus, they consistently challenge the very canon that, to this day, still insists on their inferiority and marginality. Most importantly, they staunchly declare "I Am" to a Western world that principally answers, "You Are Not."

I believe that effectively contesting the Eurocentricity of the Western canon in general and the existentialist canon in particular may effectively highlight Western discourse's paradoxical creation of the existential Africana

subject. For the canon's perpetuity depends upon the continual elision of seminal Africana works that actively challenge its veracity and viability. Doing so will also effectively reveal the depth and breadth of Africana history, literature, and philosophy. Thus, I am arguing for the inclusion of African diasporic texts within the existentialist canon, as these texts subvert the anti-African and Eurocentric ideology at the heart of Western letters.

Although sixteenth-century English national identity was informed by racial dualism that justified African enslavement and rationalized European hegemony, it was Enlightenment discourse's reductive view of African ahistoricality and non-Being that rooted ideological racism within the Western canon. This philosophical development served to codify institutionalized racism, forever binding it to the system of chattel slavery in the West. These interrelated historical, philosophical, and social developments catalyzed an existential awareness of Being and Freedom among nineteenth century Africana scholar-activists. It is this same material and ontological awareness among twentieth-century Africana scholars that recasts the enslaved African as the progenitor of Western modernity, capitalism, and Empire.

The nineteenth-century freedom movements in Africa, the West Indies and in the United States made the present day twentieth-century movement possible. In fact, the whole of the nineteenth century for us can justifiably be called the 'century of resistance.'

John Henrik Clarke

We can now say that the Western intellectual tradition operates within an exclusionary paradigm…For the African human, the exclusion was complete – it was both ontological and epistemic erasure. Both these forms of erasure have profoundly shaped contemporary discussions about black thought – the meaning and construction of intellectual traditions.

Anthony Bogues

The preponderance of Black…philosophical inquiry, analysis, and philosophically oriented oral, literary, and political work has been directed primarily towards change in the human condition and toward social and legal change in pursuit of a clarification and perfection of the democratic ideal of justice. That pursuit always has combined ontological analysis.

Broadus N. Butler

Chapter Two: The African Diaspora

While nineteenth-century Africana scholars like David Walker and Frederick Douglass sought to connect Negro American history to a larger historical discourse that situated ancient Africa as the source of classical Western civilization, two twentieth-century Africana philosophers[33] sought to reconceptualize enslaved Africans in the Americas as workers, an African diasporic proletariat central to the creation of Western modernity and global capitalism. W.E.B. Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (1935) and C.L.R. James's *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the*

[33] Here, I invoke the term philosopher in the traditional sense, as both Du Bois and James dedicated several volumes of scholarly work towards the articulation of their Pan-Africanist, anti-imperialist visions. See W.E.B. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Towards an Autobiography of a Race Concept* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1940*); The World and Africa: An Inquiry into the Part Which Africa has Played in World History* (New York: International Publishers, 1946); *Against Racism: Unpublished Essays, Papers, Addresses, 1887-1961* Ed. Herbert Aptheker (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1985). See C.L.R. James, "The Case for West Indian Self-Government" 1933. *The C.L.R. James Reader*. Ed. Anna Grimshaw. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992); *A History of Pan-African Revolt*. (Washington, D.C.: Drum and Spear Press, 1969); *Beyond a Boundary* (London: Stanley Paul & Co., 1963).

San Domingo Revolution (1938) mark a shift within the discipline of history, for their African diasporic and anti-capitalist themes were put forth at a time when Western history was dominated by more parochial studies on the nation-state, for although "…transnational perspectives appeared in the …work of W.E.B. Du Bois, notably in *Black Reconstruction*, of the West Indian Trotskyite C.L.R. James, and other black activist-scholars…they were marginalized by professional academics" [34] who established the discipline's parameters around local histories. Indeed, Brent Hayes Edwards holds that *Black Reconstruction* and *The Black Jacobins*:

> …inaugurates another shift in focus from the nation-state to a transnational or Pan-African frame of reference that has been integral in recent scholarship on anti-colonialism and black internationalism…An important feature of the common ground of black radicalism is that it is consistently diasporic. (4)

While these scholar-activists must be understood as Black radical thinkers engaged during a post World War I era rife with Pan-Africanist, anti-imperialist, and global Black radical activity in the Francophone, Anglophone, and Hispanophone segments of the diaspora[35], the ideological import of *Black Reconstruction* and *The Black Jacobins* lies in their theoretical corrective to Western discourse's epistemic and ontological erasure of the African from the narrative of Western civilization, specifically her role in the birth of Western modernity and global capitalism. *Black Reconstruction* and *The Black Jacobins*,

---

[34] Ian Tyrell, Op. Cit. 1018-1019.

[35] On Pan-Africanism in the francophone African diaspora see Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003) and on Pan-Africanism in the Anglophone and Hispanophone African diaspora see Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Verso-New Left Books, 1998).

consequently, are seminal interdisciplinary texts that subvert both what Karl Marx terms the "'idealist historiography' of the Enlightenment,"[36] and Marx's own science of history, dialectical materialism.

Though Marxism's anti-capitalist critique represents a watershed development in Western discourse, its principal focus on the European proletariat reveals an ethnic chauvinism that is both highlighted and problematized by *Black Reconstruction* and *The Black Jacobins*. These texts' break with both mainstream and radical Western historiography lies in their related theses that place Western chattel slavery as the originary source of capitalist accumulation. Du Bois and James's repositioning of enslaved African labor as the material source of modernity begs a counter-hegemonic reading of Western history and theory that reveals Africana peoples as central agents in Western development, neither subordinate to principal figures of the Enlightenment nor to Marx's now vindicated European proletariat.

While Du Bois turned to Marxism after having witnessed, first-hand, the limits of liberalism in his fight for Negro American equality, and James was a self-proclaimed "trained Trotskyite" when he wrote the *Black Jacobins,* [37] both were moved by the historical, ideological, and sociopolitical climates of their day to expand Western radical theory's scope by foregrounding the monumental event of African racial slavery in the West. Unlike Marx, Du Bois and James's texts

---

[36] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) 18.
[37] On DuBois' gradual disillusionment with liberalism see Robinson's *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1983) chapter nine, and Anthony Bogues*, Black Heretics, Black Prophets: Radical Political Intellectuals* (New York: Rougtledge, 2003) chapter three. And on James' identification as a Trtotskyite, see *The C.L.R. James Reader*, Ed. Anna Grimshaw (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992) 7-12.

reveal that the capitalist accumulation of chattel slavery should not be deemed subordinate to that of seventeenth-century European mill production, for as Anthony Bogues explains *The Black Jacobins'* reinterpretation of Marxist theory:

> *The Black Jacobins*…[places] colonialism and plantation both at the rosy dawn of the accumulation process and central to nineteenth-century economic developments…In standard Marxist historical narrative, the birth of capitalist production originated during the late 1700s with the emergence of mills production and the production of textiles. Plantation slavery was subsidiary to this, and slave labor was an anomaly. (79)

Quite rightfully, Bogues highlights the way that James's *The Black Jacobins* problematizes the Marxian chronology of capitalist accumulation by proving Western chattel slavery's relationship to the unprecedented growth of the French and Western economies; however, he fails to acknowledge that the equation between slavery and capitalist accumulation was first proffered by Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction*[38], particularly as Du Bois relates American capitalist accumulation to the Industrial Revolution, and to the establishment of an enslaved African proletariat and enslaved/colonized global proletariat of color.[39]

As African diasporic subjects who matured in the wake of slavery's demise, Du Bois and James prove that Western slavery initiated the modern capitalist system; and as black radical thinkers, Du Bois and James were further compelled to challenge anti-African and white supremacist ideologies in Western discourse, as these not only perpetuated Africana inequality in the year immediately following emancipation, but their racist legacy continued to well into

---

[38] James, himself, explains the indelible impression Du Bois's radical historiography had on his own theoretical development. See *Lectures on the Black Jacobins* Ed. Anna Grimshaw (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992) 86-91.

[39] See *Black Reconstruction* 5, 15, 210-213, 581-586, and 718

the twentieth century and dictated the socio-political and cultural zeitgeist of Du Bois and James's day. In *Black Marxism*, Cedric Robinson names Du Bois and James's preoccupation with the nineteenth century, the "century of resistance," as the material and phenomenological foundation of their Black radical thought. As twentieth-century thinkers, Robinson holds that Du Bois and James's:

> …era began with the ending of slavery. They were, it might be said, the children of slaves. The phenomenology of slavery formed and informed them. And in the vortex of its ending, more particularly in the wake of the social forces that compelled new and different situatings of Blacks and others destined to serve as labor forces, these theorists discovered their shared social and intellectual location. The twentieth century was for the most part their biographical station, but merely one site in the zone of their interrogation. (177)

One site in Du Bois and James's field of inquiry was, thereby, informed by the phenomenology of slavery and its dialectical counterpoint – Africana resistance. It seems a matter of course, then, that as twentieth-century thinkers Du Bois and James would utilize the Marxian map of dialectical materialism to explore ideological and phenomenological aspects of Western slavery and imperialism to enrich their histories of American Reconstruction and the San Domingo Revolution respectively.

The role of scientific racism and social Darwinism as framing ideologies of Western hegemonic discourse and their centrality to the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, chattel slavery, and imperialism; as well as their socio-political and quotidian manifestations in twentieth-century Western culture represent the other "zone of interrogation" informing Du Bois and James's scholarship. As they were writing *Black Reconstruction* and *The Black Jacobins*, both thinkers played

pivotal roles in the early twentieth-century Pan-Africanist movement – a global movement founded on the related principles of anti-imperialism and African diasporic unity. Through Du Bois and James's scholarship and activism, the African diaspora is realized in both theory and praxis. This conflation of discursive, ideological, and socio-political aims is realized in *Black Reconstruction* and *The Black Jacobins* as both works explore the material effects of Western hegemony on the African diasporic subjects at their core, while also serving as the inaugural texts of Black Radical and Black Atlantic studies.[40]

Theorists, like Cedric Robinson, Paul Gilroy, and Anthony Bogues generally agree that Du Bois and James's main contribution as radical theorists is their reinvigoration of Marxism, which foregrounds the Africana historical experience of enslavement, exploitation, resistance, and revolution. Yet few critics have thoroughly examined the manner in which Du Bois and James explore existential questions of Being and Freedom in *Black Reconstruction* and *The Black Jacobins*.[41] Robinson's *Black Marxism* situates Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction* and James's *The Black Jacobins* as literary encapsulations of the Black radical tradition, citing the authors' principal inspiration as the four-centuries long praxis of Africana resistance from the bottom up.[42] And using Pierre Bordieu's definition of heresy to cite Du Bois and James's Black radical critique of Marxism, Anthony Bogues categorizes *Black Reconstruction* and *The*

---

[40] See Robinson, *Black Marxism*, chapters nine and ten for the significance of Du Bois and James within the context of the Black Radical Tradition. See Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993) preface and chapter six for Du Bois and James's inauguration of Black Atlantic studies. See also Bogues, Op Cit.

[41] For texts that do include brief discussions of Being and Freedom in *Black Reconstruction* and *The Black Jacobins*, see Robinson Op Cit., and Bogues, Ibid.

[42] Robinson, *Black Marxism* 184.

Black Jacobins as heretical discourses for two reasons: The works proclaim the humanity and agency of enslaved Africans in the Americas, and they simultaneously challenge established Western doxa that proclaims the authors' innate racial inferiority.[43]

Both Robinson and Bogues make extremely insightful arguments about Du Bois and James's revisions of Marxist historiography; nevertheless, neither critic fully explores the manner in which Du Bois and James use the ostensibly Marxist structures of *Black Reconstruction* and *The Black Jacobins* as starting points for psychological and existential analyses of Being and Freedom. For just as Broadus Butler states, the aim of Black philosophers has been to actualize the principle of justice, a process that entails ontological analysis. [44] Du Bois and James fulfilled this socio-political and philosophical task in their theorizations of African diasporic mass-action and revolution in *Black Reconstruction* and *The Black Jacobins*.

To fully appreciate the import of Du Bois and James's explorations of Being and Freedom, it is necessary to analyze the deft manner in which these philosophers enumerate the details of enslaved Africans' highly exploitative material conditions – conditions that Du Bois and James consistently define as the necessary by-products of Western ruling class hegemony – to then dovetail into interrogations of existential issues that parochial Marxist analyses would necessarily obviate. This distinct combination of Black radicalism, Marxist

[43] Bogues, Op. Cit. 18.
[44] Broadus N. Butler, "Frederick Douglass: The Black Philosopher in the United States: A Commentary" in *Philosophy Born of Struggle*, ed. Leonard Harris (Dubuque: Kenall/Hunt Publishing, 1983) 1-11.

historiography, and existential probing makes Du Bois and James's works groundbreaking interdisciplinary texts that perform interrelated discursive functions. Firstly, *Black Reconstruction* and *The Black Jacobins* refute canonical claims of African ahistoricality and circumscribed African historicality in traditional and radical Western historiography. Secondly, these texts stand as quintessential literary encapsulations of what Robinson has termed the Black radical tradition, a tradition that seeks to restore "collective ontological totality"[45] to Africana peoples. Thirdly, *Black Reconstruction* and *The Black Jacobins'* examinations of Being and Freedom further support my theory of Being Apart, as both texts' ontological themes prefigure later existential exegeses in post World War II European thought.

We must first consider the enormity of Du Bois's theoretical challenge in *Black Reconstruction* before examining the existential aspects of *Black Reconstruction* and *The Black Jacobins*, for *Black Reconstruction's* earlier publication makes it the preeminent twentieth-century Black radical/Black Atlantic text. Moreover James, himself, in 1971, remarked on the tremendous impact Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction* had on his own work.[46] Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction* elucidates three facets of Being Apart that subvert both traditional and radical Western theory.

First, *Black Reconstruction* presents a history of Reconstruction that highlights Marxism's Eurocentricity by delineating chattel slavery's links to

---

[45] Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000) 168-171.

[46] C.L.R. James, "Lectures on the Black Jacobins" in Small Axe. Vol. 8 (September 2000): 84-105. James's remarks on Du Bois's prescient vision will be discussed at greater length in the second part of this chapter.

Western industrialization and imperialism; in so doing Du Bois outlines a pre-Gramscian description of ruling class hegemony that existed in the nineteenth-century West. Du Bois skillfully de-centers the European proletariat as the originary source of capitalist accumulation by proving how the enormous profits gleaned from enslaved African labor, literally, feed the North and the West's burgeoning steel, railway, and manufacturing economies. While doing so, he also provides a detailed analysis of how the contemporary American socio-political and cultural landscape was defined by social Darwinist thinking and the codification of racism.

Second, *Black Reconstruction* makes a bold indictment against the American historical profession as the institutional agent of said hegemony. Du Bois's final chapter, "The Propaganda of History," lambastes Western historians for perpetuating the fallacy of African American culpability in the failure of Reconstruction and, in so doing, he highlights the American historians' failure to adhere to their own principles of scientific objectivity.

And third, *Black Reconstruction* quite convincingly forces the reader to consider the Western chattel slavery and Emancipation as two epochal historical moments in the human drama that is the making of Western civilization. Indeed, Du Bois opens his with the declaration that: "Easily the most dramatic episode in American history was the sudden move to free four million black slaves in an effort to stop a great civil war, to end forty years of bitter controversy, and to appease the moral sense of civilization" (3).

In the following pages, I will demonstrate how Du Bois rewrites Western and Africana history in manner that foregrounds his theoretical reinvention and revolution.

Du Boisian Revelation

At the start Du Bois announces his theoretical intent in *Black Reconstruction's* title. In revising the more commonly used phrase, American Reconstruction, Du Bois foregrounds African American humanity and agency during one of the most contentious and blatantly anti-African periods in Western history. Who, before Du Bois, had ever referred to American Reconstruction as a, specifically, *Black* historical and socio-political event? The preface, entitled, "To the Reader," embodies Du Bois' position on contemporary theories of African inferiority, while providing a revealing self-reflexive commentary on his Western reading public:

> It would only be fair to the reader to say frankly in advance that the attitude of any person towards this story will be distinctly influenced by his theories of the Negro race…*In fine, I am going to tell this story as though Negroes were ordinary human beings, realizing that this attitude will from the first seriously curtail my audience.* (Emphasis added)

In this editorialization on Negro Americans' being apart from "ordinary human beings," Du Bois challenges both the late nineteenth-century scientific racism of the Reconstruction era and contemporary twentieth-century social Darwinist theories of African sub-humanity by boldly declaring African humanity and implying its necessary by-product – agency.

In *Black Reconstruction's* first chapter, "The Black Worker," Du Bois begins his radical historiography by inserting the enslaved and emancipated African into the lexicon and timeline of dialectical materialism. He names the enslaved African the black worker and with this new appellation, he commits the unprecedented act of re-envisioning Western history and radical theory by defining slavery as a system of labor that irrevocably shaped the modern world. As Robinson states in *Black Marxism*:

> …slavery was the specific historical institution through which the Black *worker* had been introduced into the world system. However it was not as slaves that one could come to an understanding of the significance that these Black men, women and children had for American development. It was as *labour*. (199)

This renaming of enslaved Africans as Black workers forces a reconceptualization of the significance of Black labor and its pivotal role in capitalist accumulation for nineteenth-century America and, as Du Bois argues, for the entire Western world. In the pages that follow, Du Bois further compels the reader to apprehend the enormous productivity and centrality of enslaved African labor to three interconnected developments in Western history – modern industrialization, global capitalism, and Western imperialism:

> The giant forces of water and of steam were harnessed to do the world's work, and the black workers of America bent at the bottom of a growing pyramid of commerce and industry; and not only could they not be spared, if this new economic organization was to expand, but rather they became the cause of new political demands and alignments, of new dreams of power and visions of empire…Black labor became the foundation stone not only of the Southern social structure, but of Northern manufacture and commerce, of the English factory system, of European commerce,

> of buying and selling on a world-wide scale; new cities were built on the results of black labor… (5)

Du Bois's vivid depiction of exploited Black labor fueling the global capitalist machine makes immediately clear the necessity of enslaved labor for Western development's imperative of capital accumulation and what he later terms "industrial empire." By emphasizing the socio-economic causality between capitalist empire building and industrialization, Du Bois aptly connects the South's consolidation of agricultural and political power to its calculated disenfranchisement of Negro Americans. This combination of agricultural and industrial ruling class dominance gave birth to what he terms America's capitalist dictatorship – an economic totalitarianism that, by disenfranchising Negro Americans, had effectively set the stage for Western imperialism's global degradation of all colored laborers:

> The black voter struggled and appealed, but it was in vain. And the United States, reinforced by the increased political power of the South based on disfranchisement of black voters, took its place to reinforce the capitalistic dictatorship of the United States, which became the most powerful in the world, and which backed the new industrial imperialism and degraded colored labor the world over. (630)

Du Bois continues to link the wealth of chattel slavery and its late nineteenth-century demise to the rise of European imperialism and its attendant exploited labor forces in Africa and Asia. He contextualizes this shift to African and Asian colonial labor by stressing social Darwinism as the popular ideological rationale for the West's exploitation of colonial labor forces:

> Within the very echo of that philanthropy which had abolished the slave trade, was beginning a new industrial slavery of black, brown, and yellow workers in Africa and Asia. Arising from this…came the change in attitude towards these darker peoples…they were inferiors. These inferiors were to be governed for their own good. (632)

Here, Du Bois successfully establishes a new chronology of Western modernity, a chronology whose origin lies in chattel slavery and its ideological rationale – social Darwinism. Modernity, according to Du Bois, must be understood not solely as the transition from agrarian feudalism to industrial production as Marx avers[47]; instead modernity must be apprehended as the socio-political and economic phenomena of nineteenth-century chattel slavery and colonialism that gave rise to an exploited global labor force of color in Africa and Asia as well as America, an exploitation made acceptable by the ideological rationale of social Darwinism.

The consequent links are capitalist dominance, Western imperial expansion, and colonial exploitation. Thus Du Bois's theoretical innovation and his insertion of enslaved African labor within a few of dialectical materialism's primary terms of engagement – labor, industrialization, capitalism, and modernization – is a global, historical critique of Western slavery. No longer may the peculiar institution be viewed as an unfortunate aberration; instead it must be understood as a socio-economic institution integral to the development of Western industry, capitalism, and imperialism; a socio-economic institution buttressed by the hegemonic legitimization of anti-African racism and social Darwinism.

---

[47] Oliver Crummel Cox, *Capitalism as a System* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1964) 212-222.

Du Bois introduces chattel slavery's import to global capitalist development early in the text; as he does this he also points to the slave system's impact on Negro American cultural production. Du Bois charges that this most oppressive and exploitative of labor systems instilled within blacks a distinct cosmological and philosophical ethos that led to the only true form of American art – the African American oral tradition. He insists that:

> *…of all human development, ancient and modern, not the least singular and significant is the philosophy of life and action which slavery bred in the souls of black folk*…The subtle folk-lore of Africa, with whimsy and parable, veiled wish and wisdom; and above all fell the anointing chrism of slave music, the only gift of pure art in America…Nothing else of art or religion did the slave South give to the world, except Negro song and story. (14) (emphasis added)

Du Bois' assessment of African American orature is extremely revealing on two counts. He locates the African American oral tradition within a historical continuum of cultural production; it is one, he insists, that represents a watershed moment in Western history that leads to a collective Negro American world-view and apprehension of agency. Furthermore, Du Bois identifies slave music as the only true form of American art; interestingly Du Bois then continues his discussion on the African American orature's historical significance by citing famed orator, Frederick Douglass' famous 1852 speech, "What is the Fourth of July to Me?" as the pinnacle of Negro American oral expression. That Du Bois characterizes African American orature for engendering a "philosophy of life and action" among enslaved Africans is extremely significant, for this ethos and agency is precisely what compelled slave populations to resist and rebel against

the institution of slavery during the Civil War, specifically during what Du Bois terms "the general strike."

Du Bois's effort to situate chattel slavery and Reconstruction within a global context continues in chapter four, "The General Strike." By renaming the cessation of slave labor during the Civil War a general strike, Du Bois inflects Marxism with Black radical critique. He holds that these nineteenth-century Black workers' general strike pre-dates the Russian proletariat's general strike: "…because among Negroes, and particularly in the South, there was being put into force one of the most extraordinary experiments of Marxism that the world, before the Russian revolution, had seen" (358). Further stressing Negro American agency, Du Bois cites the emancipated slaves' determination to end the condition of their subjugation by eradicating the plantation system despite the abuse they encountered from Northern regiments:

> They were mistreated by the soldiers; ridiculed; driven away, and yet they came. They increased with every campaign, and as a final gesture, they marched with Sherman from Atlanta to the sea…This was not merely the desire to stop work. It was a strike on a wide basis against the conditions of work. It was a general strike that involved directly in the end perhaps a half million people. They wanted to stop the economy of the plantation system, and to do that they left the plantations. (67)

Prior to *Black Reconstruction*, the halting of slave labor had not been depicted as a mass-action, a systematic effort to shut down the Southern plantation economy because American slaves were neither perceived as workers nor as historical agents. Through Du Bois's insightful periodization, however, the reader is once again, given to understand this event's larger historical import for

Western history in general and radical history in particular: The Black worker is one member of a larger Black proletariat that resisted capitalist oppression by acting to shut down the Southern plantation system. In "Lectures on *The Black Jacobins*," C.L.R. James remarks on Du Bois's prescient vision:

> When did the idea of the general strike come into industry?...It came in 1905 in Russia…Du Bois knew that…but he said there was a general strike that took place in 1862 in the United States by the slaves! That's what his chapter on the general strike means. He knew that in 1905 that was the historical development and it began there, but he says there was one before that. There was one by the slaves in the plantations. And *that* is the writing of history…(93)

That James, himself, emphasizes Du Bois's historic and historical feat in *Black Reconstruction* indicates his awareness that Du Bois was engaged in the rewriting of Western history, so that Africana peoples' experience would be viewed as that which changed the course of history itself.

In chapter fourteen, appropriately entitled, "The Counter-Revolution of Property," Du Bois introduces the necessary element of labor exploitation – ruling class dominance – and explains how nineteenth-century American capitalists – Northern industrialists and Southern slaveholders – were able to maintain the unconscious submission of the laboring classes:

> …the guidance and dictatorship of capital for the object of private profit were not to be questioned or overthrown; *but it must maintain its ascendancy by controlling the public opinion of the laboring class. This was accomplished…by the power to give and withhold employment…the power to influence public opinion through the prestige of wealth, news, and literature, and the power to dominate legislatures, courts, and offices of administration.* (605) (Emphasis added)

Du Bois's description of an overarching, insidious ruling class dominance that infiltrates all facets of society, culture, and politics bespeaks a pre-Gramscian model of hegemony. In *Ideology*, Terry Eagleton delineates Gramscian hegemony through a model of socio-cultural, political, and institutional diffusion that echoes Du Bois's description of ruling class dominance. Like Du Bois, Eagleton insists that the very success of hegemony lies in its imperceptibility; in its inconspicuous merging with the fabric of daily life:

> The concept of hegemony thus belongs with the question: How is the working class to take power in a social formation where the dominant power is subtly, pervasively diffused throughout habitual daily practices, intimately interwoven with 'culture' itself, inscribed in the very texture of our experiences from nursery school to funeral parlor? How do we combat a power which has become the 'common sense' of whole social order, rather than one which is widely perceived as alien and oppressive? (114)

As Du Bois and Eagleton show, the hegemonic becomes the "common sense" of society. This insidious ruling class logic is precisely what Du Bois was challenging in *Black Reconstruction* although, unlike his European radical counterparts, Du Bois fought a ruling class order that was both anti-African and white supremacist. Interestingly, neither Robinson nor Bogues remarks on Du Bois's discussion of American capitalist oligarchy in terms that prefigure Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci's definition of hegemony.

Black Reconstruction also highlights the manner in which the hegemonic aspects of anti-African racism and white supremacy were manipulated by the Southern planter class to ensure the perpetuity of slavery, thereby maintaining the slaveholders' socio-economic and political power, and solidifying enslaved Africans as Negroes, separate and utterly apart from humanity. Du Bois contends

that nineteenth-century thinkers spread wantonly theories of African inferiority to effectively maintain chattel slavery's essentially racist character:

> …in order to maintain its income without sacrifice or exertion, the South fell back on a doctrine of racial differences which it asserted made higher intelligence and increased efficiency impossible for Negro labor…His subservient religious leaders reverted to the 'Curse of Canaan;' his pseudo-scientists gathered and supplemented all available doctrines of race inferiority; his scattered schools and pedantic periodicals repeated these legends, until for the average planter born after 1840 it was impossible not to believe that all valid laws in psychology, economics and politics stopped with the Negro race. (38-39)

This perceived cessation of reason in the face of Negro American Being epitomizes the unholy alliance between the Southern planter class and an already extant anti-African popular discourse; it also reflects the popular discourse at the time of *Black Reconstruction's* publication. Social Darwinist theories of African racial inferiority and ahistoricality were firmly in place in the 1930's; thus *Black Reconstruction's* use of Black radical and Marxist theories to underscore African agency and centrality to Western history really was an act of theoretical heresy as Anthony Bogues asserts. It is no wonder, then, that, the *American Historical Review* willfully ignored *Black Reconstruction* when it was first published.[48] Du Bois's marginalization by the American historical profession should come as no surprise; it simply reveals the degree to which his work threatened the putative veracity of the Western historical canon.

According to Raymond Williams' *Marxism and Literature*, Du Bois's particular brand of counter-hegemonic discourse – his expansion of Marxist

[48] Ian Tyrell, "Making Nations/Making States: American Historians in the Context of Empire" in *The Journal of American History. The Nation and Beyond: Transnational Perspectives on United States History*. 86.3 (Dec. 1999): 1015-1044.

terminology and theory, and his labeling chattel slavery the cornerstone of capitalism – may be viewed as "historically and socially constituting language" that is indicative of: "…*the changing practical consciousness of human beings*, in which both the evolutionary and the historical processes can be given full weight…" (43). The historical processes to which Du Bois gives "full weight" are Western slavery and enslaved African toil as Black/American labor; the changing consciousness is the reader's newfound awareness of Western slavery's global impact. Through Du Bois's insights, the reader may fully appreciate these historical developments as global socio-economic and political events that challenge Western theory's focus on the European proletariat as the progenitor of modernity.

Du Bois's radical historiography, indeed, his embrace of what Robinson has termed the Black radical tradition, represents a decisive shift in Du Bois's application of Marxist theory. As *Black Reconstruction* shows, Du Bois recognized Marxism's import for identifying class struggle and as the key to ending ruling class domination; yet *Black Reconstruction* also reveals Marxism's limitations in accommodating a ruling class that is both white supremacist *and* anti-African. Consequently, it should come as no surprise that Du Bois seemingly uses *Black Reconstruction* to critique Marxist theory; indeed Du Bois believed that Marxism had to be adapted in order to fully address the issues of Negro oppression: "Marxian philosophy is a true diagnosis of the situation in Europe in the middle of the 19th century…But it must be modified in the United

States of America and especially so far as the Negro group is concerned" (Du Bois qtd. in Bogues 77).

As *Black Reconstruction* shows and as Du Bois himself reiterated, even Marxism – a radical philosophy created to end ruling class oppression – is incapable of addressing the enslavement and oppression of a proletariat that is not European but African. This fundamental shortcoming further substantiates the alienation at the core of Being Apart, for if a radical philosophy like Marxism cannot acknowledge chattel slavery as the foundation of Western development, how can its tenets even attempt to address the subjugation and liberation of Africana peoples? Simply said, it cannot and this was one of Du Bois's implicit theses in *Black Reconstruction*: the hegemony of ideological racism in Western discourse, be it traditional or radical, precludes Western theory from acknowledging the Negro's crucial role in creating modernity. Western theory both traditional and radical overlooks the presence, significance, and immeasurable contribution of Black workers to the cause of proletariat resistance[49]; therefore, Du Bois's project of renaming the slave the black worker is actually a project of reconceptualizing history. Cedric Robinson reasons that:

> In the changing of the names of things, [Du Bois] sought to provide the basis for a new conceptualization of their relationship…*The institution of American slave labor could not be effectively conceptualized as a thing in and of itself. Rather, it was a particular historical development for world capitalism which expropriated the labour of African workers as primitive accumulation. American slavery was a subsystem of world capitalism.* (199-200) (Emphasis added)

[49] While *Black Reconstruction* seemingly presents an overall critique of Marxism's limitations with respect to Western slavery as a racial institution, Du Bois does cite several correspondences of Marx and Marxist organizations to stress Marx's firm anti-slavery stance. See *Black Reconstruction* 22-24, 89-91, 218, 354, 357, 360.

Robinson deftly highlights Du Bois' terminological revision. Du Bois's renaming of slaves as labor radically alters the reader's understanding of the undeniable, yet commonly overlooked link between Western slavery and modern capitalism. Through *Black Reconstruction*'s catholic analysis, chattel slavery may no longer be viewed as an archaic, transient American institution; rather it may be understood as a four hundred year old Western socio-economic institution that created the wealth and prosperity of the entire Western world.

Robinson avers that Du Bois's historiographical revision in *Black Reconstruction* places Du Bois, for all intents and purposes, in the same category of socio-political philosopher as Karl Marx. For as Marx's science of history subverts earlier Enlightenment discourses of objectivist or rational historiography by proposing the dialectic of ruling class oppression and proletariat resistance, Du Bois's Black radicalism complicates this equation further by introducing the variables of *white-supremacist* ruling class oppression and *Black* proletariat resistance.

Although Robinson rightly argues *Black Reconstruction* surpasses prosaic history and enters the realm of political theory, I would argue more specifically that *Black Reconstruction* quite forcefully asserts that the discipline of history is not and should not be perceived as discrete from Western hegemonic discourse. In *Black Reconstruction's* final chapter, entitled, "The Propaganda of History," Du Bois comments at length on the extent to which the American historical profession has been instrumental in the institutionalization of anti-African racism,

as it too held fast to the tenets of Negro American inferiority, white Southern loyalty, and ruling class dominance. Du Bois emphasizes that he:

> …[writes] then in a filed devastated by passion and belief…Three-fourths of the testimony against the Negro in Reconstruction is on the unsupported evidence of men who hated and despised Negroes and regarded it as loyalty to blood, patriotism to country, and filial tribute to the fathers to lie, steal or kill in order to discredit these black folk…This chapter…which in logic should be a survey of books and sources, becomes of sheer necessity an arraignment of American historians and an indictment of their ideals…*It simply shows that with sufficient general agreement and determination among the dominant classes, the truth of history may be utterly distorted and contradicted and changed to any convenient fairy tale that the masters of men wish*. (725-726) (Emphasis added)

Du Bois's charge that history was, and may continue to be, manipulated and dictated by biased Western historians committed to perpetuating myths of Black culpability for the "failure" of Reconstruction. And his indictment that the ruling classes document history itself offers a searing critique of Western discourse and the historical profession.[50]

Indeed, Du Bois seemingly uses this critique and a critique of Western radical theory to stretch *Black Reconstruction's* application of Marxism by examining the ontological dimensions of the Black worker's material reality. The result is existential probing that occurs throughout the text. Induced by the material conditions of African enslavement, emancipation, and disenfranchisement is a shattered Negro American ontology. In "The Black Worker," a chapter seemingly centered on a discussion of citizenship, voting rights, and labor exploitation, Du Bois initiates a phenomenological reading with the "dangerous" anomaly that was the free Negro – an individual whose very

[50] W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction* (New York: Antheneum, 1935) chapter 17.

Being threatened the survival of Western slavery, white supremacy, and capitalism. Du Bois explains that:

> As slavery grew to a system and the Cotton Kingdom began to expand into imperial white domination, a free Negro was a contradiction, a threat and a menace…as an educated property holder, a successful mechanic or even professional man, he more than threatened slavery. *He contradicted and undermined it. He must not be. He must be suppressed, enslaved, colonized*. And nothing so bad could be said about him that did not easily appear true to slaveholders. (7) (Emphasis added)

Du Bois clearly states that the attainment of physical Freedom for certain Negro Americans was antithetical to the full realization of Western capitalism; that nineteenth-century American slaveholders understood fully that maintaining ruling class dominance was contingent upon the unequivocal subjugation of the majority of Negro Americans. This subjugation, by necessity, had to include the Negro Americans' submission to the will of white Southerners or, as they named themselves, "masters." The free Negro was, in some cases, exempt from this submission, thereby necessitating his/her ontological erasure by Southern whites: "He must not be. He must be suppressed, enslaved, colonized" (7). The white Southern insistence that the Free Negro's erasure be contingent upon his/her subjugation is extremely revealing, for according to their racist resolve the Free Negroes' ontological nullification could only be instantiated through his/her capitulation to white supremacist rule.

To push this existential analysis of Freedom further, Du Bois links the free Negroes' ontological erasure to the material oppression of enslavement and colonization, seemingly establishing a causal link between materiality and existence that enriches an already rich socio-political critique with broader

phenomenological analysis: "He must be suppressed, enslaved, colonized" (7). Free Negroes, thus, represent a significant material and ontological threat to white supremacist hegemony. That even a small number of free Negroes posed such a great threat to the Southern plantocracy speaks to the level of insecurity among the Southern slaveholding class. In the wake of the Haitian Revolution, free Negros not withstanding, Southern slave owners also feared insurrection among the enslaved. Du Bois continues by offering a comparative diasporic analysis of slave revolts in the United States versus those in the West Indies, especially in Haiti:

> The [United States'] system of slavery demanded a special police force and such a force as made possible and unusually effective by the presence of poor whites. *This explains the difference between the slave revolts in the West Indies, and the lack of effective revolt in the Southern United States…there were actually more white people to police the slaves than there were slaves…The result was that the system was held stable and intact by the poor white. Even with the late ruin of Haiti before their eyes, the planters, stirred as they were, were nevertheless able to stamp out slave revolt…*Gradually the whole white South became an armed and commissioned camp to keep Negroes in slavery and to kill the black rebel. (12) (emphasis added)

With this comparison Du Bois effectively identifies the nineteenth-century African Diaspora a site of materialist inquiry; enslaved Africans in the United States and in the West Indies are not only workers, but also members of an enslaved African diasporic proletariat ready to engage in violent conflict for their Freedom regardless of the odds for success.[51]

[51] Again, this ethos of resistance irrespective of triumph recalls Cedric Robinson's Black Radical Tradition, outlined in Robinson, Op Cit. 168-171.

Du Bois continues to probe the materiality and ontology of Freedom by critiquing the paradoxical nature of Enlightenment discourses on liberty during the height of Western slavery through the historic figure of the fugitive slave. Citing the incomprehensibility of reducing human beings to property, Du Bois affirms the enslaved African's right – based on the esteemed principles of eighteenth-century rationality – to be deemed, first and foremost, a human being:

> It is simply said that under any condition of life, the reduction of a human being to real estate was a crime against humanity of such enormity that its existence must be immediately ended…But now, first, must be demanded that ordinary human freedom and recognition of essential manhood which slavery blasphemously denied. This philosophy of freedom was a logical continuation of the freedom philosophy of the eighteenth century which insisted that Freedom was not an End but an indispensable means to the beginning of human progress…(20)

His contention that Western progress was halted by chattel slavery's perpetuation is driven home throughout *Black Reconstruction*. Like David Walker and Frederick Douglass before him, Du Bois cites Enlightenment rationality to point out the inherent hypocrisy of chattel slavery. Du Bois uses the language of the Enlightenment to portray the slave who dares to escape as one asserting his/her humanity in a system that consistently denies it. The fugitive slave is: "…the piece of intelligent humanity who could say: I have been owned like an ox. I stole my own body and now I am hunted by law and lash to be made an ox again. By no conception of justice could such logic be answered" (20).

In this stunning metaphor, Du Bois illuminates the fundamental existential drive behind the slave's will to run: the need to resist enslavement, the need to assert her humanity, and the need to physically actualize one's free will. Escape,

as a form of material and ontological resistance, become a means of existential actualization that seemingly corrects the slave's apprehension of Being Apart from humanity. Though Freedom is present irrespective of material conditions, the process of existential actualization inherent to attaining physical Freedom may be realized through escape. In this way, escape represents a way of actualizing Freedom just as the embrace of suicide, or "the jubilee," did for other enslaved Africans.[52]

The condition of Freedom, be it material or ontological, becomes antithetical to the necessity of subjugation inherent to capitalist exploitation; thus, I propose the Africana apprehension of Being Apart as the impetus behind the Black radical tradition of material and ontological resistance to capitalist oppression. Whether that resistance is actualized in escape or suicide, it lies in the enslaved African's desire to reaffirm her personhood through the actualization of Freedom. Robinson emphasizes the Black radical tradition of resistance as a crucial element in reclaiming a collective sense of Being that the oppressor willfully tries to destroy:

> The Black radical tradition cast doubt on the extent to which capitalism penetrated and re-formed social life and on its ability to create entirely new categories of human experience stripped bare of the historical consciousness embedded in culture…*the Black radical tradition had defined…the continuing development of a collective consciousness informed by the historical struggles for liberation and motivated by the shared sense of obligation to preserve the collective being, the ontological totality*. (170-171) (Emphasis added)

[52] Gilroy, Op Cit. 66-69.

In understanding that the condition of Freedom exists inherently and that the will to resist makes this Freedom actual, enslaved Africans' struggle was waged to reclaim "the collective being, the ontological totality" that chattel slavery attempted to annihilate. Fighting this annihilation, thus, becomes a revolutionary act regardless of the outcome, irrespective of the number of fallen enemies, as Cedric Robinson asserts.[53] To build upon Robinson's brief existential analysis of Black radicalism, I suggest that the Africana experience of Being Apart – the knowledge that the West refuses to concede Africana humanity – has impelled Africana people to resist materially, ontologically, and discursively for the past four centuries.

In *Black Reconstruction* Du Bois's discursive rebellion is palpable. One of the most important aspects of Du Bois's challenge is *Black Reconstruction's* critique of Marxism, specifically the manner that race is imbricated upon the related issues of labor and alienation. Anthony Bogues invokes the Marxian proletariat's apprehension of alienation, stressing that:

> In Marxist terms, wage labor is perceived as alienation…*The question that Du Bois raises was what would happen when labor was embodied in both body and person – in other words, when labor was combined with the property of a person…The slave was a slave – he or she was property in its totality.* (83) (Emphasis added)

Bogues rightfully contends that *Black Reconstruction* traces the genesis of modern capitalism to the exploitation of enslaved African labor; however, Bogues does not fully address the existential questions raised by Du Bois: What occurs when labor and property are embodied in the worker? To this, I would argue, as

[53] Robinson, Op Cit. 168

Black Reconstruction implies, that what occurs is an alienation that surpasses that of the Marxian proletariat. The Black worker's particular alienation is characterized by a shattered psychology, a self-degradation and self-alienation that could only be born of Western chattel slavery, anti-African racism, and the ideological and quotidian manifestations of said racism that, together, reduced the Black worker to a sub-human being. This is an existential alienation epitomized by the internalization of anti-African racism, a self-hatred found among Africana people that leads to a distinctly Western brand of psychological enslavement – the Negro inferiority complex.

Du Bois discusses the Black workers' inferiority complex by first describing the material conditions that precipitated it:

> …there was in 1863 a real meaning to slavery different from that we may apply to the laborer today. *It was in part psychological, the enforced personal feeling of inferiority, the calling of another Master; the standing of hat in hand. It was the helplessness. It was the defenselessness of family life. It was the submergence below the arbitrary will of any sort of individual. It was without a doubt worse in these vital respects than that which exists today in Europe or America*. (9) (Emphasis added)

Du Bois' focus on the forced inferiority complex, evinced by the calling of one's owner, "master," reflects the enslaved African's level of degradation. It is not enough that the enslaved were deemed sub-human, but they daily and hourly were forced to interpellate their perceived inferiority by calling the architect of their degradation "master." And as Du Bois so pointedly notes, in this manner, the enslaved were owned by any member of the slave-holding class: man, woman, or child. The most humiliating example of this was the common practice of white

children, some from the moment of their birth, owning adult slaves just as they would own a dog, cat, or other farm animal.

Du Bois's examination of the phenomenology of slavery reaches its peak in chapter nine, "The Price of Disaster." Again, he uses a description of Southern social conditions to segue into their ontological implications for Negro Americans. To explain the intractability of white Southerners towards the de jure enfranchisement of newly emancipated slaves, Du Bois states that:

> …it was the American Blindspot that made the experience all the more difficult, and to the South incomprehensible. *For several generations the South had been taught to look upon the Negro as a thing apart. He was different from other human beings*. The system of slave labor, under which he was employed, was radically different from all other systems of labor. (370) (Emphasis added)

By charging chattel slavery responsible for the Southern apprehension of enslaved Africans as things apart, Du Bois elucidates how the symbiotic ideologies of anti-African racism and white supremacy caused the Black worker's complete alienation, a condition dependent upon anti-African racism's insistence upon African inferiority. This conflation of societal ideology and social practice, according to Du Bois, led to insurmountable feelings of inadequacy and despair:

> The result of this had to be unfortunate for the Negro. He was a caged human being, driven into a curious mental provincialism. An inferiority complex dominated him. He did not believe himself a man like other men….Large numbers sank into apathy and fatalism! There was no chance for the Black man; there was no use in striving: ambition was not for Negroes. (701)

In Du Bois's view so successful was anti-African racism in entrenching white supremacy and African inferiority that Negro Americans themselves had

internalized anti-African racism, believing themselves incapable of any achievement whatsoever. Plausible as this hypothesis is, it does contradict Du Bois' earlier exhortations in chapter one, "The Black Worker," on African American orature as representative of American cultural and artistic production, and as the catalyst for Africana agency and resistance.

In *Black Reconstruction's* penultimate chapter, aptly titled, "Back Towards Slavery," Du Bois furthers his analysis of Southern culture's hegemonic dimensions by detailing its adherence to racial and caste hierarchy. Intrinsic to this hierarchy was the complete disenfranchisement of newly emancipated Negro Americans because:

> …caste has been revived in a modern civilized land… First, it was presented and defended as 'race' separation, but it was never mere race separation. It was always domination of blacks by white officials, white police and laws and ordinances made by white men…Besides this a determined psychology of caste was built up. In every possible way it was impressed and advertised that the white race was superior and the Negro an inferior race. This inferiority must be publicly acknowledged and submitted to. Titles of courtesy were denied colored men and women. Certain signs of servility and usages amounting to public and personal insult were insisted upon. (695)

Through his clear description of "archaic and barbaric" Southern governmental policies that manifested the vaster workings of Western hegemony, Du Bois illustrates how the continued oppression of disenfranchised Negro Americans was justified by and reflected in racist public policy and societal conventions that reinforced notions of African racial inferiority. For example, what Du Bois terms "signs of servility…amounting to pubic and personal insult" may be found in the

common, and still extant, white Southern practice of calling an adult African American woman or man "girl" or "boy."

Delineating how Western slavery created the hegemony of global capitalism, and its resultant racial, socio-economic, and political hierarchies, is only the tip of *Black Reconstruction's* philosophical iceberg, for in the first chapter Du Bois makes one of his boldest and most radical statements that, once again, places Marxism's Eurocentricity in high relief. Du Bois employs syllogistic reasoning to reveal linkages among the Freedom of humankind, the emancipation of labor, and the Freedom of the enslaved/colonized by theorizing that: "The emancipation of man is the emancipation of labor and the emancipation of labor is the freeing of that basic majority of workers who are yellow, brown, and black" (15).

This statement proves that Du Bois's radicalism surpasses many Marxists. His call for Freedom is a call for and greater class *and* race consciousness. This declaration takes the issue of proletariat revolution out of the European continent and into Europe's colonial dominions, where native labor is exploited for purely imperial gain. Du Bois's anti-imperialist stance is contextualized in his 1940 autobiography, *Dusk of Dawn*, where he outlines the predominant forces of ideology and their impact on his own work and on that of his peers, insisting that his:

> …thoughts, the thoughts of Washington, Trotter, and others, were the expression of social forces more than of our own minds. These forces or ideologies embraced more than our reasoned acts. They included physical, biological and psychological forces; habits, conventions and enactments…The total result was the history of our day. That history may be epitomized in one world – Empire;

> the domination of white Europe over black Africa and yellow Asia, through political power built on the economic control of labor, income, and ideas. (96)

For Du Bois, Empire is neither distant abstraction nor transient Western ideology. Rather it is the twentieth-century manifestation of capitalism born of four centuries of chattel slavery, imperialism, and colonialism; the Western imperative to create and maintain wealth through the continued exploitation of the Black and colored laboring classes. Du Bois uses this anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist globalism to situate the plight of emancipated Negro Americans, a peasant class of laborers, within the same historical context as other post-revolutionary peasants.

He details the Black workers' Reconstruction era quest for land rights to the similar struggle of feudal European peasants: "The German and English and French serf, the Italian and Russian serf, were, on emancipation given definite rights in the land. Only the American Negro slave was emancipated without such rights and in the end this spelled for him the continuation of slavery" (611). Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* recounts this "continuation of slavery" with great alacrity through descriptions of the Southern debt-peonage and sharecropping systems which, combined, sank newly emancipated Negro Americans into an inescapable mire of poverty and dependency, thereby continuing their de facto state of slavery.[54]

Black Reconstruction ends in the same manner that it begins: by placing the plight of enslaved Africans within the context of the global drama that is

[54] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Avon Books, 1903) 309-319.

Western history. Du Bois contends that the catastrophe of Reconstruction surpasses Greek tragedy and is, thereby, equivalent to key developments in Western history:

> The most magnificent drama in the last thousand years of human history is the transportation of ten million human beings out of the dark beauty of their mother continent into the new-found Eldorado of the West. They descended into Hell; and in the third century they arose from the dead, in the finest effort to achieve democracy for the working millions which this world had ever seen. It was a tragedy that beggared the Greek; it was an upheaval of humanity like the Reformation and the French Revolution. (727)

With this ending, Du Bois completes his project of highlighting the historical significance of chattel slavery for Western civilization by powerfully equating it to watershed developments in Western culture and politics, just as he proves its centrality to capitalism and imperialism by identifying its links to ideological racism and modern industrialism. In doing so, Du Bois not only creates a theory of history, he creates history itself. No one before him had fully apprehended the epochal historical and philosophical import of the enslaved African in and to the West. But after Du Bois, Trinidadian scholar C.L.R. James would seek to problematize Marxism once again; this time using the San Domingo Revolution and its leader, Toussaint L'Ouverture, to signify the enslaved/colonized African's apprehension of Freedom as the occasion for material and existential actualization.

Jamesian Enlightenment

The Black Jacobins' preface (to the first edition) proclaims the San Domingo Revolution an historical anomaly, the only successful slave revolt in modern history. According to James, the San Domingo Revolution was the material manifestation of the ethical and political ideals of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. The Black Jacobins' was an African proletariat revolution that saw enslaved and colonized subjects actualizing Enlightenment principles of Freedom, thereby becoming agents of radical change:

> The revolt is the only successful slave revolt in history, and the odds it had to overcome is evidence of the magnitude of the interests that were involved. The transformation of slaves, trembling in hundreds before a single white man, into a people able to organize themselves and defeat the most powerful European nations of their day is one of the great epics of revolutionary struggle and achievement. (ix)

By emphasizing the Revolution as a triumphant slave revolt, James deftly reminds the reader that the enslaved women, men, and children of San Domingo were transformed into a revolutionary army, engaged in warfare against the most advanced European militias of the eighteenth century. Supporting this assessment, Anthony Bogues quite rightly stresses the improbability of the Haitians' victory over the imperial might of the West; this he argues, and the fact that the Haitian Revolution stamped out African racial slavery in Haiti, behooves the Revolution's inclusion in Western studies of revolution and modernity:

> This revolution, called 'unthinkable'…has been neglected in studies of 'revolution.' But the nature of the event encouraged James to tell a tale that shifted the main historical axis of the 'Age of Revolution,' narrating a different tale about the rise of modernity. (79)

James repositions the Age of Revolution along an historical axis that recounts the rise of proletariat mass-action as an originally African diasporic phenomenon. Moreover, in naming this Revolution, "one of the great epics of revolutionary struggle," James, inserts the Africana struggle for liberation into the genealogy of both traditional and radical Western historiography, thereby furthering the counter-hegemonic discourse at the heart of his and Du Bois's radical Africana letters.

James's counter-hegemonic analysis begins in the first chapter, where a genealogy of African resistance to chattel slavery is established by citing slave insurrections and suicides during the Middle Passage. Futile though these attempts at insurrection were, James's emphasis on how enslaved Africans courted death to attain Freedom reveals the degree to which death was a fate preferable to enslavement. He holds that they: "…undertook vast hunger strikes; undid their chains and hurled themselves on the crew in futile attempts at insurrection…some took the opportunity to jump overboard, uttering cries of triumph as they cleared the vessel and disappeared below the surface" (9). That James reminds readers of the "failure" of these revolts further supports Cedric Robinson's previously afore-cited claim that the slaves' victory lay not in the number of dead oppressors, but rather in the very act of resistance itself.

James continues the above-cited passage of *The Black Jacobins* by explaining the San Domingo slaveholders' disregard for their slaves' well-being as necessary for the slaveholders' survival: "To cow them into the necessary

docility and acceptance necessitated a calculated brutality and terrorism, and it is this that explains the unusual spectacle of property-owners apparently careless of preserving their property: they had first to ensure their own safety" (12). Interestingly, this passage echoes *Black Reconstruction's* earlier description of the American South as an "armed camp" to contain the Black rebel. Another means used by slaveholders' to ensure their safety was maintaining the plantation's paradoxical character as the womb of capitalism and tomb of the enslaved by working them to death: "The life in San Domingo killed them off fast. The planters deliberately worked them to death rather than wait for children to grow up" (14).

As this passage so vividly recounts, slaveholders found it more expedient to work their slaves to death, as it was cheaper to replace deceased slaves with newly enslaved Africans than to maintain the slaves' survival. Given this fact of naked capitalist exploitation, it is not surprising that scores of slaves committed suicide to end their misery and, according to James, to bring malice upon their owners: "Suicide was a common habit, and such was their disregard for life that they often killed themselves…to spite their owner" (15).

In stating that enslaved Africans killed themselves as revenge against their owners, James connotes that the slaves' willful resistance against the slaveholders is a struggle against their socio-economic status as property. Slave suicide, therefore, becomes a willful negation of capitalist profit earned through the slaves' subjugation and dehumanization, a physical annihilation that is only tantamount to the their ontological erasure as human beings. James's statement

on slave suicide as an act of resistance recalls Du Bois's statement *in Black Reconstruction* that the fugitive slave, or the escaped Black worker, "steals his own body." For *The Black Jacobins'* enslaved proletariat, suicide becomes the ultimate act of stealing one's body, for one steals his/her own very Being from the clutches of exploitation, paradoxically reclaiming it through the very act of suicide.

Du Bois and James' accounts of slave insurrection, fugitive activity, and suicide cannot be thoroughly explained by Western radical theory. Marxism, as Du Bois and James have proven, cannot explain African subjugation and oppression under chattel slavery, for Western radical theory was developed to explain the dialectics of capitalist oppression and proletariat resistance in a strictly European context, a context ostensibly distinct from Western slavery's link to capitalism and to Western ideologies of anti-African racism. Slave insurrection and suicide reflect themes of Being and Freedom, which may be more thoroughly apprehended through the theoretical lens of Being Apart. These acts of resistance are manifestations of existential alienation; suicide reflects an ontological imperative, for the enslaved person may only achieve existential actualization through death. Though seemingly paradoxical, Being is reclaimed in a physical death that negates the social death of slavery.

It was Du Bois and James's implicit aim to stretch Marxism's contextual limitations by introducing enslaved African labor into Western history and theory. As James's "Lectures on *The Black Jacobins*" remarks on the global historical vision of Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction*:

> He had opened out the historical perspective in a manner I didn't know…he was always driven by the need of expanding and making clear to black people in what way they were involved in world history…Du Bois taught me to think in those terms…Who was thinking of the Black worker in 1865? Who was thinking about the Black worker in 1935? (86-91)

James's comment on Du Bois's incisive historical analysis on the global impact of enslaved African labor during and after Reconstruction, in part, reveals James's implicit challenge to Marxist theory. By asking who was concerned about the Black worker's plight, the implication is that no one was, not even American and European proponents of Western radical theory. Only Du Bois was preoccupied with the ramifications of chattel slavery as a system of capitalist labor, and now James himself was as well.

James's critique of Western history continues in his naming Toussaint L'Ouverture – the leader of the San Domingo revolution and former slave – one of the greatest historical figures of the Enlightenment: "The writer believes, and is confident the narrative will prove, that between 1789 and 1815, with the single exception of Bonaparte himself, no single figure appeared on the historical scene more greatly gifted than this Negro, a slave until he was 45" (x). By placing L'Ouverture in the same category as French imperialist Bonaparte, James initiates a revision of Western historiography that foregrounds the importance of African resistance in San Domingo to the developing ideological and ethical inheritance of the West.

L'Ouverture's stature as a formidable Enlightenment leader is furthered in James's analysis of his letter to the Directory, an impassioned yet measured

missive urging against the French government's plan to reinstate slavery in San Domingo. In this letter, which James denotes as a "milestone" in L'Ouverture's career, L'Ouverture promises that he and his fellow freedom fighters would die a thousand deaths before submitting to enslavement,[55] and that: *"…we have known how to face dangers to obtain our liberty, we shall know how to brave death to maintain it"* (195). This determination to maintain Freedom was, according to James, born of L'Ouverture's identity as a slave. Having been a slave enabled him to grasp the essence of Freedom in a way that his European and American counterparts, who theorized on Freedom extensively, never could. L'Ouverture's was a keen perception unencumbered by the equivocation and exception of bourgeois idealism; thus his awareness of Freedom's import was as immediate and concrete as the sugar cane plantations on which he had toiled. James underscores:

> That was why in the hour of danger Toussaint, uninstructed as he was, could find the language and accent of Diderot, Rousseau, and Raynal, of Mirabeau, Robespierre…And in one respect he excelled them all. For even these masters of the spoken and written word, owing to the class complications of their society, too often had to pause, to hesitate, to qualify. *Toussaint could defend the freedom of the blacks without a reservation, and this gave his declaration a strength and a single-mindedness rare in the great documents of the time.* The French bourgeoisie could not understand it. Rivers of blood were to flow before they understood that elevated as was his tone Toussaint had written neither bombast nor rhetoric but the simple and sober truth. (198) (Emphasis added)

L'Ouverture's cognizance of what Orlando Patterson terms the "social death" of slavery necessitates an ontological awareness of Freedom. For L'Ouverture, Freedom is not an abstraction to be modified but a reality to be

[55] James 194-196.

attained and, if necessary, attained through death. James advances his comparison between L'Ouverture's philosophical formulation of Freedom and those of privileged eighteenth and nineteenth-century Western theorists by stressing the singularly historic discursive achievement of his letter to the Directory:

> Pericles on Democracy, Paine on the Rights of Man, the Declaration of Independence, the Communist Manifesto, these are some of the political documents which, whatever the wisdom or weaknesses of their analysis, have moved men and will always move them, for the writers…strike chords and awaken aspirations that sleep in the hearts of the majority of every age. But Pericles, Tom Paine, Jefferson, Marx and Engels, were men of a liberal education, formed in the tradition of ethics, philosophy and history. Toussaint was a slave, not six years out of slavery, bearing alone the unaccustomed burden of war and government, dictating his thoughts in the crude words of a broken dialect, written and rewritten by his secretaries until their devotion and his will had hammered them into adequate shape…he accomplished what he did because, superbly gifted he incarnated the determination of his people never to be slaves again. (193-194)

Again, James compares L'Ouverture's democratic vision to those of his privileged Western counterparts; however James argues that this letter should be considered one of the greatest political documents of the age since a man who had risen from the utter degradation of chattel slavery crafted it. Through this critique James contextualizes L'Ouverture's letter as a material, historic, and discursive encapsulation of Freedom. What is more, the letter also encapsulates Freedom as an ontological necessity for the enslaved masses of San Domingo, for they had lived under slavery and refused to do so again.

James's treatment of L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution during the Age of Revolution stands in stark contrast to Homi Bhabha's reading of *The Black Jacobins*. While James clearly establishes of a genealogy of African

resistance to Western slavery and emphasizes the import of slavery's ties to Enlightenment discourses, Bhabha's reading of *The Black Jacobins* focuses rather myopically on how the event of the San Domingo Revolution shifted the spatiality of modernity.

In the concluding chapter of *The Location of Culture*, entitled "Race, Time and the Revision of Modernity," Homi Bhabha situates his postcolonial conceptualization of modernity along a critical continuum informed by the works of Habermas, Lyotard, Lefort, and Foucault. Bhabha acknowledges the manner in which these thinkers challenge the role of "ethical and cultural judgment" in the epistemology of modernity and though his critique of Michel Foucault's Eurocentrism is accurate, Bhabha employs a somewhat limited reading of *The Black Jacobins* to revise Foucault's "spatial sign of modernity." Bhabha holds that:

> Through Kant, Foucault traces 'the ontology of the present' to the exemplary event of the French Revolution and it is there that he stages his sign of modernity…Foucault introduces a Eurocentric perspective…The Eurocentricity of Foucault's theory of cultural difference is revealed in his insistent spatializing of the time of modernity…What if the 'distance' that constitutes the meaning of the Revolution… stretches not across the Place de la Bastille or the rue des Blancs-Monteaux, but spans the temporal difference of the colonial space? What if we heard the 'moral disposition of mankind' uttered by Toussaint L'Ouverture for whom, as C.L.R. James so vividly recalls, the signs of modernity, 'liberty, equality, fraternity…what the French Revolution signified, was perpetually on his lips, in his correspondence, in his private conversations.' (Bhabha 244)

Bhabha proposes that L'Ouverture's internalization of the moral disposition of man represents a valid signifier of modernity; however this

interpretation, while valid, fails to address James's dialectical theorization of African enslavement and resistance, which is fundamental to *The Black Jacobins'* thesis and its implicit critique of Marxism. The seminal nature of James' analysis of enslaved African labor in San Domingo lies in its insistence that enslaved Africans represent the first modern proletariat, and that their self-identification as an exploited laboring class led to their resistance and revolution. James holds that:

> The slaves worked on the land and, like revolutionary peasants everywhere, they aimed at the extermination of their oppressors. But working and living together in gangs of hundreds on the huge sugar factories…they were closer to a modern proletariat than any group of workers in existence at the time. (85-86)

Bhabha's failure to thoroughly consider the stark reality of chattel slavery and imperialism and, therefore, the dialectic of racial oppression and African resistance in L'Ouverture's preoccupation with liberty, equality, and fraternity relegates the leader of the first successful slave revolt in history to limited role of colonial "mimic" – to borrow one of Bhabha's terms – as opposed to a leader in the African diasporic struggle for liberation. This oversight also leads to an incomplete analysis of James's achievement in *The Black Jacobins*. Without properly contextualizing Western slavery, and its attendant discourses of Western superiority and African inferiority, Bhabha occludes the manner in which James' work stands as a greater challenge to both traditional and radical Western theory.

To highlight *The Black Jacobins'* genealogy of African resistance in San Domingo prior to the Revolution, James cites Maroon chief Mackandal's seventeenth-century attempts at insurrection, occurring an entire century before

the French and Haitian Revolutions. James holds that Mackandal's vision of Freedom included driving European imperialists out of San Domingo, depicting him as a charismatic leader who:

> …conceived the bold design of uniting all the Negroes and driving the whites out of the colony. He was a Negro from Guinea who had been a slave…*Mackandal was an orator, in the opinion of a white contemporary, equal in eloquence to the European orators of the day…Not only did his band raid and pillage plantations far and wide, but he himself ranged from plantation to plantation to make converts, stimulate followers, and perfect his great plan for the destruction of white civilization in San Domingo*…The Mackandal rebellion never reached fruition and it was the only hint of an organized attempt at revolt during the hundred years preceding the French Revolution. (20-21) (Emphasis added)

Like James's initial description of L'Ouverture, Mackandal is compared to his late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century European counterparts who were well schooled in the oratory arts of rhetoric and persuasion. Only this freedom fighter used his wit to incite rebellion among enslaved Africans in a French colony, thereby ironically, advancing principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity among the enslaved masses in a French colonial dominion an entire century *before* these theories on Freedom had become a cornerstone of Enlightenment ideology.

James continues to explore slave resistance through a psychological analysis of the dialectics of oppression, revealing the oppressors need to animalize the enslaved and the slaves' indefatigable quest to assert their humanity. He underscores that: "The difficulty was that though one could trap them like animals, transport them in pens, work them alongside an ass or a horse and beat both with the same stick, stable and starve them, they remained…quite invincibly

human beings; with the intelligence and resentments of human beings" (12). Despite the slaveholders' systematic efforts to set enslaved Africans apart from humanity, the enslaved Africans of San Domingo continually resisted this ontological erasure.

As Du Bois did in *Black Reconstruction*, James begins *The Black Jacobins* by citing Africana historicality and agency and by re-naming chattel slavery as the racial and socio-economic system at the foundation of modern capitalism. Yet unlike Du Bois, James titles the first chapter, "The Property," to seemingly denote the stark exploitation of African labor under chattel slavery. "The Property" stands in contrast to Du Bois's first chapter, "The Black Worker," yet James's realism links the enslaved Africans' quest for liberation to the ideological, socio-economic, and political imperatives of Western slavery. In doing so, James considers the dialectical and symbiotic pairing of a European ruling class and an enslaved African proletariat integral to chattel slavery's unique system of capitalist exploitation, imperial domination, and racial oppression, for he insists that:

> Men make their own history, and the black Jacobins of San Domingo were to make history which would alter the fate of millions of men and shift the economic currents of three continents. The slave trade and slavery were woven tight into the economics of the eighteenth century. Three forces, the proprietors of San Domingo, the French bourgeoisie and the British bourgeoisie, throve on the devastation of a continent and on the brutal exploitation of millions…(25)

In this critique of eighteenth-century Western history, James reveals the socio-economic interrelationships among chattel slavery, the European bourgeoisie, and

the European planter class in San Domingo, and how these relationships led to a radical uprising that changed the course of history. This multi-faceted analysis of eighteenth-century imperialism represents the primary zone of James's historical interrogation, for James compels the reader to comprehend both chattel slavery and the African resistance to enslavement, not only as the socio-economic and ideological foundation of Western modernity, but as a dialectical phenomenon that irrevocably changed the course of Western history itself. In their historic battle to end slavery and gain sovereignty and independence from France, Haitian freedom fighters single-handedly triumphed over one of the oldest forms of capitalist exploitation in the world – African racial slavery.[56]

In the fourth chapter, "The San Domingo Masses Begin," James argues that chattel slavery, as a highly exploitative form of capitalism, made enslaved Africans the epitome of revolutionary peasants for they not only organized effectively to defeat the slave system, they also triumphed over nearly impossible odds in so doing: "…they were closer to a modern proletariat than any group of workers in existence at the time, and the rising was, therefore, a thoroughly prepared and organized mass movement" (85-86).

James, like Du Bois, reconceptualizes enslaved Africans as workers, aptly naming them the first modern proletariat of the eighteenth-century, an organized proletariat whose principal desire was Freedom. That James characterizes the slave revolt as a planned mass movement speaks to his own theoretical mission to illuminate African resistance to slavery as central to Western modernity. At the

[56] See Bogues 220, n.26.

same time, this reconceptualization of Africans as a modern proletariat offers a revision of Marxism and its attendant socio-economic and political classifications:

> In the end [*The Black Jacobins*] text was organically lined to revolutionary political practice. The telling of the…only successful black slave revolt in modernity rewrote Marxist categories of labor, as well as the nature of the political economy of early capitalism and of radical historiography. As a consequence, James pushed Marxist theory in new directions. (Bogues 74)

James, like Du Bois before him, redefines dialectical materialism to encapsulate the African historical experience of chattel slavery and resistance. Through their studies of the Haitian Revolution and Black Reconstruction, alienated European mill/factory workers may no longer symbolize modernity; instead modernity is represented by an enslaved African diasporic proletariat. What is more, by titling the chapter, "The San Domingo Masses Begin," James connotes a collective ontological and social re-birth through the apprehension of liberation, suggesting that the enslaved African masses were awakened as a social class through their collective actualization of Freedom.

In an epigraph that follows the chapter title, "The San Domingo Masses Begin," James includes an untranslated African chant: "Eh! Eh! Bomba! Heu! Heu! Canga, bafio te! Canga, moune de le! Canga, do ki la! Canga, do ki la! Canga, li!" (85). This transcription of an African chant announces James' intent to locate African culture as central to the enslaved Africans' revolutionary ethos. Where *Black Reconstruction* provides a more implicit connection between African American orature and subsequent African American resistance, *The Black Jacobins* provides an explicit account of how African cosmology – in the form of

Haitian Vodoun and the oral tradition – becomes a conduit for revolution in San Domingo. James explains that this:

> …was, therefore, a thoroughly prepared and organized mass movement. By hard experience they had learned that isolated efforts were doomed to failure, and in the early months of 1791…they were organizing for revolution. Voodoo was the medium of conspiracy. In spite of all prohibitions, the slaves traveled miles to sing and dance and practice the rites and talk; and now since the [French] revolution hear the political news and make their plans. Boukman, a Papaloi or High Priest…was the leader…By the end of July 1791 the blacks in and around Le Cap were ready and waiting. The plan was conceived on a massive scale and they aimed at exterminating the whites and taking the colony for themselves. (86)

That the masses of San Domingo begin as a mass proletariat revolution against slavery and colonialism using an African cosmological system to subvert Western domination is extremely significant. The enslaved Africans of Boukman's incipient revolution in 1791 utilized their own spiritual and ontological framework to end their oppression. In doing so, they asserted their collective Being and Freedom to ensure their physical liberation.

Interestingly, James came to this Afro-centric view of history through his study of Western radical theory. He credits this exposure to Marxism and his contact with other British colonial subjects from the African Diaspora, while he lived in England, for making his now classic study of *The Black Jacobins* possible[57]:

> So I hope you understand now that this book is not an accident. It didn't just fall from a tree. It is the result of a whole series of circumstances by which I thoroughly master…Marxism…I had read the history of the Marxist movement, and I had written four hundred pages on the Marxist movement, from its beginning in

[57] James, "Lectures on *The Black Jacobins*" pp. 67-71.

> 1864 to what was taking place in 1936. I was a highly trained Marxist and that is the person who wrote *The Black Jacobins*. (James 71)

And though James acknowledges that his Western radical sensibility is what led to *The Black Jacobins'* ostensibly Marxist reading of the Haitian Revolution, I would argue (like Cedric Robinson and Anthony Bogues) that James's interdisciplinary approach surpasses traditional Marxist historiography. James's study includes a reading of the interrelationships among Western slavery and the French and Haitian Revolutions. James's first chapter's citation of French historian Juares reveals the link between the French bourgeoisie's prosperity, garnered from the profits of slavery, and their subsequent awakening as an oppressed social class: "Sad irony of human history, comments Juares, the fortunes created at Bordeaux, at Nantes by the slave-trade, gave to the bourgeoisie that pride which needed liberty and contributed to human emancipation" (47). This French bourgeois pride, James argues, was fed by a burgeoning imperialist sensibility that was predicated upon the exploitation of enslaved Africans in San Domingo. James supports this point by describing the French expectation that colonial wealth was abundant as it was eternal:

> How could anyone seriously fear for such a wonderful colony? Slavery seemed eternal and the profits mounted. Never before, and perhaps never since, has the world seen anything proportionately so dazzling as the last years of pre-revolutionary San Domingo. Between 1783 and 1789 production nearly doubled. Between 1764 and 1771 the average importation of slaves varied between ten and fifteen thousand. In 1786 it was 27,000 and from 1787 onwards the colony was taking more than 40,000 slaves a year. (55)

With this passage, James plainly shows how the capitalist accumulation of chattel slavery provided the economic foundation for the French Revolution. James goes on to demonstrates how the French bourgeoisie's resistance, in turn, reignited revolution among an already recalcitrant enslaved African population in San Domingo several generations after the failed attempts of Mackandal:

> The enormous increase of slaves was filling the colony with native Africans, more resentful more intractable, more ready for rebellion than the creole Negro. Of the half-a-million slaves in the colony in 1789, more than two-thirds had been born in Africa. (55-56)

These enslaved Africans, as James charges, were the San Domingo masses; the same masses who, under the leadership of Boukman, had heard the stories of the French Revolution and were ready to seize the colony for themselves. James reminds us that: "They had heard of the revolution and had construed it in their own image: the white slaves in France had risen, and killed their masters, and were now enjoying the fruits of the earth" (82).

The Black Jacobins, therefore, places the San Domingo masses in a genealogy that foregrounds the historical legacy of Africana resistance to chattel slavery in Haiti, beginning during the Middle Passage, continuing in Mackandal's seventeenth-century plot to overthrown European rule, achieving near success with Boukman's 1791 rebellion, and reaching its apotheosis under the leadership of Toussaint L'Ouverture. Thus, it is imperative to understand that: "The French Revolution became the permissive context for the Haitian Revolution, not *the* cause of the revolution. The Haitian Revolution was not the French Revolution in Haiti" (Bogues 81-82). This reinforces my earlier point about Homi Bhabha's (mis)reading of Toussaint L'Ouverture, the Haitian Revolution, and the

temporality of modernity. There was no mimicry involved in this New World Revolution, only the reemergence of an extant Black Radical ethos.

James continues to explore the links between French modernity and chattel slavery in San Domingo by identifying colonial representation in the French National Assembly as the principal impetus behind debates on Freedom and liberty as natural rights of man[58]:

> In less than five minutes the great liberal orator had placed the case of the Friends of the Negro squarely before the whole of France in unforgettable words. The San Domingo representatives realized at last what they had done: they had tied the fortune of San Domingo to the assembly of a people in revolution and thenceforth the history of liberty in France and slave emancipation in San Domingo is one and indivisible. (60-61)

James' insistence that the discourses of Freedom and slavery in eighteenth-century San Domingo and France were interdependent and mutually informed shows the degree to which *The Black Jacobins* must be critiqued as a radical intervention into tradition and radical Western theory. Traditional Western theory, like Homi Bhabha's, mistakenly names the Haitian Revolution as an extension of the French Revolution. Radical Western theory is remiss in its omission of African diasporic proletariat struggle. As Cedric Robinson notes, James uses Marxism as the theoretical framework for *The Black Jacobins*, yet James seemingly does so to question Marxism's Eurocentric definition of capitalist development. In this manner, James addresses Marxism's blind spot

[58] Tiffany Ruby Patterson and Robin D.G. Kelley, "Unfinished Migrations: Reflections on the African Diaspora and the Making of the Modern World" in *African Studies Review* spec. issue on the Diaspora. 43.1 (2000): 30.

towards the enslaved African proletariat and its erasure from the annals of early capitalism. Robinson stresses that:

> The theoretical frame for *The Black Jacobins* was, of course, the theories of revolution developed by Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky. James asserted that fact…It was not, however, entirely the case. From Marx and Engels he had taken the concept of a revolutionary class and the economic foundation for its historical emergence. But the slaves of Haiti were not a Marxian proletariat…Moreover James seemed willing to challenge Marx and Engels on the very grounds they had laid for the sociological significance of early capitalism…While the European proletariat had been formed by the ideas of the bourgeoisie…in Haiti and presumably elsewhere Africans had constructed their own revolutionary culture. (384-385)

Robinson insists that the Black proletariat of Haiti succeeded in subverting the French imperialist (and white supremacist) ruling class order from the bottom up; however, I would also argue that this material struggle also represents resistance against the devaluation of African labor under the system of chattel slavery. This point may be illustrated in the words of an unnamed Haitian freedom fighter that was labeled an anarchist in the annals of French history, a man whose words served as one of James's many sources. When asked why this man and others burned the vast plantations of San Domingo to the ground, the freedom fighter responded: "We have a right to burn what we cultivate because a man has a right to dispose of his own labour…" (361).

Through this anonymous freedom fighter's defiance one may see how the Black proletariat of Haiti, despite the circumstance of its enslavement and exploitation, perceived themselves as workers, as human beings possessing the right to destroy labor from which they received neither sustenance nor profit. By

insisting on his identity as a man and laborer, this freedom fighter embodies and articulates the very aspects of his humanity that the chattel slave system sought to destroy. He burns plantations to be free; thus the struggle for Freedom in Haiti, and elsewhere in the African diaspora becomes an existential demand for Being and Freedom.

It seems a matter of course, then, that *The Black Jacobins*, like *Black Reconstruction,* would include analyses of African psychology and ontology as James, like Du Bois, was informed by the phenomenology of slavery. It also seems that *The Black Jacobins* and *Black Reconstruction* had to be conceptualized as historical studies that addressed theoretical, political, and philosophical concerns, for the plight of enslaved Africans under four hundred years of chattel slavery problematizes the strictly class-based dialectics of oppression elucidated by Marxism. James and Du Bois were compelled to see beyond Marxism and employ more catholic analyses of African racial slavery because race, and its attendant discourses of anti-African racism, not class was the principal rationale for African enslavement in the West. For James and Du Bois, the ideologies of anti-African racism and white supremacy had to be analyzed philosophically.

Integral to this philosophical critique are Du Bois and James's explorations of Being and Freedom and though Anthony Bogues's analysis of *The Black Jacobins* and *Black Reconstruction* is quite instructive, I disagree with his assessment that: "Du Bois was more successful than James in writing about the social mind of the slaves…" (85). Granted, James does not devote a great deal of text to examining the Haitian freedom fighters' collective psychology; however

James's analysis of the Haitian freedom fighters' conceptualization of their labor's worth and of the concept of Freedom, though comparatively brief, offer great insight into the existential dimensions of the freedom fighters' collective psychology. Nowhere is James's existential analysis of Freedom more explicit than in *The Black Jacobins'* final chapter, "The War of Independence."

For the formerly enslaved Africans of San Domingo who had tasted Freedom and refused to capitulate to re-enslavement, death was the only alternative to liberty. They embraced death for the cause of liberation, remaining freedom fighters to the end. When they battled to seize the San Domingo capital, Le Cap, from the French military several freedom fighters were captured and put to death. James narrates these events with great alacrity and attention to the philosophical import of the freedom fighters' quest for liberation:

> When Chevalier, a black chief, hesitated at the sight of the scaffold, his wife shamed him. 'You do not know how sweet it is to die for liberty!' And refusing to allow herself to be hanged by the executioner, she took the rope and hanged herself. To her daughters going to execution with her, another woman gave courage. 'Be glad you will not be the mothers of slaves.' (361-362)

Here, the freedom fighter's cry that death for Freedom is sweet reveals the depth of her desire for liberation; that she would rather die by her own hand than by that of a colonial executioner reveals an existential need to sacrifice her life for the greater cause of liberation. And in the passage that follows, the mother who comforts her children, begging them to consider the honor of death preferable to the degradation of slavery[59], the choice is the same: liberty or death.

---

[59] James Op Cit. 362.

In this final chapter, James includes a telling analysis of the French military's response to the bravery of the Haitian freedom fighters. Rather than admire their indefatigable courage, these European imperialists instead chose to rationalize the Haitians' bravery through the prevalent anti-African discourse of the day. The freedom fighters more than proved their humanity by exercising their free will and choosing death over a life of slavery. Yet the French, were unwilling to acknowledge the freedom fighters' human dignity. They saw the freedom fighters as sub-human and rationalized their bravery as the by-product of an aberrant African physicality insensible to pain:

> The French, powerless before this fortitude, saw in it not the strength of revolution but some peculiarity special to blacks. The muscles of a Negro, they said, contracted with so much force as to make him insensible to pain. They enslaved the Negro, they said, because he was not a man, and when he behaved like a man they called him a monster. (361-362)

James's assessment of the intractability of anti-African racism among these French officers is unmistakable. They refused to acknowledge the Haitians as human beings; therefore they were made slaves, beasts of burden. When faced with their unquestionable humanity in the face of death, the French remained incapable of seeing the freedom fighters' embrace of death (the jubilee) as the quest for Freedom. Instead, the French could only see the freedom fighters as monsters, as creatures immune to physical pain. They could not acknowledge the freedom fighters' bravery because they held fast to the tenets of African inferiority; thus, they could only see the freedom fighters of San Domingo as

creatures apart from humanity, rather than as people whose fortitude reflected the true spirit of their lauded Enlightenment theories of Freedom.

Interestingly, James's narration of the Haitian freedom fighters' resolve to actualize Freedom in their embrace of death prefigures Antonio Gramsci's designation of Freedom in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. In a section subtitled, "Progress and Becoming," Gramsci outlines the significance and practical application of philosophy in society. Seemingly echoing James's conceptualization of Freedom as the existential manifestation of free will, Gramsci contends that: "The measure of freedom enters into the concept of man…But the existence of objective conditions of freedom is not yet enough: it is necessary to 'know' them, and how to use them. And to want to use them" (360).

Not only does Gramsci make the distinction between understanding Freedom and knowing Freedom, he also highlights the importance of using these "objective conditions" to make Freedom actual. James foreshadows Gramsci's distinction between understanding Freedom and knowing Freedom, by revealing how Western theorists, like Thomas Jefferson and Karl Marx, used discourse to create a proscribed understanding of Freedom while the Haitian freedom fighters used revolution to instantiate a first-hand knowledge of Freedom. Here we may apprehend that manner that James, like Du Bois before him, uses the historical instance of African diasporic revolution to reveal how the theory and practice of resistance may become one and the same.

Gramsci, like James, places emphasis on the individual's ability to transform the world through his/her knowledge of Freedom, stressing that: "Man

is to be conceived as an historical bloc of purely individual and subjective elements…To transform the external world…is to potentiate oneself and to develop oneself" (360). As the human embodiment of history that actualized Freedom and charted the course of Western modernity, the Haitian freedom fighters changed the course of world history through their unwavering pursuit of liberation from slavery and European colonial rule.

In his final chapter James, like Du Bois, is interpellated by the call of history, only James is decidedly more optimistic in his treatment of how the San Domingo revolution will be viewed in perpetuity:

> What happened in San Domingo…is one of those pages in history which every schoolboy should learn, and most certainly will learn, some day. The national struggle against Bonaparte in Spain, the burning of Moscow by the Russians that fills the histories of the period, were anticipated and excelled by the blacks and Mulattoes of the island of San Domingo. The records are there. *For self-sacrifice and heroism, the men, women and children who drove out the French stand second to no fighters for independence in any place or time. And the reason was simple. They had seen at last that without independence they could not maintain their liberty, and liberty was far more concrete for former slaves than the elusive forms of political democracy in France*. (356-357) (Emphasis added)

James's insistence on the historical import of the San Domingo Revolution is quite telling. Not only does he insist on its future study because of the Revolution's pertinence to Western history, he defines this relevance through the Haitian freedom fighters' awareness of Freedom as it was catalyzed by the materiality of their enslavement. As James shows, the enslaved women, men, and children of San Domingo could better grasp the significance of liberty than those members of the French bourgeoisie who only glimpsed Freedom's import in the

vaunted realm of theoretical abstraction. Unfortunately, however, James's optimism was just that, for the Haitian Revolution is not taught within the context of radical Western historical developments alongside the Russian Revolution. Its instruction is relegated to courses in Africana and Caribbean studies, even though all students of history would benefit from its many lessons, not just those specializing in non-Western disciplines.

In *Black Reconstruction* and *The Black Jacobins*, we find the work of two African diasporic philosophers who sought to contextualize the advent of eighteenth and nineteenth-century modernity through the related events of chattel slavery, global capitalism, and Empire. Du Bois and James's radical sensibility in these texts gave birth to historic revisions of both traditional and radical Western theory by casting their Eurocentricity in high relief. The enslaved African diasporic proletariat of *Black Reconstruction* and the *Black Jacobins* introduced an even more problematic dialectic of capitalist oppression: a white Southern and European ruling class and an enslaved African proletariat. However, this African diasporic proletariat created a culture of resistance that Du Bois and James duly recognize as the catalyst of modernity and Empire. The imperial dialectic of European domination and native subordination begun by Du Bois and James would be further probed in Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*.

If one is nearly everywhere told that one is not fully a human being, but one finds oneself struggling constantly with human responsibilities – over life and death, freedom and lack thereof…the moment of theoretical reflection demands engagement with such idiosyncrasy…including engagements with ontological questions of being – for example, essence, necessity, contingency, and possibility – and teleological questions of where humanity should be going – for example, liberation, humanization, and freedom.

Lewis Gordon

Blacks alone are reduced to being a color…And though they are not the only victims of racism, blacks alone have been set apart, degraded and ostracized exclusively on the basis of race and color. Thus the striving to create and affirm our identity and humanity in defiance of racial essentialization and domination forms the common ground of the black liberation struggle. The struggle for identity entails a struggle for a liberated 'black consciousness.

Robert Birt

Chapter Three: The Existential

Unlike W.E.B. Du Bois' signification of Frederick Douglass' orature in *Black Reconstruction* and C.L.R. James' references to *Black Reconstruction's* historical innovation in *Lectures on the Black Jacobins*, Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* neither invokes Du Bois nor James by name. Fanon's interdisciplinary study does, however, recall Du Bois and James' larger theoretical project of centralizing the Africana subject's pivotal role in watershed moments of Western historical and ideological developments. As a psychiatrist and political philosopher, Fanon's concerns are the psychology, materiality, and ontology of the colonized subject; thus he reinterprets psychoanalysis, materialism and existentialism in *Black Skin, White Masks* to thoroughly scrutinize the colonial subject's lived experience of racism. Though it is generally held that existentialism and materialism are opposing philosophies, and

that existentialism is generally viewed as "a philosophy of crisis,"[60] this perception should not occlude its more practical implicitly materialist preoccupation with the human condition. Indeed, existentialism's ideological influence:

> …derives from the fact that *it has concerned itself with human existence in its cultural and historical context…existential philosophers have deliberately and self-consciously addressed themselves to the human situation as they themselves have been involved in it*. (Schrader 3) (emphasis added)

That existentialism is firmly grounded in historical and cultural contexts, and its theorist's experiences of said social fields, reveals its potential for a more radical interrogation and application of two of its principal themes, Being and Freedom. These themes have been integral to the Africana historical experience of Western chattel slavery and Empire, just as they are integral to Africana scholars' counter-hegemonic discursive mission. Lewis Gordon reminds us that:

> The…ontological question was examined by many philosophers and social critics of African descent in the nineteenth century, including such well-known and diverse figures as Martin Delany, Maria Stewart, Anna Julia Cooper, and (early) Du Bois. It was not until the late 1940's, however, that a self-avowed existential examination of these issues emerged, ironically through the work of a European philosopher – namely, Jean-Paul Sartre. (8-9)

As Gordon and I have demonstrated, Africana thinkers have analyzed existentialist issues of Being and Freedom in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is highly ironic that more than a century after these philosophical questions were raised by Africana people – those directly affected by the material

---

[60] George Alfred Schrader, *Existential Philosophers: Kierkegaard to Merleau-Ponty* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967) 2.

conditions of chattel slavery, racial oppression, and their attendant phenomenological effects – that Jean-Paul Sartre would categorize these same concerns under the philosophical rubric of existentialism.

In the 1950's Frantz Fanon and Jean-Paul Sartre applied the ontological and phenomenological aspects of existential philosophy to dialectical materialism, forging a multi-disciplinary discourse against the capitalist and hegemonic exigencies of Western Empire. They expanded existentialism's philosophical base to incorporate the complicating elements of anti-Arab and anti-African racism on colonial identity formation during the French-Algerian War. The subsequent decolonization of Algeria, which served as the revolutionary template for the remainder of the colonized Third World, provided Fanon and Sartre with a contemporary example of dialectical materialism within the context of Empire, one that readily accommodated the socio-political merit of existentialist thought vis a vis global decolonization.[61]

While it is generally held that Fanon's radicalism was born of his commitment to the Algerian decolonization struggle, the seeds of his radicalism lay in the 1952 publication of his first book, *Black Skin, White Masks*.[62] In it, a distinctly Fanonian theoretical method is established. Fanon not only breaks with the Negritude philosophy of his mentor, Aimee Cesaire, but he combines elements of psychoanalysis, dialectics, materialism and existentialism, effectively establishing a theoretical foundation that would become the basis of his later

[61] James D. Le Sueur, *Uncivil War: Intellectuals and Identity Politics During the Decolonization of Algeria* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001) 227-249.
[62] Tony Martin, "Rescuing Fanon from the Critics" in *African Studies Review*. 13.3 (1970): 381-399.

political writings.[63] In the same manner that Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction* and James's *The Black Jacobins* rewrote Marxist history by centralizing the enslaved African's role in the birth of modernity, capitalism, and Empire, Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952, 1967) expands existential philosophy's focus on Being and Freedom to foreground the historical reality of anti-African racism and European colonialism, thereby revealing existentialism's potential use as a discursive critique against Empire.

A trained psychiatrist when he wrote *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon ostensibly employs psychoanalytic methods to probe the colonized subject's "abnormal" psyche. Fanon's methodology combines what he terms ontogeny, phylogeny, and sociogeny – an innovative process that analyzes the individual colonial subject, the collective colonized subject class, and the larger colonial society as dysfunctional outgrowths of European Empire.[64] Fanon uses this method of analyzing the colonized and the colonizer to theorize on Being and Freedom within what he terms the Manichean colonial world, a world where the colonizer represents the embodiment of universal good and the colonized that of pure evil. In Fanon's employment of Manichaeism[65], we may readily apprehend the historical and ideological legacy of the sixteenth-century Empire and anti-African racism, predicated upon the dualism of an inherently superior European

---

[63] For Fanon's disenchantment with the Negritude movement, see David Caute, *Frantz Fanon* (New York: Viking Press, 1970) 21-23; Irene Gendzier, Frantz Fanon: A Critical Study (New York: Random House-Pantheon Books, 1973) 21; Messay Kebede, "The Rehabilitation of Violence and the Violence of Rehabilitation: Fanon and Colonialism" in *Journal of Black Studies*. 31.5 (2001): 539-562; Tony Martin, "Rescuing Fanon from the Critics" in *African Studies Review*. 13.3 (1970): 381-399. On *Black Skin, White Masks'* theoretical significance for Fanon's later writings, see Tony Martin.

[64] *Black Skin, White Masks*. Trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967) 11.

[65] Founded by Mani, Manichaeism is a third-century Persian religion based on the duality of universal good and evil.

identity (white/good) and an essentially inferior African identity (black/evil) that was discussed in chapter one. Yet Fanon's white-black binary is further complicated by three centuries of attendant philosophical and political developments, for his Manichean colonial world is delineated through an anti-imperialist and pro-liberation discourse that revises elements of Hegelian dialectics, Marxist materialism, Heideggerian phenomenology, and Sartrian Existentialism[66] by positing the colonial subject's quest for Freedom.

Fanon utilizes the above-cited theoretical pastiche to elucidate the totalizing oppression of Western hegemony and Empire, and its impact on several related fields of the colonial subject's lived experience: the psychological, the material, the dialectical, and the existential. Therefore, as someone committed to "analyzing and destroying" the "psychoexistential complex" resulting from the "juxtaposition of the black and white races" (12), Fanon must reveal breadth and depth of said complex(es). Thus, he applies, and thereby revises, key principles from these divergent schools of Western thought in his analysis of the colonial subject, in particular, and the ideological structures of European colonialism, in general. In doing so, he not only reveals the (individual) psychological and (social) institutional effects of imperial hegemony, he also illuminates its firm hold on the colonized subject's psyche in its manifestation as an insidious inferiority complex.

The ideological structures of colonialism, indeed, colonialism's very survival, demands the complete eradication of native culture, history, citizenship,

---

[66] Op. Cit. pp. 227-249; See also Irene L. Gendzier, *Frantz Fanon: A Critical Study* (New York: Random House-Pantheon Books, 1973) 4-21.

and language; and the replacement of these with European systems of culture, history, citizenship, and language. This supplanting of native culture is accomplished through the reconditioning of native populations. Fanon states that:

> Insofar as he conceives of European culture as a means of stripping himself of his race, he becomes alienated…it is a question of a victim of a system based on the exploitation of a given race by another, on the contempt in which a given branch of humanity is held by a form of civilization that pretends to superiority. (224)

The native must be convinced of her essential inferiority in order for her to submit to foreign rule, thereby ensuring the colonial project's very survival. The colonial world creates and perpetuates the collective inferiority complex among colonized subjects; thus, European cultural imperialism and internalized inferiority become the dualistically defining characteristic of the colonized subject class's lived experience. Fanon further expostulates that: "The feeling of inferiority of the colonized is correlative to the European's feeling of superiority" (93).

Although he depicts the colonial world as a nearly impenetrable systemic fortress of Western hegemony, his diagnosis is not fatal. He posits the potential for native Freedom and, in doing so, reveals the colonial subject's necessary quest for existential actualization, human potential fulfilled by risking death in a violent confrontation for human recognition and, most importantly, Freedom. Fanon reveals the liberated consciousness of the colonial subject, and the resultant liberated society, as the quintessential site of existential actualization. Thus, through *Black Skin, White Mask's* theoretical mélange of psychoanalysis, dialectics, materialism, and existentialism Fanon accomplishes two

unprecedented, and related, discursive feats: Being and Freedom seemingly reach their apotheosis within the historical and political context of Africana liberation. And somewhat paradoxically, European-centered schools of Western thought are used to posit the colonial subject's liberated consciousness as the quintessential site of existential actualization.

Black Skin, White Masks's, imagistic title seems to announce Fanon's theoretical mission: to reveal the existential crisis lying at the heart of the black/colonized subject's lived experience under the inherently racist workings of Empire. The title, *Black Skins, White Masks*, seemingly announces the multi-disciplinary approach Fanon uses to probe the colonial subject's crisis of self-identification, as the binary formulation of Black skins and white masks describes several theoretical dichotomies: psychoanalytical, in the employment of a mask to obscure true identity; dialectical, in the play of opposing racial identities and symbolically Manichean forces; and ontological, in the subsuming of black identity by the mask of white identity. The Negro is black but, according to Fanon, the stultifying effects of colonialism's white mask prevent her from existing by and for herself; she must exist by and for white civilization, for as Fanon states in *Black Skin, White Masks'* introduction: "White civilization and European culture have forced an existential deviation on the Negro" (12).

This existential deviation is manifest in the colonized subject's forced denial of her own native identity. Wearing a white mask negates native/black identity and all that it represents – racial and ethnic particularity, racial self-identification, and native history and culture. A colonial subject, himself, and a

psychiatrist, Fanon understood colonialism as the historical, ideological and material deviation that breeds what he terms psychological "disalienation" in colonized subjects. So even though Fanon begins by declaring *Black Skin, White Masks* a psychological study, he simultaneously insists that the colonial subject's inferiority complex is the direct result of extenuating social and economic forces created by the material realities of colonialism. In his introduction Fanon plainly states that:

> The analysis that I am undertaking is psychological. In spite of this it is apparent to me that the effective disalienation of the black man entails an immediate recognition of social and economic realities. *If there is an inferiority complex, it is the outcome of a double process: primarily economic; subsequently, the internalization – or better the epidermalization – of this inferiority*. (10) (emphasis added)

The social and economic realities of colonialism that necessitate native poverty and degradation and imperial wealth and privilege, according to Fanon, also contribute to the colonized subject class's inferiority complex, for a causal link is established between the materiality of colonial oppression and the native's identity as a black-skinned colonized subject. Fanon's colonial disalienation, or self-alienation, is the internalization of native inferiority. This condition makes the colonial subjects plight ineluctable, for as long as she is black she will remain inferior in the eyes of the European colonizer and justifiably oppressed. The colonized is seemingly locked into a cycle of oppression, a material condition that catalyzes the psychological complex of self-alienation. In proving how the material reality of colonial oppression creates and maintains psychological complexes, Fanon illuminates the ways in which a detailed study of colonialism

imbricates two critical approaches that are, generally, perceived as theoretically opposed: dialectical materialism and psychoanalysis. On *Black Skin, White Masks's* critical juxtaposition of these contrasting sciences, Anne McClintock notes that:

> The audacity of [Fanon's] insight is that it allows one to ask whether the psychodyanmics of colonial power and anti-colonial subversion can be interpreted by deploying…the same concept and techniques used to interpret the psychodynamics of the unconscious…in *Black Skin, White Masks*…he insists that…racial alienation is not only an 'individual question' but also involves a 'socio-diagnostic'. Reducing Fanon to a purely formal psychoanalysis, or a purely structural Marxism, risks foreclosing precisely those suggestive tensions that animate…the most subversive elements in his work. (94)

It is these suggestive tensions between Marxism and psychoanalysis that establish critical commonalities, which, in turn, forge unexpected linkages between these divergent theoretical approaches. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon demonstrates how the (individual) colonial subject's abnormal psychological state is the result of an aberrant (social) material state: that of a dominated, subjugated, and degraded colonized existence. The colonial subject's awareness of Being is, therefore, distilled from the oppressive material conditions of Western domination that compromise her individual psyche and ontology. For this reason, Fanon's quote bears repeating: "If there is an inferiority complex, it is the outcome of a double process: -- 1 primarily economic; subsequently 2, the internalization – or, better the epidermalization of this inferiority" (10)

Before examining Fanon's explorations of Being and Freedom in *Black Skin, White Masks*, it is first necessary to situate Fanon as a psychiatrist and

intellectual whose motivations were professional, stemming from his chosen field of psychiatry; social, originating in his identification as a colonial subject; and intellectual, arising from his intense study of Western philosophy.[67]

During his psychiatric residency in France at Saint Alban hospital in 1952, Fanon studied under a professor who exposed him and his fellow classmates to socio-therapy, a method of psychiatry stressing the indivisibility of the individual patient from her specific social environment and societal orientation. This form of socio-therapy offers a diagnostic method that places equal weight on the individual and her social orientation. This socio-therapeutic model moved Fanon to probe the individual psyche and apply his findings to an examination of the societal factors involved in said individual's psychological complexes.

With the colonial subject as his patient, Fanon seemingly applies this method of socio-therapy to the individual colonial subject, to the social setting of the French colonial Antilles, and to the wider colonial world.[68] Concomitant to Fanon's professional forays into socio-therapy, he was exposed to a significant amount of existentialist literature that was popular in 1950's France. Fanon studied the works of Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre, among the works of other philosophers, whose exegeses on phenomenology and ontology complimented his earlier undergraduate education in the principal authors of

---

[67] Regarding this contextualization of Fanon, I am in no way supporting Henry Louis Gates's call in "Critical Fanonisms" to "historicize" Fanon as a means of neutralizing conflicting contemporary critical interpretations of Fanon's legacy in postcolonial theory; rather I am attempting to show how Fanon's engagement with the socio-political and philosophical tomes of the Western canon enabled him to radically expand their previously European-centered parameters. See Henry Louis Gates, "Critical Fanonisms" in Critical Inquiry. 17.3 (1991): 457-470.

[68] Although Fanon is rather firm in *Black Skin, White Masks'* introduction that his study is specifically pertinent to the colonial world of the French Antilles, the remainder of the text makes numerous references to the colonial subject in general.

Western radical theory: Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, and Leon Trotysky.[69] Based on Fanon's exposure to psychiatric socio-therapy's materialist concern with the individual as a product of her social milieu, it seems that his methodology in *Black Skin, White Masks* was borne of his application of socio-therapeutic analysis to his examination of the colonial situation. For Fanon uses the colonized subject as the psychiatric patient, just as he analyzes her larger socio-political context as a subject of European Empire, influenced by its attendant ideological and political discourses of racism. This distinctly Fanonian method combines key principles from the schools of thought to which he was exposed as a colonized subject studying in the European metropole: psychoanalysis, dialectics, materialism, and existentialism.

While some consider Fanon's theoretical amalgam idiosyncratic[70], critic George Schrader comments on the rather seamless conceptual progression from Freudian psychoanalysis to Heideggerian phenomenology. Schrader contends that Freud's study of the unconscious motives behind human behavior offers a theoretical bridge to Heidegger's theory of ontology. He insists that:

> It is quite easy to make the transition from Freud's psychoanalytic theory of human behavior to Heidegger's fundamental ontology. We need only to expand our analysis in order to grasp the basic principles of ontology…Heidegger's thesis is that ontological concerns are operative in all…human activity. If Heidegger is correct…ontology is relevant to the most commonplace features of our experience. (37)

---

[69] Gendzier Op. Cit. 19-20.

[70] On the cover of Grove Press' 1967 edition of *Black Skin, White Masks*, the reviewer from *Newsweek* describes Fanon's work as, "…a strange, haunting mélange of existential analysis, revolutionary manifesto, metaphysics, prose poetry and literary criticism…"

One such prosaic feature of human experience would be desire; and according to Freud human behavior is the cumulative manifestation of unconscious desires, desires that shape the understanding of Being. Just as Freudian psychoanalysis implies that the unconscious dictates our experience of Being through the (un)conscious manifestation of our desires, choices and actions, Heideggerian phenomenology posits Being as the center of our lived experience, a lived experience that cannot be divorced from the world in which we live. Hinchman and Hinchman remark that in *Being and Time*:

> Heidegger builds on Husserl's central argument that subject and object, human awareness and the environing world, are indissolubly linked. One cannot even in principle treat the ego as something detached from its surrounding…the phenomenologist must open himself up to the rich totality of experience…(189)

Somewhat paradoxically, Heidegger's "rich totality of experience" includes a deliberate consideration of the individual's lived reality; thus Heidegger revises phenomenology by positing a somewhat materialist premise: the individual, and her sense of Being, is inextricably bound to the subjective experience of her social world. Indeed, *Being and Time*: "…deals with the phenomenological study of everyday life…Heidegger…transformed phenomenology…into a method through which to carry on a more radical inquiry into ontology, the study of what it is *to be*" (Hinchman & Hinchman 189). Given that Heidegger's work offers a radical intervention into the study of Being, it is no surprise, then, that Fanon a trained psychiatrist and colonial subject – himself the embodiment of historical, ideological, and geo-political forces – would be drawn

to Heideggerian phenomenology's thesis that individual ontology is the dichotomous reflection of the individual and her societal milieu.

Fanon's professional vocation as a psychiatrist and his social orientation as an intellectual seemingly allowed him to build upon this connection between the psychoanalytic and the existential; yet Fanon accomplished something that neither Freud nor Heidegger were capable of doing due to their exclusive focus on the European subject. Fanon applied Freudian psychoanalysis' theories on consciousness and Heidegger's phenomenological theories of Being to a dialectical *and* materialist analysis of the colonial world.[71] As Fanon, himself, states on his incorporation of divergent methods to his examination of colonialism in *Black Skin, White Masks*: "Although I had more or less concentrated on the psychic alienation of the black man, I could not remain silent about certain things which, however psychological they may be, produce consequences that extend into the domains of other sciences" (48). Clearly, the extreme forces of hegemonic domination intrinsic to and necessary for the survival of Empire compelled Fanon to probe the afore-mentioned sciences and philosophies.

Fanon's exposition on the profound and stultifying effects of racism as ideology and praxis on the colonized psyche in *Black Skin, White Masks* was formulated as the direct result of his methodical engagement with the philosophical and political tomes of the Western Canon. This dialogue is made clear in several of *Black Skin, White Masks'* chapter titles and sub-titles: "The

[71] Here, I make the distinction between dialectics and materialism because Fanon, himself, does. He applies Hegelian dialectics to the colonial setting in a manner that is distinct from his application of Marx's dialectical materialism to the same.

Negro and Psychopathology," "The Negro and Hegel," "The Negro and Recognition." Irene Gendzier notes that:

> …out of the amalgam of men and ideas that affected Fanon, there were other historic figures, notably Marx, Freud, and Hegel, whose presence is to be discerned in his works. *It was through the inner debate he engaged with these men, a debate molded by events in which he found himself, that Fanon eventually evolved an intellectual and political position of his own*. (21) (emphasis added)

Fanon's inner debate with these theorists raised several questions about the epistemic, ideological, and institutional aspects of anti-African racism that are foregrounded in his theorization of the Manichaean colonial world – a world whose dualistic black-white, evil-good binary, quite conveniently, lends itself to another interpretive juxtaposition of Freudian psychoanalysis and Marxist materialism. In a psychoanalytic reading, the savagely "evil", black native may symbolize the wildly undisciplined id and the "good", white colonizer that of the tempered, controlling super-ego. A materialist reading of the Manichean world's black-white binary reveals the dialectics of Empire: the white, European ruling colonial class oppresses the black native/colonized class until resistance, which is immanent, occurs.

Evinced by the autobiographical sections in chapter five, "The Fact of Blackness," *Black Skin, White Masks* self-reflexive format, suggests that Irene Gendzier is quite right in her contention that for Fanon: " To write was a form of action; it was in its origins self-centered and reflexive. But by its very nature it was also a method of communicating…in its conception, a process that engaged the conscience and consciousness of its author" (4). For as Gendzier comments

on *Black Skin, White Masks's* opening page: "Why write this book?" (7). As the text itself reveals, Fanon wrote to make sense of the psychological effects of the historical and socio-political forces of anti-African racism and Western domination.

Fanon ostensibly announces psychoanalysis as his primary method in *Black Skin, White Masks*, declaring: "Before beginning the case, I have to say certain things. The analysis that I am undertaking is psychological" (10). Nevertheless, as Diana Fuss quite rightly insists that:

> Psychoanalysis' interest in the problem of identification provides Fanon with a vocabulary and an intellectual framework in which to diagnose and to treat not only the psychological disorders produced in individuals by the violence of colonial domination but also the neurotic structure of colonialism itself. At the same time, its investigation of alterity within the historical and political frame of colonialism suggests that identification is neither a historically universal concept nor a politically innocent one. *A by-product of modernity, the psychoanalytic theory of identification takes shape within the larger cultural context of colonial expansion and imperial crisis*. (20) (emphasis added)

Indeed, Fanon's application of psychoanalytic principles to the colonial problem allows him to establish the colonial subject's individual identity formation as indiscrete from the ideological, political, and material history of European imperialism and colonial domination. Fanon declares emphatically that the colonial subject's self-identification is informed by her awareness of the specific power relationship of domination and oppression.

While Diana Fuss is quite right in asserting that psychoanalysis provides Fanon with the lexical and critical frame for his examination of the colonized individual and the larger colonial society, I would argue further that Fanon uses

psychoanalysis in the colonial setting as a theoretical springboard to leap into a more nuanced reading of obscure thematic linkages among psychoanalysis, dialectics, materialism, and existentialism – all of which Fanon teases out through an analysis of the colonial subjects' lived experience. On *Black Skin, White Masks'* employment of psychoanalysis and his acute awareness of the need for dialectical engagement in the colonial setting, Fanon explains that:

> *When I began this book, having completed my medical studies, I thought of presenting it as my thesis. But dialectic required the constant adoption of positions.* Although I had more or less concentrated on the psychic alienation of the black man, I could not remain silent about certain things which, however psychological they may be, produce consequences that extend into the domain of other sciences. (48) (emphasis added)

Despite *Black Skin, White Masks'* psychoanalytic subject matter, and Fanon's related need to meet his professional training requirement, he reveals his deep engagement with Hegelian and Marxist discourse by holding fast to the requirements of dialectic. He explicitly states that he could not write *Black Skin, White Masks* as a purely psychological study because he saw the colonial subject's psychological alienation as the result of the historical and material alienation of European hegemony and colonial rule. For Fanon, the crisis of Empire provides the ideal socio-political and ideological field within which to apprehend the colonial subject's internalization of hegemonic ideals and practices, as many of *Black Skin, White Masks'* other chapter titles prove: "The Woman of Color and the White Man," The Man of Color and the White Woman," "The So-Called Dependency Complex of Colonized People," and "The Fact of Blackness."

Fanon's engagement with the historical forces of colonization and decolonization seemingly compels him to identify the layered aspects of colonial oppression: material, psychological, and existential and their imbrication upon the colonized subject's psyche. To illustrate this layering, he begins his first chapter with one of the starkest manifestations of imperial hegemony in the colonies – the imposition of European language and its impact on native self-identification. "The Negro and Language" elucidates the manner in which the colonized subject's individual ontology and self-identification – her Being – is problematized by the linguistic and cultural imperatives of Empire. Fanon contends that there is:

> …a basic importance to the phenomenon of language. That is why I find it necessary to begin with this subject, which should provide us with one of the elements in the colored man's comprehension of the other. *For it is implicit that to speak is to exist absolutely for the other*. (17) (emphasis added)

Fanon's theorization of imperial linguistic dominance as fundamental to the colonized subject' apprehension of Being (and the colonizer as other) positions language as both an expression of culture *and* existence. That the native language is forcibly suppressed under colonialism is highly significant, for language defines cultural identity.[72] Fanon goes even further to suggest that the adoption of an imperial language has existential implications, as the colonizer's language forces the colonial subject to "exist absolutely" for the colonizer, the other.

---

[72] The connected issues of imperial language appropriation, cultural imperialism, and mental colonization are explored in great detail in Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (Oxford: James Currey, Ltd., 1981)

This position on linguistic communication as the occasion for "existing absolutely for the other" reflects Fanon's dialogue with Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* and Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre theorized extensively on the Other, positing that: "…the appearance of the Other in my experience is manifested by the presence of organized forms such as gestures and expressions, acts and conducts" (307). These gestures and acts include the exchange of language, and in the colonial setting language becomes representative of forced foreign domination. It follows, then, that the foreign language becomes primary; the native language secondary; and the field of language itself, as it pertains to identity formation, a distorted inversion of the natural order.

In this regard, Fanon's exposition on identity formation in the colonial world is similar to Heidegger's interpretation of language in *Being and Time*: "*Language for Heidegger is not a mere instrument of communication…it is the very dimension in which human life moves,* that which brings the world to be in the first place. Only where there is language is the 'world' in the distinctively human sense" (Eagleton 55) (emphasis added).

The colonized subject's life, then, moves in a foreign language and culture that – as the verbal expression of Empire – can only denigrate and debase the native. This debasement of native culture contributes to the colonial subject's inferiority complex. She is forced to adopt the colonizer's language to be deemed conditionally and marginally human by the foreign colonial administration that now rules her land. Fanon avers that:

> The problem that we confront in this chapter is this: the Negro of the Antilles will be proportionately whiter – that is, he will come closer to being a real human being – in direct ratio to his mastery of the French language. I am not unaware that this is one of man's attitudes face to face with Being…*Every colonized people – in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality – finds itself face to face with the language…that is, with the culture of the mother country*. The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness. (18) (emphasis added)

Here, Fanon uses the imposition of European imperial language to establish a causal chain of the colonial subject's psychological and ontological disalienation. First, he proclaims that the edicts of Empire, necessitating the subordination of native language and culture to those of France (Europe), force an inferiority complex. Then, he contests that the very cause of the colonial subject's inferiority complex – the forced acquisition of European imperial language – forces another dichotomy: marginal social acceptance by the colonizer. The inferiority complex, or white mask of language, is set firmly in place because the colonized becomes forcibly inculcated into a system of knowledge, through the Ideological State Apparatuses of educational, cultural, and social institutions. Because of the proselytizing effects of cultural imperialism, she will then believe that her native culture is primitive, barbaric, and inherently inferior. Messay Kebede argues that:

> Colonial discourse and rule have so dehumanized and degraded colonized peoples that they have to go through the whole process of relearning to be human. The tag of primitiveness affixed on them, the contempt for and complete destruction of their cultural legacy, their forced assimilation into the European culture…all

> have resulted in the inculcation, deep into the soul of each colonized person, of a devastating inferiority complex. (540)

Consequently, the colonial subject may only understand her ontology through the distorted prism of racist European acculturation, an understanding that necessarily problematizes the native's apprehension of Being. The native dons the mask of whiteness – of white civilization, language and culture, and is effectively self-alienated from her native identity. Stuart Hall contends that the self-alienation resulting from the internalization of colonial racism is, in fact, the internalization of the self-as-other because:

> Racism…operates by constructing impassable symbolic boundaries between racially constituted categories, and its typically binary system of representation constantly marks and attempts to fix and neutralize the difference between belonging and otherness…as Fanon constantly reminded us, the epistemic violence is both outside and inside…that is why it is a question, not only of 'black skin' but of *Black Skin, White Masks* – the internalizing of the self-as-other. (445)

Fanon illustrates this internalizing of the self as other through the example of an Antillean school child who is taught that his ancestors are not enslaved Africans, forcibly transported to the Antilles, but the French colonizers who oppressed them: "The black…in the Antilles who in his lessons is forever talking about 'our ancestors, the Gauls,' identifies himself with the explorer, the bringer of civilization, the white man who carries truth to savages – an all white truth" (147). In the Antillean classroom the epistemic violence of colonialism is carried out ideologically through the imposition of European culture, language, and

education; and historically in the privileging of European history over native history and culture.

Echoing Fanon, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o concurs that in the colonial world: "Literary education was now determined by the dominant language while also reinforcing that dominance. Orature (oral literature)…stopped…Thus language and literature were taking us further and further from ourselves, from our world to other worlds" (12). This removal from the self is only deepened by an educational system that exposes the colonized subject to central authors of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century Western canon – David Hume, Thomas Jefferson, and G.W.F. Hegel. The writings of these three proponents of anti-African racism (detailed at length in chapter one) stand at the center of Western discourse and, indeed, shaped the ideological mission of Empire:

> …it was worse when the colonial child was exposed to images of his world as mirrored in the written languages of his colonizer. *Where his own native languages were associated in his impressionable mind with low status…or downright stupidity, non-intelligibility and barbarism, this was reinforced by the world he met in the works of…some of the giants of western intellectual and political establishment, such as Hume…Thomas Jefferson…or Hegel*…Hegel's statement that there was nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in the African character is representative of the racist images of Africans and Africa…a colonial child was bound to encounter in the literature of the colonial language. The results could be disastrous. (18) (emphasis added)

That Wa Thiong'o stresses the presence of David Hume, Thomas Jefferson, and G.W.F. Hegel in the colonial classroom reminds us of the far-reaching influence of the Western canon. The canon's ideological impact on the colonized subject, indeed the African diasporic subject, becomes yet another

manifestation of Empire and hegemony as she is exposed to racist discourse that denigrates her existence and seemingly justifies her oppression.

Though Fanon's example of imperial education – the Antillean schoolchild who is taught about her ancestors the Gauls – rings with sarcasm, this moment of colonial inculcation further reveals his engagement with Western radical theory and its emphasis on the institutionalization of colonial oppression. Fanon's example also underscores colonialism's epistemological violence, a violence perpetuated through the Ideological State Apparatus of the French-Antillean educational system. Though Fanon does not name the school system as a contemporary example of Vladimir Lenin's Ideological State Apparatus, the imperialist inculcation of his Antillean school child shows how imperialist ideology establishes and maintains Empire through the denial of the African ancestral presence and the elision of contributions to Antillean culture.

For Lenin, the Ideological State Apparatuses function: "…massively and productively by ideology, but they also function secondarily by repression…" (Althusser 145). But it is the Ideological State Apparatus of the educational system that: "certainly has the dominant role" (Althusser 155). Fanon's example also implies that each succeeding generation of Antilleans becomes an unconscious co-conspirator in its own oppression. And the language in which these lessons are taught is the colonizer's language – the official imperial language of the Antilles – French. Paul-Nursey Bray credits Fanon's seemingly prophetic ideological and political vision, highlighting that Fanon:

> …anticipates a number of contemporary positions in his recognition that a liberated consciousness is not an automatic

> response to social change…There must, in addition, be a process by which the ideological forms are directly confronted and overturned, a basic revision of 'the idea that the colonized holds of himself.' (135)

To overturn the ideological structures of colonialism, these structures must first be identified. Fanon identifies the French-Antillean educational system as an ideological structure and, in doing so, proves the need for its elimination if the native is to attempt mental decolonization. Part and parcel of this potential psychic liberation is the issue of language. If language is the plane upon which humans experience a uniquely human existence, as both Fanon and Heidegger seemingly agree, then language dictates one's apprehension of Being. For Fanon, the colonial subject experiences a complete and utter disunity of Being with the internalization of not only a foreign language, but also the imperial language of an oppressively, racist value system.

Fanon emphasizes the colonial subject's resultant ontological dissonance in his description of the French colonial subject who relocates to France as one who experiences "definitive…absolute mutation" (19). Fanon further asks of this relocated colonized subject: "What is the origin of this personality change? What is the source of this new way of being…the fact that the newly returned Negro adopts a language different from that of the group into which he was born is evidence of a dislocation, a separation" (25).

Fanon's resultant disalienation, or self-alienation, the forced apprehension of the self as evil other in the Manichean colonial world, feeds and perpetuates the inherently racist ideology of European colonial rule. *Black Skin, White Masks'*

appropriation of Manichaeism effectively connotes the extreme power dynamics of colonial rule –as evinced by the ideology of racism intrinsic to the colonial educational system – wherein the colonizer is positioned as the epitome of all that is good and the colonized native is viewed as the quintessence of evil. This symbolic duality cum material duality is emblematic on several related levels.

First, Fanon's implicit aim in *Black Skin, White Masks* is to unearth and explain the colonized subject's psychological complex by proving said complex's roots in the material, discursive, dialectical, and existential circumstances. His explanation of the ideological and historical racism behind colonialism, thus, posits an extreme hegemonic dynamic that justifies and rationalizes the irrationality (or neurotic structure) of the racist, colonial impulse itself. For it must be remembered that: "Racism is an ideology that justifies the economic exploitation, oppression, and the domination of one country by another, of one race by another, the cruder the form of exploitation, the cruder the accompanying ideology" (Nursey-Bray 136). Fanon's examples on imperial language acquisition and colonial classroom lessons illustrate the crudeness of racism as practice and praxis.

That the attendant ideology of racism rationalizes the subjugation of one race by another makes racism a violent practice and praxis. As Jean-Paul Sartre expostulates in *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, racism must:

> …become a practice: it is not contemplation awakening the significations engraved on things; it is in itself self-justifying violence…The activity of racism is a praxis dominated by a 'theory' ('biological,' 'social' or empirical racism, it does not matter which) aiming…to use every possible means to increase the 'sub-humanity' of the natives. (720)

Much like Fanon's definition of racism as both ideology and praxis, Sartre's denotation of racism is highly instructive in its insistence on the epistemic and physical violence of racism in the creation of Empire, both of which reveal its hegemonic nature. To illustrate Fanon and Sartre's similar conceptualizations of racism as ideology, praxis, and self-justifying violence I will revisit Fanon's Antillean school child as she is inculcated into the spurious tenets of European cultural and racial superiority.

Picture a full classroom of Antillean school children repeating the teacher's historically fabricated litany, "Our ancestors, the Gauls..." Ideology is at work, its epistemic and psychological violence obliterating the native history and culture of the Antilles. Now picture a lone child raising her hand in protest, telling her teacher (in perfect French) that her great-grandmother, a former slave, told her that all of her ancestors came from Africa, and that the Creole they were forbidden to speak in school was a mixture of their native African language(s) and their acquired French. Now hear the exclamations of shock and surprise around the classroom as the teacher's face screws violently into a frown.

The teacher steadies her angry voice and tells the student that her great-grandmother is sadly mistaken. The young girl says that her grandmother is never wrong, and her teacher pulls a ruler from her desk drawer. She calls the trouble-making student to the front of the class, telling her to hold out her right hand. Crack! The ruler smacks the girl's small palm. Where are your ancestors from? France, the class answers. The physical violence of corporal punishment ensures

that the epistemic violence of colonial ideology and education will, from henceforth, go unchallenged.[73] Quite tellingly, a thorough investigation into how the use of Martinican Creole would seemingly subvert French imperial culture is conspicuously absent from Fanon's study.

Using the Ideological State Apparatus of the educational system, Fanon depicts the systemic and hegemonic nature of European imperialism and colonialism. The forced domination of an entire people is justified through ideological structures that perpetuate the myth of not only native inferiority, but that of an aberrant native evil, an evil that must be contained, controlled, and conditioned through imperial domination. Fanon's Manichaean metaphor allows for a highly symbolic allegory for the egregious ideology of racism behind colonial domination, while underscoring the colonized class' debilitating inferiority complex. It bears repeating that under this Manichaean system, native history and culture are reified as the quintessence of evil, of primitivism and backwardness, and since a people's collective self-perception and self-identification are inextricably linked to the colonizer's imperial denigration of said native culture, the natives' collective self-esteem is effectively decimated. On the centrality of racism in Fanon's Manichean construct Paul Nursey-Bray explains that:

> Fanon's discussion of the Manichaean character of the settler/native relations…is seeking to capture the character of the colonial world at that precise historical moment when the ideology of racism is paramount…an understanding of the Manichaeism of the value structure of the colonial world remains of importance.

[73] Fanon explores the connection between epistemic violence and physical violence further in *The Wretched of the Earth*. Trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963) Chapters 1, 4, and 5.

> The ideology of racism has to be confronted because it imprisons the native within a value system that construes their identity in negative terms of inadequacy and impotence. (137)

Nursey-Bray is quite right to characterize the colonized subject's self-identification as "inadequate and impotent"; however, I would argue further that the native's self-perception of powerlessness goes far beyond ordinary feelings of negative self-worth. It must be remembered that the colonized subject suffers from an inferiority complex predicated on the colonizer's institutionalization of her sub-humanity. Thus, while Nursey-Bray's assessment of the ideological intractability of anti-African racism is accurate, I would argue further that the Manichean poles represented by white and black are not only good and evil, but also Being human and Being Apart from humanity.

The native's apprehension of Being Apart is epitomized in her desire to become white. On this craving for racial transubstantiation, Fanon observes that: "It is in fact quite customary in Martinique to dream of a form of salvation that consists of magically turning white" (44). The fact that the native desires to become white speaks to the depth of her self-alienation. The native no longer wishes to be perceived as sub-human and remain apart; she wishes to exist in the world of fully recognized humanity, the world of whiteness. Being for the native, therefore, means becomes being white. The Antillean native's internalization of the anti-African racism at the heart of the colonial project should not be surprising, given the material realities of colonialism as Fanon's examples prove. Under these circumstances, it would be a shock if the colonized subject maintained an un-changed, pre-colonial self-perception.

The native, as both Fanon and Sartre emphasize, is made to feel sub-human; what is more she is forced to become completely dependent on the colonizer, through institutionalized racism that reaches every corner of her social existence. According to V.Y. Mudimbe's assessment of native inferiority and dependence[74]:

> The alienation of colonialism entails both the objective fact of total dependence (economic, political, cultural and religious) and the subjective process of self-victimization of the dominated. The colonized internalizes the racial stereotypes imposed upon him, particularly in his attitudes towards technology, culture, and language. (175)

Mudimbe's analysis of colonial alienation as a dual process of dependence and self-victimization is rather astute; nevertheless I would stress the fact that this dual process, this transformation of the native into a dependent and victimized colonized subject entails an erasure of Being. Through the erasure of native culture and history, the mentally colonized native becomes a tabula rasa upon which the colonizer inscribes the hegemonic cultural, ideological, and symbolic edicts of the European imperial order. Her forced dependence ensures that the edicts of Empire will go unchallenged. For if the colonized subject internalizes racist European perceptions of herself, then she believes in her own inferiority, and believes in the Europeans' right to dominate. Fanon clarifies that if the native:

> *…is overwhelmed to such a degree by the wish to be white, it is because he lives in a society that makes his inferiority complex*

[74] Chapter four of *Black Skin, White Masks* is devoted entirely to debunking O. Mannoni's theory of an innate dependency complex among the colonized, predating colonial rule. Fanon refutes Mannoni's thesis by providing evidence of a learned inferiority/dependency complex following the institutionalization of colonial systems of culture, power, and knowledge.

> *possible, in a society that derives its stability form the perpetuation of this complex, in a society that proclaims the superiority of one race;* to the identical degree to which that society creates difficulties for him, he will find himself thrust into a neurotic situation. (100)

Hence colonial rule remains in tact and the colonized remain subjugated and self-alienated. For Fanon, the black-white polarity is palpable within the colonial subject's psyche, where it is also evinced in the domain of socio-sexual desire. In chapters two and three, "The Woman of Color and the White Man" and The Man of Color and the White Woman," Fanon uses the field of (heterosexual) relationships to explore the dynamics of interracial desire in the colonial world.

While several critics have analyzed Fanon's gender bias in his study of male and female colonial subjects, specifically citing the disparity between chapter two's psychoanalytic study, "The Woman of Color and the White Man," and chapter three's "The Man of Color and the White Woman[75], I would argue that Fanon's interpretation of Mayotte Capecia's autobiography *Je suis Martiniquais* reflects a gendered reading of colonialism and proto-nationalism that, in some ways, anticipates Tom Nairn's interpretation of the modern nation as the two-faced Janus.[76] Anne McClintock's reading of Nairn urges us to consider that:

> For Nairn, the nation takes shape as a contradictory figure of time: one face gazing back into the primordial mists of the past, the other

---

[75] Gwen Bergner, "Who is That Masked Woman? Or, the Role of Gender in Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*" in *Colonialism and the Postcolonial Condition* spec. issue of *PMLA*. 110.1 (1995): 75-88; Diane Fuss, "Interior Colonies: Frantz Fanon and the Politics of Identification" in *Diacritics*. 24. 2-3 (1994): 19-42; Anne McClintock, "No Longer in a Future Heaven: Gender, Race, and Nationalism" in *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives*, eds. Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti, and Ella Shohat (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) 89.

[76] Tom Nairn, *The Break-up of Britain* (London: New Left Books, 1977).

> into an infinite future…What is less often noticed, however, is that the temporal anomaly within nationalism…is typically resolved by figuring the contradiction in the representation of *time* as a natural division of *gender*. Women are represented as the atavistic and authentic body of national tradition…Men, by contrast, represent the progressive agent of national modernity. (92)

The Janus-faced nation, then, is one in which women symbolize the nation's traditional past. Where the female for Nairn represents the culturally pristine elements of the independent nation, the female for Fanon represents the anachronistic and oppressed aspects of a still colonized nation. In Fanon's interpretation of Capecia's autobiography, woman as nation is pushed even further back in time. Woman, as represented by Mayotte Capecia, comes to represent a colonial past that pre-dates the return of native sovereignty and independence from European rule; a colonial past that is rife with the gender-specific subjugation of female colonial natives under the racist, patriarchal edicts of Empire.

In Fanon's chosen excerpt of *Je suis Martiniquais*, Capecia marries a Frenchman in order to ascend the colonial racial hierarchy, despite knowing that her husband, steeped in the tenets of European racial superiority, will never truly consider her his equal: "I should have liked to be married, but to a white man. But a woman of color is never altogether respectable in a white man's eyes. Even when he loves her. I knew that" (qtd. in Fanon 42). In Gwen Bergner's estimation, Capecia's desire to marry a white man represents: "…her aspirations to privilege her socio-sexual behavior [as it is] influenced by the economic and sexual politics of a racist, patriarchal society" (83).

Although Bergner's argument seems plausible, she ignores Capecia's plainly stated desire for a white/European physiognomy and her heart-felt pride in her partial European ancestry. Capecia provides a chronological genealogy of her family's racial relations and subsequent couplings with Europeans in Martinique, revealing a self-alienation that is made evident in her emphatic preference for whiteness and white people:

> So my mother, then, was a mixture? I should have guessed it when I looked at her light color. I found her prettier than ever, and cleverer, and more refined. If she had married a white man, do you suppose I should have been completely white?...And life might not have been so hard for me?...I made up my mind that I could never love anyone but a white man, a blue-eyed blonde, a Frenchman. (qtd. in Fanon 46-47)

Here, we see the degree to which Capecia, in Fanon's estimation subscribes to the enforced ideological and cultural standard of Manichaeism. It seems that for her: "…white and black represent the two poles of a world, two poles in perpetual conflict: a genuinely Manichean concept of the world…" (44-45). And while Bergner charges that Capecia only "sometimes…lapses into valorizing whiteness," and that Fanon "sees women's economic and sexual choices as emanating from some psychic dimension of the erotic that is disconnected from material reality," (83) I would argue that Fanon seems to take the issue with the intensity of purpose with which Capecia privileges white racial identity rather than the frequency with which she does so.

Furthermore, the mental colonization that has given rise to Capecia's self-alienation is borne of her awareness of colonial society's proscriptions against native/black identity, and that she may gain access to Being – both social and

ontological – through her marriage to a Frenchman. That her self-negated identity as a woman of color may be properly obscured by the white mask of marriage to a Frenchman; that despite the stares of condescension she receives,[77] she will have access to the wealth and privilege of the racially stratified society she had always desired. Not only has she "internalized the self-as-other," but her totalizing embrace of whiteness and all that it signifies proves that her psychic assumption of a white racial identity lies at the root of her inferiority complex.

Fanon's critique of Mayotte Capecia's seems to locate her desire within the sphere of a European imperial tradition that necessitates colonial exploitation perpetuated through the conscious, and unconscious, complicity of colonized females as bearers of racially mixed progeny. The women in Capecia's family seem to represent the female as the embodiment of a "national past" that takes the Janus faced national project to an extreme wherein the female no longer symbolizes a bygone era of cultural purity, but a history of colonialism itself. It is a history that is firmly grounded in the history of European colonialism and exploitation of colonized women. Capecia's aspirations, both symbolic and biological, to whiteness represent a longing for a national past that is forever tied to the socio-political and ideological exigencies of Empire. This is particularly evident in Capecia's resolve to marry a white man, despite the racist views that prevent him from viewing her as an equal. Capecia admits her knowledge of the inequity inherent to colonial relationships among European men and women of color, yet she enters into marriage in spite of this or, as Fanon would have it, because of this.

---

[77] *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967) 43.

Fanon follows his excoriation of Capecia's autobiography with a reading of self-alienation in Rene Marand's novel, *Un homme pareil aux autres*. For my purposes, however, I would like to analyze the manner in which Fanon highlights the vexed issue of Being through excerpts of Jean Veneuse's correspondence with his friend, a Frenchman named Coulanges.

Fanon excerpts sections of Marand's novel to recount what Antillean protagonist Jean Veneuse considers an impossible situation – his wish to marry a white Frenchwoman. Veneuse asks his friend Coulanges for advice and both Coulanges's advice and the tone of his admonitions are very revealing. He demands that Veneuse abandon all foolish thoughts of belonging to the Negro race since he has, for all intents and purposes, become a Frenchman through the veritable transmogrification of his white mask into an invisible white skin. Since Veneuse has lived in France from the age of four, Coulanges even goes so far as to question Veneuse's awareness of his own racial identity. He admonishes him to remember that:

> *…you are really one of us. Perhaps you are not altogether aware of the fact. In that case accept that you are a Frenchman from Bordeaux. Get that into your thick head. You know nothing of your compatriots of the Antilles…In fact you are like us – you are "us." Your thoughts are ours. You behave as we behave…you think of yourself…as a Negro? Utterly mistaken! You merely look like one*. As for everything else, you think as a European. Since European men love only European women, you can hardly marry anyone but a woman of the country where you have always lived, a woman of our good old France, your real and only country. (qtd. in Fanon 68) (emphasis added)

Coulanges not only insults Veneuse's intelligence by calling him dense, he assumes that Veneuse lacks any and all awareness of himself as racially distinct

from the French. The fact that Veneuse, despite years of French acculturation and assimilation, still questions the feasibility of his marrying a white French woman indicates a self-identification that, while problematized by mental colonization, is still connected to his racial identification as a French-Antillean subject of African descent. Coulanges harsh words seem unnerving; however, when examined by Fanon they reveal how identity formation becomes the exclusive ideological right of the European imperialist. Fanon explains that: "the white man agrees to give his sister to the black – but on one condition: You have nothing in common with real Negroes. You are not black, you are "extremely brown" (69). Both Coulanges's challenge to the colonized Veneuse and Fanon's response to the same substantiate Diana Fuss' assertion that in *Black Skin, White Masks*:

> Fanon proposes that in the system of power-knowledge that upholds colonialism, it is the white man who lays claim to the category of the Other, the white man who monopolizes otherness to secure an illusion of unfettered access to subjectivity…Colonialism works in part by policing the boundaries of cultural intelligibility, legislating and regulating which identities attain full cultural signification and which do not. (21)

Coulanges – the white man – polices the boundaries of racial identity by asserting his right to name, or in this case not name, Veneuse as the native/colonized Other. Coulanges condescendingly extends whiteness and human subjectivity to the Antillean Veneuse because Veneuse's white mask has become indistinguishable from his "extremely brown skin." Veneuse is no longer a Negro because he has completely adapted – culturally, linguistically, and socially – to French life and has become, for all intents and purposes, a Frenchman and stranger to the life and culture of his native Antilles. This

acculturation compels Coulanges to grant Veneuse full signification as a Frenchman, no longer a colonized subject but a successful human experiment in colonial transubstantiation: the native becomes the colonizer's doppelganger because the colonizer has deigned to deem him so.

While Fanon's readings of Mayotte Capecia and Rene Marand's works offer insight into the colonial subject's self-alienation, Fanon forges ahead to explore more material and ontological manifestations of racism and their impact on the colonial subject's psyche through her lived experience. He begins this inquiry by citing Jean-Paul Sartre's *Anti-Semite and Jew* to denote the loaded meaning of overdetermination.

The black – the native, the colonial subject – ever remains black. This overdetermination, as defined first by Sartre and then revised by Fanon is best explained by Fanon's excerpt of Sartre's *Anti-Semite and Jew*: "They [the Jews] have allowed themselves to be poisoned by the stereotypes that others have of them, and they live in fear that their acts will correspond to this stereotype…We may say that their conduct is perpetually overdetermined from the inside" (qtd. in Fanon 115). Fanon goes on to differentiate between the Jew's overdetermination and the black's, stressing that the Jew, in most cases, has white skin that may obfuscate her Jewish identity. For the black, there is no chance of being seen as anything other than black. Using himself as an example, Fanon highlights that: "…in my case everything takes on a *new* guise. I am overdetermined from without. I am a slave…of my own appearance" (116).

Fanon insists that the black's overdetermination is as permanent as her black skin. The reality of this overdetermination and epidermalization is best captured in chaper five, "The Fact of Blackness" – in the English edition (1967), and "The Lived Experience of the Black" – the direct translation from the French edition (1952). Despite the different denotative and connotative meanings in these respective chapter titles, both titles reveal the manner in which *Black Skin, White Masks* combines phenomenology and ontology. As a branch of philosophy centered on the "investigation of appearances" (Hinchman & Hinchman 187) the physical manifestation of blackness is connoted in both English and French titles. Where the English edition situates blackness, itself, as the subject of a phenomenological inquiry, the French edition's title positions the black subject as the ontological subject under consideration, and the subject's blackness becomes the de facto phenomenon of her lived experience. In both cases blackness and the lived experience of being black, therefore, represent the ineluctable aspect of existential facticity[78] in the colonial world.

Fanon proceeds to define "The Fact of Blackness" / "The Lived Experience of the Black," a chapter that critic Ian Baucom has called the most influential chapter *of Black Skin, White Masks,*[79] through lengthy auto-biographical encounters of his own racial objectification instantiated by the interpellation of whites in a probing and revelatory manner. He challenges the reader's senses by exclaiming: "Dirty nigger," or simply "Look a Negro!" (109).

---

[78] Schrader Op Cit. 23-24. Here, Schrader relates facticity to the empirically determined aspects of human existence; he further stresses that although existentialist writers are preoccupied with human freedom they are equally concerned with the factuality of the human situation.

[79] Ian Baucom, "Frantz Fanon's Radio: Solidarity, Diaspora, and the Tactics of Listening" in *Contemporary Literature*. 42.1 (2001)15.

Here Fanon recounts his experiences of racist interpellation, seemingly positioning himself as the colonial neurotic by delving in to his own damaged psyche. Lewis Gordon comments that Fanon:

> …goes to a deeper level of interiority: his own experience as lived. He finds in his autobiographical moment, a set of theses converging. The chapter 'The Lived Experience of the Black' begins with a little white boy's use of language – of publicity – to enmesh Fanon in the realm of pure exteriority, the realm of epidermal schema. There, Fanon's existence is a two-dimensional objectification. (33)

This two-dimensional objectification indicates an ontological shattering where Fanon's very humanity is seemingly called into question. Fanon proceeds to describe a cleaving of racially stereotyped selves that the white boy's hailing has elicited:

> *In the train it was no longer a question of being aware of my body in the third person but in a triple person…I was responsible at the same time for my body, for my race, for my ancestors.* I subjected myself to an objective examination, I discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristics; and I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects, slave-ships, and above all else, above all: 'Sho good eatin.' (112) (emphasis added)

Fanon's ontological triplication illustrates the manner in which the black colonial subject becomes a representation, for his physicality, race, and forebears while recalling internalized stereotypes of blackness that hail from the African continent – "cannibalism and fetishism" to the American South – "Sho good eatin'". These stereotypes prove that the black colonial subject and the African diasporic subject are one and the same in their experiences of anti-African racism.

The African diasporic subject cannot exist autonomously; her ontology is ever problematized by the presence of whites, for:

> In the Weltanschauung of a colonized people there is an impurity, a flaw that outlaws any ontological explanation…Ontology…does not permit us to understand the being of the black man. For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man. (109-110)

Here, Fanon stresses the manner in which the black's apprehension of Being is problematized by the ineluctable presence of the white – individual, society, and colonial society. Ontology for the black is not an a priori reality; instead it is a reality that permanently compromised and defined by the inescapable duality with whiteness and all that it represents – white supremacy, anti-African racism, and racist stereotypes.

Fanon explores this lived binary in the afore-cited autobiographical encounters, and his reactions bespeak the anger, shock, and trauma befitting one who is experiencing a form of existential dread. In C.L.R. James's assessment of Heideggerian dread, James contends that for Heidegger:

> …Man is not afraid of anything in particular…the mere fact that you are living…and you do not know what exactly is going to happen to you…that makes in your existence the necessity of some kind of dread as to what is going to happen to you in your future. (9)

For Heidegger dread is the feeling of foreboding; it is a foreboding that awakens the fear of the known – death – and the unknown – the exact moment of death. For Fanon, this dread occurs at the moment of racist interpellation: "Dirty nigger!" Fanon captures its recurring nature through repetition; he repeats the

hailing four separate times throughout the chapter, an act of exposition that reflects its frequent occurence in the Manichean colonial world.

The existential themes of Being and Freedom in Fanon's dialectical (and dreadful) Manichean world seem to necessitate that due consideration be given to the originator of the dialectical process, G.W.F. Hegel. For Fanon, this quest for Freedom is crystallized in his interpretation of the Hegelian dialectic of recognition and struggle in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind*.

The Hegelian dialectic of individual consciousness and recognition is laid bare through Fanon's somewhat paradoxical sub-section to chapter seven entitled, "The Negro and Hegel," a heading that raises not a few red flags. First, Hegel's only position on the Negro, as was discussed in chapter one, is one of complete and utter derision. His *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* speciously establishes the Negro as neither contributing to civilization nor possessing human consciousness. Secondly, *Black Skin, White Masks* does not address the African's historical and ontological erasure from Hegelian discourse. Failing to address and refute the logic Hegel's anti-African bias makes Fanon's usage of Hegel's dialectic of consciousness and recognition from *Phenomenology of the Mind* extremely ironic.[80] Hegel's dialectic of human recognition and violent struggle encapsulates perfectly the lot of Africana peoples' four centuries long fight for humanity and Freedom under Western chattel slavery and colonialism. The very race Hegel deemed sub-human is the same race whose four-centuries long history

[80] Although Fanon engages quite vigorously with Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind*, not once does he mention Hegel's excision of Africa from the stage of world history in *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*. In fact, Fanon takes several theoretical jabs at mentor Aime Cesaire's Negritude philosophy by insisting that the discovery of ancient African kingdoms would not dispel colonial alienation. See Fanon Op Cit. 34, 225, 226.

of oppression and resistance is mirrored in Hegel's own seminal dialectic. The irony is rich.

Given Hegel's virulent anti-African position, Fanon's attraction to Hegelian discourse seems to be grounded in its animation of history as the preeminent social field that determines human experience. Hegel holds that history and culture make human beings who and what they are: "For Hegel, man is first and foremost a being who functions within the context of history and culture…he viewed human becoming as dominated by world history" (Schrader 13). And since the colonial encounter was both a consequence of Western hegemonic history and European cultural imperialism, it seems that one must also consider another European colonial subject's views on the Hegelian dialectic. Amilcar Cabral, a former Portuguese colonial subject from Guinea-Bissau, reminds us that: "There was constant resistance to [European colonial] force. If the colonial force was acting in one direction, there was always our force which acted in the opposite direction" (33). Using a dialectical framework, Cabral vividly illustrates the ineluctable nature of colonial oppression and native resistance. Thus, it seems that these exigent aspects of Hegel's dialectic are what moved Fanon to reinterpret Hegelian dialectics within the colonial setting.

Fanon's logic in *Black Skin, White Masks* is a very Hegelian logic. The text proposes that the colonial subject's inferiority complex has been created by the history and culture of European Empire and colonialism; that the colonial subject is the direct product of his environment, and of the history and culture of European domination. It is no wonder that this aspect of Hegelian discourse held

allure for Fanon, as Hegelian discourse further probes the connection between human alienation and world history even further: "The particular form of alienation experienced by an individual depends upon his situation in world history and cannot be overcome save as historical-cultural processes follow out of the logic of their development" (Schrader 14).

Setting aside the fact that Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* uses this same argument to justify the excision of African civilization from the narrative of world history, Fanon, once again applies Hegelianism to modern colonialism. For Fanon, alienation becomes the colonial subject's disalienation, a state of self-hatred created by the history and culture of European Empire, and a state of oppression that can only be overcome through the historical process of decolonization. This process of radical historical and societal change may only be catalyzed through the antithesis of the colonial inferiority complex: a liberated consciousness that strives for Freedom. This Freedom may only be attained through a confrontation, indeed, a demand for human recognition with the colonizer. Fanon distills key ideas on recognition from Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Mind* to interpret the problematic of human recognition for the colonized by the colonizer. Hegel, in Fanon's estimation, stresses that:

> Man is human only to the extent to which he tries to impose his existence on another man in order to be recognized by him. As long as he has not been effectively recognized by the other, that other will remain the theme of his actions. It is on that other being, on recognition by that other being that his own human worth and reality depend. It is that other being in whom the meaning of his life is condensed. (216-217)

In the colonial setting, Fanon asserts that the colonizer will remain the principal catalyst of the colonized subject's actions until the colonizer recognizes the native as human; furthermore that the meaning of her life is located in the colonizer's willful denial of her humanity. Unless the colonizer recognizes and acknowledges the native's humanity, according to Fanon, a violent confrontation will ensue: "It is solely by risking life that freedom is obtained; only thus it is tried and proved that the essential nature of self-consciousness is not bare existence…" (qtd. in Fanon 218)

Quite paradoxically, Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Mind* makes a rather strong case *against* the epistemological and ontological erasure of Africans inherent to Western discourse, for risking one's life for the attainment of Freedom is and has been the nexus of Africana resistance to slavery and colonialism, as was discussed in the preceding two chapters. Fanon extrapolates upon Hegel's initial proposition, stressing that:

> …human reality in-itself-for-itself can be achieved only through conflict and through the risk that conflict implies. This risk means that I go beyond life towards a supreme good that is the transformation of subjective certainty of my own worth into a universally valid objective truth…He who is reluctant to recognize me opposes me. In a savage struggle, I am willing to accept convulsions of death, invincible dissolution, but also the possibility of the impossible. (218)

For Fanon, the risk of death concretizes the essence of human existence: the need for human recognition, the quest for Freedom. His insistence that "he who is reluctant to recognize me opposes me" seemingly represent the throwing down of the revolutionary gauntlet; that he accepts death as a possible outcome of

a struggle for Freedom reveals *Black Skin, White Masks* as the originary text of Fanonian radicalism, a radicalism that is generally considered to have developed out of Fanon's later political and discursive involvement with the French-Algerian War. As Tony Martin stresses:

> *Several of Fanon's interpreters suggest that he became aware of the necessity for violence as a result of his Algerian experience. This does not seem to be the case. For as early as his first book…published in 1952, Fanon had unmistakably arrived at this conclusion by way of Hegel.* In a section of that book devoted to "The Negro and Hegel," Fanon used the plight of the Negro to elaborate a theory of the conditions under which the Negro could liberate himself. Fanon established that Freedom…can only be established by a dialectical progression in which the subjected individual imposes himself on the other in a violent demand for acceptance. (392) (emphasis added)

In the colonial world, this violent demand for recognition reaches its apex in decolonization struggles. Natives are not recognized as human beings worthy of exercising their right to sovereignty; therefore they are forced, by the nature of this dialectic, to demand recognition from their oppressors and court death to obtain it. Violence and the risk of death, for Fanon, means that the native's life is transformed into the corporeal manifestation of the "universal objective truth" of Freedom. As Messay Kebede similarly argues:

> In relating themselves to freedom through the readiness to die, the colonized clearly indicate what is at stake…What comes first is not the recognition of particularity but the humanity of the colonized, the struggle for recognition as human being…Violence expresses this disincarnate, ethereal freedom. It is how freedom exists less as an attribute than as the very subject exacting recognition through the risking of life. The rehabilitative value of violence lies in the equation that the colonized are ready to risk the only and most precious thing they have, namely, their life, for their dignity and equality. (549-550)

Kebede substantiates Fanon's position that resistance to colonial oppression takes Freedom out of the realm of abstraction and into the inequitable world of man; that the inequities of colonial oppression can be eradicated through a struggle for equality and Freedom. And on the absolute necessity for a liberated consciousness in the creation of a liberated society, Robert Birt reveals a Fanonian influence in his contention that:

> There can be no radical transformation of identity without an entire struggle to radically transform the social order. And no radical transformation of the social structure is possible (nor would it have a purpose) without the transformation of identity – the self-creation of a new kind of human being. It is this self-creation and renewal that is the aim of all effort. (211)

This new human is one who has initiated her self-recreation by decolonizing her mind, by disposing of internalized racism through the recognition of her own intrinsic value, and by daring to restructure her formerly oppressive society into one that is more egalitarian. Clearly, Fanon's call for native Freedom in *Black Skin, White Masks* reflects his ongoing dialogue with Marxist theory and its preoccupation with societal transformation. While Fanon engaged with Marxism, Kebede also asserts that Fanon's radicalism surpasses that of Marx because:

> …Fanon goes beyond the Marxist characterization of violence as the 'midwife of history.' He reads into the forceful resistance against colonialism the gestation, the birth of a historical subject. Through violence directed at their oppressors, the colonized peoples reconstitute their human self in an autonomous and unrestricted way. (554)

The violence for Freedom that Fanon espouses in *Black Skin, White Masks* reaches a crescendo in *The Wretched of the Earth*. In it, Fanon warns that:

"Decolonization…is a historical process…Decolonization is the veritable creation of new men" (36). And later:

> Independence is not a word which can be used as an exorcism, but an indispensable condition for the existence of men and women who are truly liberated, in other words who are truly masters of all the material means which make possible the radical transformation of society. (310)

Hence existential self-actualization born of violent confrontation and the risk of death for Freedom leads to a radical transformation of society in which the newly liberated masses become the instruments of societal change.

With *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon achieves a critical tour de force. His professional training in psychoanalysis and his dialogue with Western philosophers allowed him to elucidate areas of theoretical convergence among varied schools of Western thought. Like W.E.B. Du Bois and C.L.R. James before him, Fanon uses the African diasporic subject as a point of inquiry in this critical experiment making his achievement in *Black Skin, White Masks*, like Du Bois and James's, highly unexpected. For the black subject was never fully considered in the initial conceptualization of psychoanalysis, materialism, dialectics, or existentialism.

Fanon analyzes the black colonial subject's psychology and ontology; her lived experience is probed, illuminating a nexus of psychology, dialectics, materiality, and existence that comprise her day-to day reality. It is a reality that reveals the black colonial subject as a living embodiment of Western discourse's paradox. For once again the Africana subject, categorized as sub-human by Western discourse, wages battles for Being and Freedom that are reflected in

Hegelian, Marxist, and existentialist discourses. In revising these critical approaches, he creates a distinctly Fanonian hermeneutics against Empire that surpasses the radicalism of both Marx and Sartre, for Fanon positions the attainment of Freedom in the colonial world as the apotheosis of existential actualization. This totality of Being, according to Fanon, creates a new race of humans capable of creating a new world that is free of oppression, exploitation, and hegemonic domination. Idealistic, yes, but Fanon locates this idealism in the complete eradication of Empire, a seemingly impossibile feat that, if achieved, would necessitate that Freedom be granted to all.

Colonialism…conspired to create a legacy of global displacement, in which people are robbed of their homeland and the language in which their culture has been formed. Disparate diasporic communities are now faced with the shared struggle of articulating a cultural identity in which history and home reside in language…

Sophia Lehmann

It was time for sitting on porches…It was time to hear things and talk. These sitters had been tongueless, earless, eyeless conveniences all day long. Mules and other brutes had occupied their skins. But now, the sun and the bossman were gone, so the skins felt powerful and human. They became lords of sounds and lesser things. They passed entire nations through their mouths.

Zora Neale Hurston

Chapter Four: Kamau Brathwaite's Nation Language: Sound and Rememory in the Americas

Where Frederick Douglass, David Walker, W.E.B. Du Bois, C.L.R. James and Frantz Fanon redirect Western historiography's narrative axis by casting the enslaved/colonized African as an historical agent central to the genesis of Western civilization, modernity, and colonial liberation, Barbajan poet and critic Kamau Brathwaite holds this agent as the source of an Africana cultural discourse born in the Americas. Brathwaite, like his predecessors before him, credits African orature for establishing a culture of resistance against chattel slavery in the Americas. However Brathwaite's ideological intervention in "History of the Voice"[81] goes even further than his predecessors' with its polemic nation language theory. Brathwaite renames the African oral tradition in the Americas nation language, an African based linguistic and cultural system in which

[81] As evidence of his commitment to orature, Brathwaite first introduced his theory of nation language at the 1976 Carifesta – an annual Caribbean writer's conference – where "Voice" was given as an oral presentation. He theorized on nation language through the spoken word, instead of choosing to publish the essay first. This speaks to his ongoing theoretical project of decentering the written word as the primary cite of cultural, historical, and ideological discourse. Hereafter "History of the Voice" will be cited as "Voice."

Africana orature *and* music are central in the creation of a counter-hegemonic New World discourse.

Like the afore-mentioned Africana theorists' revision of Western historiography and philosophy, Brathwaite's theory of nation language initiates a similar intervention into Western thought through its explorations of Being and Freedom. The radicalism of nation language theory, however, is that it identifies the words, songs, *and* music of the African oral tradition as a diasporic cultural system that has not only shaped a distinctly New World culture of resistance, but as one that has irrevocably altered the sound and diction of English in the Caribbean as well. Thus, with his formulation of nation language Brathwaite takes on the first aspect of Western discourse's tri-partite anti-Africanism – the dehumanization of the African and the creation of the Negro, *and* the resultant devaluation of her cultural productions.

Nation language, then, primarily centers on the African's cultural developments after the rupture of the Middle Passage, after the deracination from her native land and upon her dispossession in the Americas where she was forced to adapt. It is a theory of Africana discourse that privileges the voice in its communication of sound, words, and music from both African and Western cultural sources; consequently nation language theory is a fully encompassing diasporic critique of Africana cultural productions in the New World that simultaneously acknowledges the paradoxical and ineluctable presence of Western cultural inheritances and influences. Nation language, and its related discourse of "tidalectics," disturbs Western theory in several radical ways.

First, Brathwaite's theory of nation language challenges the primacy of Western letters by implicitly questioning the ideological dyad at its foundation: the perceived superiority of European cultural productions and hierarchical status of the written word. Brathwaite designates an African based New World "dialect" nation language, a complete linguistic system with its own cultural, cosmological, and ontological logic. "Voice" announces the discursive import of orality in the production of Africana diasporic culture; nation language theory thereby divests the written word of its hierarchical status and highlights Africana words, songs and music (particularly the Blues and jazz) in the establishment of an African diasporic creative protest tradition.

Second, nation language inverts the historical paradigm of imperial language imposition and Africana cultural subordination in the New World. The notion of a purely European-centered imperial linguistic discourse is refuted through Brathwaite and other critics' historical documentation that supports nation language's impact on New World colloquial English. Paradoxically the submerged language of a dispossessed and enslaved African proletariat resurfaced to become, and remain, the dominant spoken language in the Anglophone Caribbean. Thus, we may consider nation language a linguistic and epistemic revolution born of Western slavery; a sound revolution that has shattered the English pentameter and effectively dethroned the Queen's English as the lingua franca of the Anglophone Caribbean.

Third, nation language theory defies reductionist critical analyses through Brathwaite's catholic use of Western historiography and theory. He places nation

language within a larger historical genealogy that names the fourteenth and fifteenth-century European national languages and literatures movement begun by Danti Aligheri as nation language's theoretical forerunner. Equally concerned with colloquial influences, Brathwaite pointedly names T.S. Eliot and John Arlott, as two principal inspirations behind Caribbean writers' use of nation language in their literary texts. And finally by locating the nation simultaneously within language and the African Diaspora[82], Brathwaite, confounds the notion of the nation-state while simultaneously prefiguring Benedict Anderson's formulation of a primordial national orature that voices, defines, and perpetuates the nation.

Finally, Brathwaite's related conceptualization of tidalectics raises the specter of Hegel once more if only to seemingly mock the irony of the dialectician's persistent presence. Brathwaite's tidalectics is clearly a play on dialectics, as Brathwaite himself notes, yet in his clever assonant revision lies a penetrating reimagining of European-centered dialectics into an Africana theoretical model that envisions the tide, the water, and the Middle Passage, all of which figure so prominently in Brathwaite's historical, theoretical, and poetic works.[83] Through his invocation of the tide, Brathwaite reimagines dialectics in a manner that valorizes the historical experiences of Western slavery and Empire as the occasion for nation language's genesis. Like Fanon, Brathwaite wrestles with Hegel, imperial language imposition, and efforts to eradicate the colonized subject's native tongue. Indeed, the present absence of Martinican Creole in

[82] On this point, I take my cue from Peter Hitchcock's insightful reading of Benedict Anderson and Ernest Renan in *Imaginary States: Studies in Cultural Transnationalism* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

[83] Several titles of Brathwaite's texts evoke tide, water, and the Middle Passage: *Islands*, "Limbo," *Middle Passages*, and *The Arrivants*.

Fanon's evocative first chapter begs the question: at what incalculable cost have Africana people lost their native tongue(s)? Brathwaite's theory of nation language answers Fanon plaintively: The native tongue was never lost – only submerged and modified. Listen, speak, sing, and remember.

To fully appreciate the import of Brathwaite's theoretical (re)vision, we must first examine his project of renaming. Just as Du Bois and James rename enslaved Africans black workers and a black proletariat respectively, thereby revealing their collective role as historical agents, Brathwaite's renaming of nation language fulfills a similar discursive mission: to assign full historical and cultural relevance to enslaved Africans in the Americas. Thus, the language of the enslaved should be deemed language, not dialect, for a people's language encompasses a discrete culture, cosmology, and ethical heritage that dialect (with its pejorative connotations) never could. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o further elucidates the connectedness between a people's language and culture in terms that signify a larger cultural inheritance and a collective cosmology, specifying that:

> …culture embodies those moral, ethical and aesthetic values, the set of spiritual eyeglasses through which [people] come to view themselves and their place in the universe. Values are the basis of a peoples' identity, their sense of particularity as members of the human race. All this is carried by language. *Language as culture is the collective memory bank of a people's experience in history. Culture is almost indistinguishable from the language that makes possible its genesis, growth, banking, articulation and indeed its transmission from one generation to the next*. (14-15) (emphasis added)

Language is therefore indivisible from culture, history, and cosmology; its invention and voicing become the threshold to a people's world-view. Brathwaite

makes this connection clear in "Voice's" description of nation language with its: "…more ritual forms like *kumina*, like *shango*, the religious forms…which begin to disclose the complexity that is possible with nation language" (273). Africana religions like Kumina and Shango, are voiced in a language that defines and carries cultural meaning. Thus, Brathwaite renames (Anglophone) Afro-Caribbean dialect nation language to emphasize the manner in which the word dialect is actually a misnomer, rife with the linguistic and cultural biases of Western imperialism. He further differentiates between nation language and dialect, clarifying that dialect:

> …carries very pejorative overtones. Dialect is thought of as…'inferior' English. Dialect is the language when you want to make fun of someone. Caricature speaks in dialect. *Dialect has a long history coming from the plantation where people's dignity was distorted through their languages and the descriptions that the dialect gave to them*. (266) (emphasis added)

Brathwaite highlights the ways in which the dialect of plantation culture acted to denigrate the enslaved. He implicitly recalls the "small" variant between Negro and nigger, a change made by traversing the path from English to dialectical English and one used to distort enslaved Africans' collective self-perception. Negro, as was discussed in chapter one, is the Spanish word for black. Nigger, in contrast, has the pejorative denotation and connotation African dehumanization under chattel slavery. Dialect and its epithet for the African are theoretically and semantically opposed to an African based cultural system that: "…is the language of…Ashanti, Congo, Nigeria, from all that mighty coast of western Africa" (261).

With use of the word "mighty" to describe the cultures and countries of western Africa, Brathwaite interpellates the import of ancient African civilizations to and for the West. This region was the home of the former Ghana, Songhai, and Mali empires – kingdoms as renowned for their wealth as they were for highly advanced civilizations that included well-established networks of nautical trade among Africa, Europe, and Asia; international centers of religious and scholarly study, of which Timbuktu (in Mali) was just one; and highly developed political and social systems that, like much of the ancient world, included systems of slavery.[84]

Brathwaite further illustrates nation language's African roots by highlighting the manner in which the hostile plantation environment necessitated that African languages, like their related cultural practices, be forced beneath the visible surface of plantation culture where they:

> … submerge[ed] themselves, because the conquering peoples did not wish to hear people speaking Ashanti or any of the Congolese languages – So there was a submergence of this imported language. Its status became one of inferiority. Similarly, its speakers were slaves. They were conceived as inferiors – nonhuman – in fact…(262)

Here Brathwaite demonstrates the crucial link between Western theory and praxis. European slave-owners and colonizers implemented the predominant eighteenth and nineteenth-century racist ideologies on a material level on the New World plantations. Western slave-owners believed Africans to be sub-human; and their linguistic expression though not deemed language in the Western sense

[84] See Margaret Shinnie, *Ancient African Kingdoms* (New York: Signet-Mentor Books, 1965); Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982); and Paul Gilroy Op. Cit.

was still communication and a potential threat to the slave system's perpetuity. Thus it was suppressed. The Western plantation system's punitive suppression of African rituals is well documented in several historical studies[85]; therefore nation language's continued existence reflects the enslaved Africans' will to resist domination. Despite the Western slave system's attempts to erase nation language, and the Africana culture it voices, nation language remains entrenched in the Americas. This entrenchment confirms that Brathwaite's nation language: "…invokes an affirmative ground for community…Brathwaite eschews a narrative history of victimhood for the energy that a history of struggle creates" (Hitchcock 65-66). Nation language's power reflects the vernacular tradition's connection to New World resistance. Just as C.L.R. James's *The Black Jacobins* proves that African rites and Vodoun chants engendered a sense of collective unity among San Domingo slaves, Brathwaite's nation language compels its speakers to view themselves: "…as a people joined by the historical experiences of rupture, removal to the New World…" (Nielsen 227).

The history of struggle outlined in "Voice" includes a struggle for linguistic primacy in the West. Brathwiate outlines the dimensions of this contest by discussing the dissimilarities between the "Ashanti and Congolese"[86] languages of West Africa, which employ the kaiso (or calypso) dactyl, and the English of Empire, which uses the pentameter, itself the syllabic embodiment of

---

[85] See *After Africa: Extracts from British Travel Accounts and Journals of the Seventeenth, Eighteenth, and Nineteenth Centuries concerning the Slaves, their Manners, and Customs in the British West Indies*. Eds. Roger Abrahams and John F. Szwed (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983); *Slave Testimony*. Ed John Blassingham (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 1977); and Orlando Patterson Op. Cit.

[86] "Voice" 261-262.

imperialist domination in the Americas.[87] The pentameter aurally and metrically predominates in most Anglo-western literary productions,[88] leaving Brathwaite to differentiate that:

> [Nation language] does not employ the iambic pentameter. It employs dactyls. It therefore mandates…the use of sound in a certain way…In the Shakespeare…the voice travels in a single forward plane toward the horizon of its end. In the kaiso [or calypso]…we have a distinct variation. The voice dips and deepens to describe an intervallic pattern. (272-273)

Nation language's asymmetrical kaiso opposes imperial English's; thus on a syllabic level a struggle for primacy of native expression takes place because the pentameter's forward and finite movement, according to Brathwaite, also: "…carries with it a certain kind of experience, which is not the experience of a hurricane. The hurricane does not roar in pentameter" (265). Nation language's kaiso rhythms, on the other hand, better articulate and approximate the Caribbean's natural occurrences like the hurricane, like the sun's rays dancing on a turquoise sea. With this exposition, Brathwaite reminds us that only a more indigenous[89] linguistic and cultural system can communicate the native Caribbean experience. As the linguistic representation of imperial rule, the pentameter has robbed Caribbean people of, "…the syllabic intelligence to describe the hurricane, which is our own experience, whereas we can describe the imported alien

---

[87] "Voice" 265-266.

[88] To properly contextualize the pentameter's dominance in Western linguistic expression, Brathwaite traces its development in English poetry from its eighth-century appearance in *Beowoulf* to its pinnacle in the works of William Shakespeare.

[89] Since the Arawak Indians of Jamaica and Barbados were exterminated by the sixteenth century I am using the term indigenous in a relative sense. Indian genocide was the principal catalyst for the Western importation of enslaved African labor, as was noted in chapter one. Thus in the sixteenth century nation language, with its West African base, comes closest to what may be identified as an indigenous New World language system.

experience of snowfall" (263). The syllable as a unit of oral intelligence is crucial to Brathwaite's thesis, for what more basic unit of speech more fully denotes the enormity of Western cultural imperialism? Therefore it seems within historical context of deracination and dispersal the syllable, for Brathwaite, becomes shibboleth. A password unlocking a world of reclamation and resistance on the battleground of language.

Brathwaite continues to contrast imperial English to nation language by describing the latter's distinctly vernacular traits in which word and song constitute meaning. This meaning may be thoroughly communicated through orature as opposed to literature because:

> …it is from …an oral tradition. The poetry, the culture itself, exists not in a dictionary but in the tradition of the spoken word. It is based as much on sound as it is on song. That is to say, the noise that it makes is part of the meaning, and if you ignore the noise (or what you would think of as noise, shall I say), then you lose part of the meaning. When it is written, you lose the sound or the noise, and therefore you lose part of the meaning. Which is, again, why I have a tape recorder for this presentation. I want you to get the sound of it, rather than the sight of it. (271)

Brathwaite stresses the orality of sound and song as these reflect a cultural tradition that is rooted in the voice. This cultural meaning, then, is opened in the voice and through its varied tonal interpretations. Hearing sound and song means understanding meaning, and this is why Brathwaite, as he insists, brought tape recordings of nation language to his talk. Theorizing nation language solely on the page would be anathema to its praxis and expression: thus to explain nation language, Brathwaite engages his audience on the level of sound, not only the

sound of his voice tinged with Barbajan nation language, but with the voices of others whose oral participation attests to nation language's communality.

An example that reflects nation language's connectivity between sound and meaning would be the Jamaican nation language pronunciation of the word "cyan," or can in English. Spoken in Jamaican, cyan means can, but if one were to draw out the intermediary vowel sounds to "cy-y-a-a-an" the word's meaning actually becomes its direct opposite, can't. This is the sound that determines meaning itself, the sound and meaning Brathwaite urges his audience and readers to carefully consider within the voice.

As Simon Gikandi comments on the voice and nation language theory's larger historical significance: "The voice…signifies shape and consciousness of that which has not been institutionalized" and that the aim of Brathwaite's theory is to "…create a space in which oral forms of history can be authorized as the true depositories of black culture" (20). The voice and the orature it animates become living embodiments of a people's historical legacy. Unlike most institutionalized histories of the West, Africana orature stands as a counter-hegemonic discourse in its valuation of Africana history and cultural heroes.[90] This is evinced in three particular stories that are oral in origin: Sundiata, the epic of old Mali[91]; the tales

[90] I am using the term cultural heroes in the same way that Zora Neale Hurston uses the term culture heroes to describe the principal trickster figures in West African and Africana folktales in "Characteristics of Negro Expression" in African American Literary Theory. Ed. Winston Napier (New York: New York University Press, 2000): 21-44.

[91] While Roger Abrahams charges that the "bardic forms of epic" were completely lost in the Africans' adaptation to the New World, this seems to contradict his position that enslaved Africans still held fast to the West African cultural practice of eloquent oratory and ornate speechmaking. This focus on orality is the drive behind the griot's recitation of ancestral genealogies and epics. See *Afro-American Folktales: Stories from Black Traditions in the New World*. Ed. Roger D. Abrahams (New York: Pantheon Books) 10-18.

of John the slave; and the legend of John Henry[92]. As evinced by Sundiata, Africana orature has not expunged the African contribution to Western civilization; nor has it dehumanized the African slave into the servile/infantile Sambo, as the tales of John the slave prove. Neither has the orature denied the pivotal role of African American labor power in the development of Western industrialization, as the legendary exploits of John Henry also prove.

Similar to Fanon's chapter on "The Negro and Language," Brathwaite's theory of nation language reveals how Western discourse's attendant doctrines of racism and imperialism denigrate indigenous Afro-Caribbean language and culture. Brathwaite outlines the soul-killing effects of colonial education on the Caribbean native. In terms similar to Fanon's Antillean schoolchild learning of her "ancestors the Gauls," Brathwaite concurs that the Ideological State Apparatus of the English colonial educational system acted to:

> …recognize and maintain…the language of the planter, the language of the official, the language of the Anglican preacher. *It insisted that not only would English be spoken in the Anglophone Caribbean, but that the educational system would carry the contours of an English heritage*…Shakespeare, George Eliot, Jane Austen, the models that were intimate to Great Britain, that had very little to do, really with the environment and the reality of the Caribbean – were dominant in the Caribbean educational system… (262-263)

Thus, like the colonized Martinican of Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, the colonized Barbajan is stripped of her native identity and inculcated into the tenets of a foreign European history and culture that has no fundamental relation to the native Caribbean experience, other than as the ideological enforcer of

[92] Zora Neale Hurston Op. Cit.

hegemony. Degraded and disremembered are the tales of Nanny of the Maroons and glorified are the exploits of Robin Hood in Sherwood Forest under this imposed system of Western domination.[93] The colonial system's Ideological State Apparatuses – the educational system, local government, and churches – consistently devalue native culture and deny Afro-Caribbean orature's cultural significance.

Nevertheless, this same point of convergence between Brathwaite and Fanon also becomes a point of divergence. While Brathwaite, like Fanon, explains the interposition of Empire on native institutions he follows this analysis with another historical discourse that does not relay a typical narrative of imperial language imposition and native cultural subordination. Brathwaite posits nation language as the linguistic system that subsumed imperial English rather that vice versa[94], charging that nation language is: "English…in terms of lexicon, but it is not English in terms of syntax. And English it certainly is not in terms of rhythm and timbre, its own sound explosion" (266). The vernacular's irrepressibility despite imperialism, argues Brathwaite, is precisely why nation language has evolved and changed, even altering the way imperial European languages were spoken. Brathwaite posits that nation language's submergence:

> …served an interesting intercultural purpose, because although people continued to speak English as it was spoken in Elizabethan times and on through the Romantic and Victorian ages, that English was nonetheless, still being influenced by the underground

[93] "Voice" 263.

[94] Although Roger Abrahams does establish the African slaves' incorporation of European vocabularies into their own West African languages, he maintains that this linguistic conflation resulted in New World dialects of European languages. Unlike Brathwaite, he does not consider the impact of this linguistic mélange on the European languages themselves. See Abrahams Op. Cit. xvi.

> language, the submerged language that the slaves had brought…*[nation language] was moving from a purely African form to a form that was African, but which was adapting to the new environment and to the cultural imperatives of the European languages. And it was influencing the way in which the French, Dutch, and Spanish spoke their own languages. So there was a very complex process taking place which is now beginning to surface in our literature*. (262) (emphasis added)

Brathwaite's contention that English as early as the sixteenth century was being influenced by nation language is extremely significant, for this reveals how an African based language significantly altered the European languages of Empire. Equally important, though not directly stated, is Brathwaite's larger theoretical proposition. By revealing how the orality of nation language has moved from its traditional African form to an adapted Afro-Caribbean form, to a greater colloquial language spoken by descendants of both African slaves *and* European slave-owners, Brathwaite proves that nation language theory inverts the paradigm of European linguistic imposition and African cultural subordination, for nation language becomes the dominant form of linguistic expression in the Anglophone Caribbean.

"The language of the slaves and laborers" (260), then, becomes the dominant colloquial language in the colonial and postcolonial Caribbean. The irony is rich, for the West African culture that European colonizers attempted to erase came to be the identifying marker of Euro-Caribbean and Afro-Caribbean linguistic expression. Brathwaite's position on nation language's (or Caribbean Creole's) impact on English from the Elizabethan era to the present day is supported by other critics. According to Jean D'Costa and Barbara Lalla, the

English spoken by whites in Jamaica and Barbados during the seventeenth century, "…bore many features of sound, morphology, and syntax directly relevant to Jamaican Creole…"[95] Thus, in the Caribbean, English slave-owners as well as Irish indentured servants, came to speak an English whose meter, tone, and syntax pulsed with the inflections of western Africa. This linguistic transmission shows that an African based language system effectively reversed the historical paradigm of imperial language imposition and Africana cultural capitulation. Thus, nation language's submergence became the occasion for its adaptation, for it resurfaced by imprinting itself onto the European languages of Empire.

What is more, nation language is African based orature and, as such, it is the dialectic counterpoint to English, the language of Western hegemony in the Anglophone Caribbean. Linguistic discourse becomes political discourse in the New World colonies of Europe, a political discourse that centers on using the Afro-Caribbean language of nation to define the Caribbean experience. Thus, nation language's metric rebellion is not solely about subverting the linguistic meter of Empire; it is about utilizing a New World language system of African origins to describe and define the indigenous Caribbean experience itself.

Nation language's syntactical and tonal variations within English, argues Brathwaite, effectively voice the native Afro-Caribbean experience by-itself and for-itself. Since it is the only surviving language system indigenous to both Africa and the Caribbean, it also becomes a Caribbean cultural and linguistic

---

[95] Barbara Lalla and Jean D'Costa, *Language in Exile: Three Hundred Yeas of Jamaican Creole* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1990).

system whose meter, tone, and diction are attuned to the Africana New World experience. This African based language with its own distinct syllabic and metrical pattern comprises, according to Brathwaite, "the body work of the language" (264), that sounds out the Caribbean experience since: "It is nation language in the Caribbean that, in fact, largely ignores the pentameter. Nation language is the language that is influenced by the African model, the African aspect of our New World Caribbean heritage" (265-266). This linguistic and cultural legacy is one that is irrevocably shaped by the exigencies of chattel slavery and Empire.

In the Heideggerian sense, it may be said that nation language represents the linguistic correlative of political and ontological self-determination since language, for Heidegger, is the source of communication in an existential sense:

> … must be understood in an ontologically broad sense. 'Communication…is grasped in principle existentially…The communication of the existential possibilities of attunement, that is, the disclosing of existence, can become the true aim of poetic speech" (152).

For African slaves in the Americas the disclosing of their existence was certainly the aim of nation language's poetic speech. They voiced folktales and songs to affirm their existence as human beings, and they articulated themselves as a cultural collectivity using what Brathwaite terms "total expression."

Given Brathwaite's focus on nation language's Afro-Caribbean influences, several critics deem his theoretical project as an exclusively anti-imperial, anti-

Western discourse,[96] a categorization that elides the ontological aspects of nation language theory's concept of total expression. The total expression of nation language dissolves the divide between orature and literature, speaker and audience, individual and group. The spoken word *is* the literature of an enslaved community for whom the penalty against reading and writing was death. Thus, the voice becomes pen and paper, writer and reader. The distinction between speaker and audience dissolves in the call and response practice where an unbroken circle of communication obviates any set role. The individual and group merge as the stories and songs are alternately given voice by the one and the many. Through this chorus of voices nation language becomes a communal activity in which a community, itself, is born. This is what Brathwaite identifies as total expression:

> …nation language is…part of what may be called total expression…the oral tradition makes demands not only on the poet but also on the audience to complete the community: the noise and sounds that the poet makes are responded to by the audience and are returned to him. *Hence we have the creation of a continuum where the meaning truly resides. And this total expression comes about because people live in the open air, because people live in conditions of poverty, because people come from a historical experience where they had to rely on their own breath…They had to depend on immanence, the power within themselves...* (273) (emphasis added)

Here, Brathwaite provides the most compelling argument for Africana orature as a cultural manifestation of collective ontology, or immanence. The

[96] See June D. Bobb, *Beating a Restless Drum* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1998); James de Jongh, *Vicious Modernism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Peter Hitchcock, *Imaginary States* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003); Nathaniel Mackey, *Paracritical Hinge* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005); *The Critical Response to Kamau Brathwaite*. Ed. Emily Ann Williams (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2004).

continuum of meaning intrinsic to nation language reaffirms its participants collective will and intent through call and response. In this communal circle the voice is used to articulate a collective totality of Being[97] that is affirmed and, indeed, celebrated in the story's human animation. The gathering of enslaved Africans, their exchange of Anancy and other trickster tales, the singing of songs gave birth to a New World Africana community and culture.[98] They were strengthened in this communal exercise that vivified their culture and forced the reclamation of their collective humanity, despite the slave system's efforts to destroy it.

Through nation language, their collective voice communicates meaning and animates meaning, giving it life and purpose. Meaning lives as the participants live – through the breath, in the voice, on the air. The storyteller and the audience become the tale or song that exists as living history. History and culture are tangible; they are immediate and, most importantly, alive in this life-affirming circle of expression. In nation language, we may apprehend the possibility of ontological totality paradoxically wrought from the rupture of Africana history itself. Thus nation language acts as a theoretical and cultural discourse that may offer a collective totality of Being, thereby acting as a corrective to Western domination and dehumanization.

Nathaniel Mackey is quite right in asserting that the seeds of Brathwaite's nation language theory initially surface in his 1971 historical study, *The*

[97] Robinson Op. Cit. 168-171.
[98] Abrahams Op. Cit. 4.

Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770-1820.[99] Mackey argues that for Brathwaite: "…a struggle for turf is taking place in language" (57). To illustrate this point Mackey cites the following passage of Brathwaite's *Creole Society*:

> It was in language that the slave was perhaps most successfully imprisoned by his master; and it was in his (mis)use of it that he perhaps most effectively rebelled. Within the folk tradition language was (and is) a creative act in itself; the word was held to contain a secret power…(237)

In *Creole Society*, Brathwaite identifies the enslaved African's resistance to imperial language imposition as both material and semiotic resistance, yet he does so by categorizing this recalcitrance as a creative act. Through the humorous tale of Quashie, the ubiquitous Caribbean slave[100], Brathwaite offers a striking example of this material and ideological resistance. Quashie is baptized and he adopts the Christian name Thomas to signify his spiritual rebirth. Quashie/Thomas has outstanding debts that he refuses to pay, rationalizing that: "Me is new man now; befo me name Quashie, now me Thomas, derefo Thomas no pay Quashie debt" (Phillipo qtd. in Brathwaite 237). With Brathwaite's citation of Quashie's religious conversion as a creative act, one may apprehend the development of Brathwaite's nation language theory from these earlier stages in *Creole Society* to its refinement in "Voice."

Although Brathwaite does not state that Quashie's use of what he then termed Jamaican Creole represents an linguistic-ontological challenge to slavery and Empire, he does designate Quashie's (mis)use of language as a form of

---

[99] Hereafter cited as *Creole Society*.

[100] See Orlando Patterson Op. Cit. 57, 96 for an explanation of how the name "Quashee", an Akan word for Sunday, came to signify a stupid, lazy slave, much like the United States equivalent "Sambo."

political rebellion. I would argue that both political *and* ontological resistance is reflected by Quashie's speech. To illustrate this point Frantz Fanon's position on language bears repeating: "…the phenomenon of language…should provide us with one of the elements in the colored man's comprehension of the other. For it is implicit that to speak is to exist absolutely for the other" (17). Quashie speaks, therefore he exists for the English slave-owner/colonizer. However, by choosing to address the slave-owner or colonial administrator in the Jamaican Creole that bespeaks his African heritage, and refusing to affect the Queen's English, Quashie takes a political and ontological stand: he refuses to exist absolutely for the English colonizer so he communicates in the language that bespeaks his own African identity. At the same time Quashie uses the religious instruments of Empire to his advantage, so although he ostensibly submits to the religious conversion of imperial rule he concomitantly rebels against imperial economic exploitation by refusing to pay his debts.

In terms of nation language's relevance for ontology, Brathwaite's position on its expression of immanence bears repeating: "…[nation language] comes about…because people come from a historical experience where they had to…depend on *immanence*, the power within themselves…" (273) For Quashie and countless others, the historical experience of chattel slavery was the material condition that forced an ontological awareness of their own innate power to resist imperial domination. Quashie resists through language by asserting his African/New World identity through the "language of slaves and laborers," thereby privileging the culture system of an oppressed class over that of the ruling

English slave-owning class. The actualization of slave resistance in and through language is also supported by Barbara Lalla and Jean D'Costa who demonstrate the manner in which Caribbean slaves alternately used Jamaican Creole or English acrolect depending on their social circumstances and their audience.[101] Thus Quashie's decision to respond in nation language instead of the Queen's English reflects an act of protest against Empire.

Brathwaite's specification that nation language emerges from the ontological source of immanence mirrors that of other nation language theorists, particularly as nation language articulates the Africana experience of Western oppression and the subsequent existential response. In discussing the work of Black English theorist Geneva Smitherman[102], George Yancy holds that:

> To best articulate that Black existential space where the real world…is filled with pain, struggle, blood, tears, and laughter – where death follows a minute of joy, where so much is improvisatory and surreal (not that abstract possible world) requires fluency in the language that partly grows out of the nitty-gritty core of the epistemology and ontology of that space. (276)

Here, Yancy defends the use of nation language to distinguish among several ideological and cultural tropes that catalyze existential awareness for the Black subject: the real/material world of anti-African racism v. the

---

[101] Language in Exile: Three Hundred Years of Jamaican Creole (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1990) 39-42; see also Abrahams Op. Cit. 10.

[102] While Geneva Smitherman's work on Black English is very significant, Smitherman focuses solely Black English as an African American cultural system unique to the United States, rather than as an African diasporic cultural system in the Americas, as Brathwaite's theory of nation language does. Yancy's article on Smitherman, however, does recognize Brathwaite as a nation language theorist whose theoretical contributions must be noted. See Geneva Smitherman, *Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1977), and also George Yancy, "Geneva Smitherman: The Social Ontology of African-American Language, the Power of *Nommo*, and the Dynamics of Resistance Through Language" in *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*. 18.4 (2004): 295.

idealized/abstracted Western world of equality; the Africana response of improvisation and adaptation to said hostile, racist world; and mainstream language born of the idealized/abstracted world v. nation language born of the epistemology and ontology of that Black existential space. Both Yancy and Brathwaite identify nation language as the tongue most capable of communicating what Frantz Fanon terms the "lived experience of racism" because, as Brathwaite illustrates, nation language emerged out of the very history of racism itself.

Perhaps nation language theory's implicit conflation of ontological totality, collective immanence and cultural memory has caused several critics to label Brathwaite's work essentialist[103] at best and crude at worst.[104] This characterization seems somewhat ironic since Brathwaite explicitly names both European and American colloquial influences that inspired West Indian writers to use nation language in their literary texts, as well as European theoretical antecedents to nation language theory.[105] In order to problematize the essentialist categorizations of Brathwaite's theory we must first examine the debate surrounding the interrelated concepts of racial essentialism and African cultural survivals (or retentions). To do this I will put forth two critical interpretations of the essentialism as these apply to Brathwaite's work: the first and most commonly

---

[103] See Edmonson Op. Cit., Moore-Gilbert Op. Cit., Hulme Op. Cit.
[104] See Hulme Op. Cit.
[105] In the opening pages of "Voice" Brathwaite locates Caribbean nation language within a larger historical and cultural tradition that identifies the fourteenth and fifteenth-century European national languages and literatures movement begun by Dante Aligheri's *De vulgari eloquentia*. Brathwaite also openly acknowledges the impact of hearing T.S. Eliot's radio-broadcasted readings of *Prelude*, *The Waste Land*, etc. for allowing him to hear the musical link between orature and jazz. He also credits on BBC cricket commentator John Arlott's expressive Hampshire "burr" for stirring within West Indian writers an excitement about the vernacular in general and their own vernacular in particular.

held analysis is that of bell hooks; the second and comparatively less cited one is that of Diana Fuss.

Hooks correctly argues that Western discourse has disseminated essentialist ideologies that propagated:

> "…colonial imperialist paradigms of black identity which represent blackness one-dimensionally in ways that reinforce and sustain white supremacy. This discourse created the idea of the 'primitive' and promoted the notion of an 'authentic' experience, seeing as 'natural,' those expressions of black life which conformed to a preexisting pattern or stereotype. Abandoning essentialist notions would be a serious challenge to racism. (2482)

Hooks's essential one-dimensional black primitive is mirrored in the anonymous black slave/colonial subject of the Drake Jewel in chapter one. The essential black's face is juxtaposed to Queen Elizabeth's' and the white supremacist notion of the ethnically indistinct and primitive black slave becomes central to sixteenth-century imperial English artistic iconography. Hooks is also correct in her assertion that an anti-African racial essentialism lies at the core of hegemonic models of black identity, and that notions of non-essential blackness would seriously weaken ideological racism in the West. She reinforces this point by calling for not simply the repudiation of essential notions of blackness, but for more nuanced readings of how the Africana historical experience of struggle has created various black identities: "There is a radical difference between a repudiation of the idea that there is a black 'essence' and recognition of the way that black identity has been specifically constituted in the experience of struggle and exile" (2483).

Hooks's contention that a more useful critique of racialism should include examinations of black identity formation that address the historical experiences of struggle and exile is extremely relevant. Her call for a more nuanced reading of Africana subjectivity urges less focus on essentialism and more attention on the historical circumstances that have created Africana identities and cultures. This argument is similar to that of Tiffany Patterson and Robin Kelley who pose the following questions that have plagued scholars of Africana history for centuries: "Were the so-called cultural survivals simply the most effective cultural baggage Africans throughout the world used in their struggles to survive? Or were they created by the very conditions under which they were forced to toil or reproduce?" (18).

Hooks, Patterson, and Kelley raise important issues; nevertheless it must be acknowledged that African cultural retentions – like the West African trickster tales that find their varied forms in Brother Anancy of the West Indies and Bre'r Rabbit in the United States – functioned to create a distinctly New World Africana culture that was fundamentally opposed to chattel slavery.[106] Perhaps the question should not be one of cultural survival v. cultural adaptation, but rather *how* Africans in the New World used their native cosmology to understand and envision their continued existence in a hostile, foreign plantation environment.

---

[106] As early as 1934, Zora Neale Hurston designates "the trickster-hero of West Africa an African American culture hero, found in the form of Bre'r Rabbit, the fox, the bear, and the lion. See "Characteristics of Negro Expression" in *African American Literary Theory*. Ed. Winston Napier (New York: New York University Press, 2000); and for a description of the West Indian Brother Anancy, see Hurston's *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica*. 1938. (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1990).

Brathwaite, Barbara Lalla, and Jean D'Costa's historical and textual documentation of African linguistic and cultural survivals in the Americas prove that African cultures adapted within the New World plantation environment through simultaneous submergence and adaptation. Similarly, Richard Wright urges us to consider that:

> If the American Negro retained, in part and for a time, remnants of his background of traditional African attitudes, it was because he couldn't see, feel or trust (at that moment in history) any other system of value or belief that could interpret the world and make it meaningful for him to act and rely upon it" (296)

Thus, the greater issue, as both Brathwaite and Wright stress, is not whether African survivals exist, but *why* they exist. They exist because enslaved Africans had to make sense of their uprooting, bondage, and degradation. One way of doing this was through cultural memory that gave voice to stories, songs, and music, an orature that then created a community created and defined by resistance.

In contrast to hooks' anti-essentialist stance, is Diana Fuss's exploration of essentialism's larger discursive functions. Fuss introduces her primary argument in *Essentially Speaking* by insisting that: "…essentialism is neither good nor bad, progressive nor reactionary, beneficial nor dangerous. The question we should be asking is not 'is this text essentialist (and therefore bad)?' but rather, 'if this text is essentialist, what motivates its deployment?' (xi). Fuss's challenge to question the perceived motivation behind a text's ostensible essentialism seems progressive, for not only is it a somewhat uncommon position among critics of

Brathwaite,[107] but Fuss makes the argument that the critic's adherence to essentialism need not be unequivocally essentialist itself. She clarifies this further by stating that: "To insist that essentialism is always and everywhere reactionary is…to buy into essentialism in the very act of making the charge; *it is to act as if essentialism has an essence*" (21).

Fuss logically and semantically implicates the critic in the very act and purpose of his own criticism: charging essentialism while using the same essentialist strategies, which obviate deeper analysis of a text's methodological deployment of essentialism. Indeed, Fuss begs readers to consider: "…that essentialism can be deployed effectively in the service of both idealist and materialist, progressive and reactionary, mythologizing and resistive discourses" (xiii). With this determination, Fuss presents the ways that essentialism serves varied, and indeed opposing, theoretical functions. Her insistence that the political ideology at work behind essentialism must also be considered is especially relevant to Brathwaite's theory of nation language, for the "progressiveness" of nation language's perceived essentialism lies in Brathwaite's counter-hegemonic revelation that nation language actively reverses the historical paradigm of imperial language domination through its African based linguistic and cultural system that privileges the poetics of voice. Furthermore, this Africana language has become predominant in the Anglophone Caribbean. As Simon Gikandi

[107] I use "uncommon" in the broad sense, as most literary theorists who have written on Brathwaite's work seem to take a pro-essentialist position or an anti-essentialist position, rarely teasing out the deployment of essentialist methodology itself. For an exception see Belinda Edmonson, "Black Aesthetics, Feminist Aesthetics, and Oppositional Discourse" in *Cultural Critique*. 22 (1992): 75-98. While Edmonson certainly engages with Fuss's argument, she fails to apply this argument to any substantive analysis of Brathwaite's theoretical work.

reasons, Brathwaites "poetics of voice" stems from: "…a colonial tradition which emphasized the hegemony and desirability of European culture at the expense of the Antillean tradition, which slavery and colonial domination had tried to repress or deny" (15). This Antillean tradition is one in which the predominant cultural and linguistic lineage may be traced back to Africa, as Brathwaite, Barbara Lalla, and Jean D'Costa have proven in their linguistic analyses of New World/African languages' impact on European languages.[108]

Applying Fuss's critique of essentialism to Bart Moore-Gilbert's analysis of Brathwaite's nation language in *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices, and Politics* reveals Moore-Gilbert's misreading of Caribbean history. Moore-Gilbert's claim that Brathwaite's privileging of Euro-African creolization over that of Indo-European and Chinese-European creolization represents an essentialist drive[109] seems unfounded. This is especially true when one considers that enslaved Africans were brought to the British and Spanish Caribbean in 1512, three centuries before Chinese and East Indian laborers were brought to the region.[110] During those three hundred years it is clear that a distinctly Afro-Caribbean culture was developing while simultaneously adapting itself to European cultural forms as well.

And in "Voice's" opening paragraphs – before even outlining his central argument about nation language – Brathwaite himself acknowledges the linguistic presence of Hindi and Chinese among the East Indian and Chinese Caribbean

---

[108] Brathwaite Op. Cit.; Lalla and D'Costa Op. Cit.
[109] Moore-Gilbert Op. Cit. 195.
[110] Williams Op. Cit. p. 33 and 218; See also Antonio Benitez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective* Trans. James Maraniss (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992) 17, 200.

communities, which he further explains in a footnote that details his lack of knowledge about studies on the "impact of Asiatic language structures on the contemporary languages of the Caribbean" (260). To charge Brathwaite, or his fellow historians Barbara Lalla and Jean D'Costa, with essentialism in documenting the African impact on the linguistic and cultural development of the Caribbean is to deny and debase, yet again, the historical African impact on modern New World cultural productions.[111]

Moore-Gilbert's theoretical resistance to New World African cultural survivals is not unique, nor is it solely the conceptual domain of the postcolonial theorist. The question of African cultural retentions' enduring legacy among Africana scholars themselves has been the subject of debate for centuries.[112] So when Brathwaite contends that, "Nation language is the language that is influenced very strongly by the African model, the African aspect of our New World/Caribbean heritage" (265-266), he is not promoting an essentialist view of African cultural retentions, he is putting forth one that is historically documented and verifiable given the five-centuries long Africana presence in the Caribbean.

While Fuss's argument for teasing out essentialism's uses in a text is quite instructive, I do question her textual examples in *Essentially Speaking*. The fifth chapter, entitled "'Race' Under Erasure?: Poststructuralist Afro-American

---

[111] Belinda Edmonson, herself a vocal critic of Brathwaite, concedes that the African cultural influence in Caribbean society is unmistakable; yet at the same time it is often diminished in favor of a social model reflecting racial diversity. See "Race, Tradition, and the Construction of the Caribbean Aesthetic" in *New Literary History*. 25.1 (1994): 109-120.

[112] In addition to *Black Reconstruction* and *The Black Jacobins*, see for example Zora Neale Hurston, *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica* (New York: J.B. Lipincott, 1938) and "Characteristics of Negro Expression" in *The Norton Anthology of African American* Literature (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997) 1041-1053; Langston Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" Ibid 1311-1315; and (Richard Wright, *Black Power* (Harper Publishers: New York 1954) 295-296.

Literary Theory" presents detailed analyses of both Henry Louis Gates and Houston Baker's theoretical (dis)engagement with the oral tradition, but makes no mention of Brathwaite's "History of the Voice," which predates both Gates and Baker's work on Africana orature by several years.

Perhaps it was the combination of Fuss's use of the Caliban[113] trope in her reading of James Baldwin's, "Everybody's Protest Novel," and chapter five's detailed analysis of Frantz Fanon's, "The Negro and Language" that led me to expect a reading of Brathwaite as a postcolonial critic engaged with the vernacular tradition. Unfortunately, no mention of Brathwaite or nation language theory is made. Fuss's theoretical models on the use of Africana orature in literary criticism are limited to Henry Louis Gates[114] and Houston Baker. Baker's *Blues Ideology* engages African American literature at the level of sound and music in terms strikingly similar to Brathwaite, as Baker calls on scholars of African American literature to: "…situate themselves inventively and daringly at the crossing sign in order to materialize vernacular faces" (202). Ironically, the crossing sign that Baker invokes is the place where orature and literature meet; the site of critical valuation of all Africana cultural productions. This is the theoretical crossroads where Brathwaite's nation language has resided since 1976 when "Voice" was first presented orally and in 1979, when "Voice" was first

---

[113] For works that discuss the import of Shakespeare's Caliban to Caribbean writers see Rob Nixon, "Caribbean and African Appropriations of *The Tempest*" in *Politics and Poetic Value*. Ed. Robert von Hallberg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); and Roberto Fernandez Retamar, *Caliban and Other Essays*. Trans. Edward Baker (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

[114] Though Gates's *The Signifying Monkey* centers on the African American vernacular's inscription within the literary tradition, I will analyze aspects of Baker's *Blues, Ideology and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory* since its inclusion of music offers uncanny parallels to Brathwaite's nation language theory.

published. Thus, Baker's vernacular faces in *Blues Ideology* are those that appear at the level of sound in and throughout Brathwaite's nation language theory in "Voice."

Baker goes on to proclaim that if scholars incorporate aspects of the oral tradition's improvisatory and creative force into their work, then a font of creative expression will spring forth:

> If scholars are successful, their response to literature, criticism, and culture in the United States will be as wonderfully energetic and engrossing as the response of the bluesman Sonny Terry to the injunction of his guitar-playing partner Brownie McGhee. Brownie intones: 'Let me hear you squall, boy, like you never squalled before!' The answer is a whooping, racing, moaning harmonica stretch that take's one's breath away, invoking forms, faces, and places whose significance was unknown prior to the song's formidable inscriptions" (203).

Here, Baker's imagery of call and response between these two Blues musicians recalls nation language's total expression. Brownie McGhee's call for Sonny Terry to squall evinces a communality and community through music that Brathwaite identifies as the total expression of nation language, both in "Voice" and his earlier essay, "Jazz and the West Indian Novel."[115] Baker's harmonica stretch and its musical intonation of community that was nameless prior to its birth through breath, also reflects the creationist drive behind Brathwaite's nation language. Ironically, Baker's call for theorists to mimic the improvisatory nature of the Blues is precisely what limits his own analysis, as he only examines the orature and the Blues through an American-centered critical framework. Eschewing improvisation that would have been possible through greater diasporic

[115] Hereafter cited as "Jazz."

analysis of Brathwaite's work, he focuses only on African American cultural productions in the United States. Thus Baker's silence on Brathwaite's nation language theory is deafening.

In this regard, Fuss's closing comments on Baker and Gates's work are extremely telling as they seemingly highlight the fundamental reason for Brathwaite's present absence in Baker's (and Gates's) text. Fuss contends that:

> What we see in the work of both Gates and Baker is a romanticization of the vernacular. *As their detractors have been all too quick to point out, each of these critics speaks about the black vernacular but rarely can they be said to speak in it…A powerful dream of the vernacular motivates the work of these two Afro-Americanists, perhaps because, for the professionalized literary critic, the vernacular has already become irrevocably lost*. What makes the vernacular…so powerful a theme in the work of both Gates and Baker is precisely the fact that it operates as a phantasm, a hallucination of lost origins. (90) (emphasis added)

While Fuss's comments appear true for Baker and Gates, they seemingly represent the uninformed critical opinions that prompt Brathwaite to lament that: "…there don't seem to be any PhD or cultural workers at work on my work" (Williams 309). Brathwaite is the very embodiment of a literary critic who keeps the oral tradition alive, in both poetry and theory. Orature is a living presence that is voiced over and over again; and that is precisely Brathwaite's aim – to keep the oral transmission of Africana history and culture alive. Peter Hitchcock stresses that: "While there are other Caribbean poets who have embodied this spirit, as living voices or vessels of history…Brathwaite has used it to complicate one's sense of poetic space" (77). In Brathwaite's nation language poetic space and theoretical space are one in the same: the voice carries the verse which is mined,

in turn, as living theory – sound and song become literature, just as orature becomes discourse.

In nation language, the power of the voice represents a powerful conflation of Africana orature, literature *and* discourse. And while some critics view Brathwaite's theoretical project as one that is simply, "…oriented towards writing back to the West"[116], I believe that in nation language we may witness the theorist as griot who not only writes back to the West, but also recites back to his audience, his theoretical forebears, and the revolutionary ancestors who died actualizing Freedom in the Americas.

In nation language's merging of orature and literature Brathwaite recites back to the forebears of C.L.R. James' *Black Jacobins*, who – under Mackandal, Boukman, and finally Toussaint – found strength in African and Vodoun chants to fight for liberation in seventeenth and eighteenth-century San Domingo. Brathwaite also recites back to the forebears in early nineteenth-century South Carolina, who had heard of Toussaint's Haitian revolution, found inspiration in Gullah Jack's powerful African conjuring[117], and organized under Denmark Vesey's leadership for their own American rebellion. Brathwaite's nation language recites back to the same forebears whose songs of lamentation still drove Frederick Douglass to weep even decades after first hearing them.[118] By emphasizing the equal and interrelated significance of Africana orature and

[116] Hyacinth Simpson, "'Voicing the Text': The Making of An Oral Poetics in Olive Senior's Short Fiction" in *Callaloo*. 27.3 (2004) 830.
[117] David Robertson, *Denmark Vesey* (New York: Random House-Vintage Books, 1999).
[118] Douglass Op Cit. 262-263.

literature, Brathwaite's nation language brings us to the source of all Africana cultural productions in the West, the breath, the word, and the song.[119]

With Brathwaite's theory of nation language we find language itself posited as political discourse. He uses seemingly uses theory as a Trojan horse, for inside the literary construct of the lecture cum essay Brathwaite designates orality as the Africana cultural tradition that has transmitted and shaped the enslaved African New World culture. And this is exactly where Brathwaite breaks with his predecessors. Where Douglass, Du Bois, and James credit the oral tradition for creating an indigenous American culture and African American culture of resistance, Brathwaite goes even further by illuminating how nation language resurrects the submerged history of Africans in the Americas during chattel slavery. The nation language stories, songs, and music in Africana folktales and songs reveal Freedom, not as a lofty abstraction of Enlightenment principles, but as a reality attainable through the "collective totality of Being"[120] in its total expression, in its articulation and exercise among the enslaved masses. Thus in the telling of tales and singing of songs, Freedom remains a process of actualization that is also instantiated through creativity. African slaves made their Freedom tangible by voicing their resistance to Western domination in their stories and songs. They gathered and often risked grave punishment to experience and maintain a sense of community. Their Freedom is made actual in this gathering, in their will to resist and exist as a collective. Nation language,

[119] In this statement I take my cue from Brathwaite the college professor. In class he often reminded me and my classmates that enslaved Africans came to the New World with nothing but breath and memory.
[120] Robinson Op Cit. 166-167

thereby, becomes the weapon and instrument of Africana resistance and Freedom in the New World.

In addition to presenting a New World cultural and theoretical critique, Brathwaite's nation language theory also interpellates and imbricates two related conceptualizations within Western and Africana history and literature: the nation and the African diaspora. This diasporic analysis necessitates readings of LeRoi Jones's *Blues People* and Brathwaite's earlier essay "Jazz," as this earlier essay presents the seeds of Brathwaite's nation language theory.

On the level of linguistic and auditory aesthetics, Brathwaite prompts us towards an understanding of nation language as sound and music. A language of music with, "…its own sound explosion" and one that, "…may be English, but often it is English which is like a howl, or a shout, or a machine-gun, or the wind or a wave. It is also like the Blues. And sometimes it is English and African at the same time" (266). The howl that is nation language may be heard in Bob Marley's signature wail; the machine-gun in Mutabaruka and Linton Kwesi Johnson's dub poetry; the wind and wave in Miss Lou's (Louise Bennett) nation language poetry; and the Blues in Don Drummonds plaintive, yet syncopated ska trombone. Thus Brathwaite hears and conceptualizes nation language at the most visceral levels of sound and music, for nation language: "…is a place formed by the interrelationship of speech and music, both natural and human compositions" (Hitchcock 68).

With Brathwaite's inclusion of the Blues in nation language, he links this Afro-Caribbean language to a larger cultural discourse of resistance in the African

Diaspora – for as both he and Amiri Baraka have shown, Blues is a music of protest that reflects the Negro American experience of anti-African racism in the West.[121] Rather tellingly, "Jazz" encapsulates a brief introduction to "Voice's" theory of nation language. Brathwaite remarks that he: "…[attempts] to show that the connection between native musical structures and the native language is very necessary to the understanding of nation language. That music is, in fact, the surest threshold to the language that comes out of it" (270).

Brathwaite's assertion that nation language is born of Africana music is a critically innovative proposition, for he implies that musical production should be deemed the primary source of semiotic exchange for enslaved Africans in the Americas. With this, Brathwaite privileges music in a manner that breaks with his predecessor's historical and theoretical inquiry. This is perhaps the most innovative feature of his nation language theory: music is not deemed subordinate to literature as a form of cultural production, rather it is on equal footing. To strengthen his argument about Africana music as discourse as a form of social protest, Brathwaite opens "Jazz" with a summary of LeRoi Jones's argument in *Blues People*, detailing the socio-political and historical conditions that gave rise to the Africana music, stating that: "[The Blues] is…the artistic expression of a particular kind of Negro – the Negro slave and his descendants under the geographical and social conditions of the American South. Jazz, on the other hand, is not "slave" music at all. It is the emancipated Negro's music" (55), and later highlighting that: "Jazz then is a music of protest. It is also in many ways a

[121] See LeRoi Jones, *Blues People* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1963); Kamau Brathwaite, "Jazz and the West Indian Novel" in *Roots* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993)

music of protection: a shield of sound behind which the individual and the group have been able to protect their spirit" (58).

Brathwaite's interpretation of blues and jazz as both music of protest and spiritual barrier reveals his concern with African diasporic cultural productions as creative manifestations of African diasporic dissent. What is more, he throws down the theoretical gauntlet, clarifying that his concern with the connections among Africana music, language, and literature: "…at this point, is not with the problems of Negro expression, but with the (British) West Indian contribution to the general movement of New World creative protest of which I regard jazz to be the archetype" (62). Jazz, like the seeds of nation language that Brathwaite begins to detect in the West Indian novels of the 1960's, reflects a larger Africana expression of dissent against Empire and Western hegemony while still, ineluctably, reflecting the influence of Western and Africana culture. Despite his explicitly stated goal of identifying common areas of New World creative protest, some critics categorize "Jazz" as promoting an "orthodoxy of blackness" and "an ambiguous, ambivalent, hopelessly enmeshed critique."[122]

Brathwaite furthers nation language's African diasporic thrust by connecting its emergence in the written poetry of 1960's and 1970's Caribbean writers to the cultural impact of Caribbean *and* American musical and poetic forms. Citing the poem "Blues" by Derek Walcott, Brathwaite expounds that Walcott's poem:

---

[122] In "Race, Tradition, and the Construction of the Caribbean Aesthetic" Belinda Edmondson constructs a rather tenuous argument against Brathwaite's use of a jazz aesthetic for critiquing West Indian literature, even though he carefully outlines the socio-political, historical, and cultural points of divergence between indigenous Caribbean musical forms, like calypso or ska, and jazz which prevent him from using the former in an analysis of the West Indian novel.

> …is a connection of Caribbean and Harlem/New Orleans which Buddy Bolden and Congo Square knew about, which McKay was to carry forward, and which in this poem, among some others…Derek Walcott continues. And it is this connection which brings in the influences of Langston Hughes for instance, and Imamu Baraka, and Sonia Sanchez, and Miles Davis, which further erodes the pentameter…(296)

Brathwaites' polemic designation of nation language as an African diasporic discourse connecting the Caribbean to New Orleans' Congo Square and to Claude McKay's Harlem reflects Brathwaite's larger discursive project: linking the connected Africana cultures of creative protest in the Americas. Thus, Brathwaite identifies the thrust of Walcott's poem "Blues" as the force of African diasporic articulation. This may be seen through his insistence that Walcott's "Blues" reflects a cultural sensibility that is also present in the works of several African diasporic and African American poets. He situates Walcott's "Blues" in relation to Claude McKay, whose sonnet "If We Must Die" symbolized the militancy of the New Negro Movement.[123] He also avers that Walcott's "Blues" recalls a musical tradition evinced in the blues and jazz music of New Orleans's Congo Square. Lastly, Walcott's "Blues" represents a continuum in African diasporic oral and musical expression, as it recalls the influences of noted Black Arts Movement poets (Imamu Baraka and Sonia Sanchez), jazz musicians (Miles Davis), and the Harlem Renaissance poet who most vocally and discursively sought to elucidate the connections among jazz, poetry, and orality – Langston

[123] On "If We Must Die's" connection to the New Negro Movement and the Harlem Renaissance, see Wayne Cooper, *Claude McKay: Rebel Sojourner in the Harlem Renaissance* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 1987); Nathan Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971); and *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. Eds. Henry Louis Gates and Nellie Y. McKay (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004): 1003-1007

Hughes. So in his diasporic critique of Walcott's "Blues," Africana cultural expression in the Americas comes full circle: deracination and dispossession become the occasion for survival and resistance; the African's survival in the New World is actualized through nation language's Africana of poetry and music. The circle is the African Diaspora, for nation language has resonance in the poetry of St. Lucia author Derek Walcott, just as it does in the jazz of New Orleans, and in the African American poetry of Langston Hughes and Sonia Sanchez.

Brathwaite's invocation of Harlem is also significant in terms of what Harlem has come to represent for him among other Africana writers the world over. James de Jongh has theorized that in the 1960's and 1970's Harlem was the principal meeting ground for poets from the African Diaspora:

> …black poets throughout the African diaspora were developing a consciousness of the fundamental unity of the Africana experience. The motif of black Harlem, which many Africana poets outside of the United States associated with the Civil Rights Movement…was seen as a shared emblem of the common aims and actualities of black life. Harlem…became a symbol of the destiny of Africana peoples to arise renewed, in spite of the unrelenting cultural, social, and political interposition by the European West. (183)

deJongh's designation of Harlem as a socio-political and counter-hegemonic trope for African diasporic poets is reflected in Brathwaite's theory of nation language as it is in just as it is in his poetry. De Jongh further charges that, "Brathwaite includes Harlem as one of several microcosmic locales in the geographic dispersal of the African diaspora…" (188). Harlem as a potent symbol for Brathwaite is made clear in his critique of Walcott's "Blues." These diasporic connections among New Orleans jazz, Harlem Renaissance and Black

Arts Movement poetics, and Walcott's own nation language also lend themselves to nation language's related conceptualization of "tidalectics."

While several critics note the "to and fro" in African and Caribbean linguistic and cultural influences that comprise tidalectics, I would also argue that the diasporic thrust behind Brathwaite's work seems to suggest that the tide in Brathwaite's tidalectics is not only moving to and fro between Africa and the Caribbean; the tide is also moving to and fro within the Americas between the Caribbean and the United States as Brathwaite's afore-cited writings on nation language, the Blues and jazz confirm.

That Brathwaite stresses the cyclic motion of the tide is significant, for a cycle implies a circle, and one may easily apprehend a circle among the disparate regions of Africa, the Caribbean, and the United States. This circle/cycle of diasporic connections is present in Brathwaite's lengthy treatise on nation language in "Voice," and briefly in its introductory stages in "Jazz." Brathwaite defines his concept of tidalectics as: "Dialectics with my difference…instead of one-two-three Hegelian, I am now more interested in the movement of the water backwards and forwards as a kind of cyclic…motion rather than linear" (Brawaite qtd. in Mackey 9). Here we see how Brathwaite employs the recurring paradoxical trope of Western epistemology in his counter-hegemonic project. Hegelian discourse, as was discussed in chapter one, presents a totalizing, racist view of Africa, Africans, and their enslaved descendants in the Americas.

And like Douglass and Fanon before him, Brathwaite confronts the specter of Hegel, yet this discursive summoning serves to foreground Brathwaite's own

reinscription and theoretical revision of Hegelian dialectics with the very ideological and polemical discourse that Hegel, himself, deemed anathema to Africana people. Tidaletics subvert the Western episteme of dialetics while acknowledging its enduring presence and highlighting its seeming paucity of relevance for the liberated consciousness of the Africana subject. Where Fanon mines the Hegelian dialectic of recognition and violent struggle to underscore the colonized subject's quest for liberation, Brathwaite confronts Hegel's Eurocentricy with the announcement of his own philosophical insurrection: You do not deem me human; therefore I will refashion your dialectic in a manner that allows my identity and intelligence to shine. Or in the resistive and emphatic diction of nation language: "Ah yu me a talk, Hegel. Yu cyaaan't define me wit yu dialectics. I-man define miself wit me hown tidalectics. 'Ow yu like dat?"

The Hegelian paradox in tidalectics is also manifest in nation language's dual interpellation of the nation and the African Diaspora, for as Brathwaite's focus on nation language's diasporic manifestations attest, the "nation" in nation language also situates the nation within the historical and ideological framework of the African Diaspora from sixteenth-century to the present day. The nineteenth century finds Hegelian discourse and German universalist theory being widely embraced by Western historians during institutionalization of nationalist discourses. Brathwaite's designation of Afro-Caribbean language as the language of nation presents a paradoxical acknowledgment to this very Western discourse since the African Diaspora itself[124]:

[124] On Brathwaite's location of nation and language within the African Diaspora also see Hitchcock Op. Cit. 69-71.

> …holds a subversive resonance when contrasted with that of the nation-state. At the same time that European powers constructed national dialogues, African slaves were being uprooted from…various parts of the African continent and scattered about the New World. Africans and their distant relatives in the New World have abided by and sometimes revolted against, the myth of national borders, ever since. Embedded in the tale of diaspora is a symbolic revolt against the nation-state, and for this reason the diaspora holds considerable significance. (238)

Hanchard is quite right to tie the emergence of the European nation state to the quest for Empire, for it was during the nineteenth century that: "The expanding empires of Europe and the United States…prompted the creation of new genealogies of nation, new myths about the inevitability of nations, their "temperament," their destinies…[Western] historiography at this time was largely rooted in racism, Manifest Destiny, social Darwinism and imperialism" (Kelley 4).

Despite the predominant nineteenth-century historical discourses that justified social Darwinism and the Western nation-state's imperialist drive there are two striking parallels between Brathwaite's nation language and Benedict Anderson's notion of national orature. Anderson holds that the nation: "…is an imagined political community…because its members…will never know most of their fellow members, meet them or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (5-6). Similarly, nation language unites its speakers through the communality of orature's total expression, lived history, and psychic communion.

This spiritual communion is most immediate in my own childhood experience of the West African/West Indian Anancy story. Growing up, my

parents bewitched us with stories of the indomitable yet tiny spider, Brother Anancy, who always outsmarted bigger and stronger animals. In Anancy's triumphs, my parents reminded us to see the struggles of our forebears against impossible odds; as they did our parents reminded us that their parents told them the very same stories, just as my great-grandparents had told my grandparents as well. I instantly felt connected to this long line of history; I felt joined to an entire culture and nation of forebears who sat, chins cupped in hands, waiting to find out how Anancy had tricked them all. For Benedict Anderson, for Brathwaite, and indeed for me, the communion of the nation lies in this very type of connection between the present and the past, between youth and elders. For although I never met my great grandparents, in hearing and experiencing the Anancy stories we became one and I did envision, as Anderson states, "the image of [our] communion."

Brathwaite establishes this generational and temporal continuum of nation language through its submergence, adaptation and continuous voicing. It is: "…an English…of the submerged, surrealist experience and sensibility…which has always been there" (266). And through this eternal nation language, Brathwaite echoes one of Benedict Anderson's more metaphysical positions on language as an ancient repository of national culture:

> First, one notes the primordialness of languages…No one can give the date for the birth of any language. Each looms imperceptibly out of a horizon less past…nothing connects us more effectively to the dead more than language…*Second there is a special kind of contemporaneous community which language alone suggests – above all in the form of poetry and songs*. (144) (emphasis added)

Here, Benedict Anderson, like Brathwaite, highlights orature's inimitable role in defining a national community through vocal communion. The poetry and songs of the nation act as a living bridge between past and present, between living and dead through the nation's constant revoicing. Given that Anderson's *Imagined Communities* is primarily concerned with the emergence of the nineteenth-century European nation-state, it is somewhat ironic that his theorization on national orature mirrors Brathwaite's own African Diasporic theorization of nation language. For in Benedict Anderson's historiography of the imperialist Western nation-state, we find the African Diaspora wrought from the rupture of imperialism; and in Anderson's national orature we find Brathwaite's nation language: Africana poetry and songs that create Anderson's "contemporaneous community;" orature that in its timelessness invokes the history of the voice as not only a form of primordial or originary language, but also as a valued repository of culture and history itself. In this manner, Brathwaite's theory of nation language simultaneously problematizes the discourse of the nation-state that was originally framed by nineteenth-century American adherents of German universalist theory and Hegelian theory, as was discussed in chapter one. Certainly Brathwaite's theory of nation language rebels against a nation defined by geography; however the African Diaspora offers an ephemeral, ideological national community in which Brathwaite's nation language is voiced. Nation language's diasporic thrust, then, reveals a paradox within theories of the nation that bespeaks Africana Diasporic resistance against Western domination in theory and praxis.

Brathwaite's placement of nation language within the African Diaspora also suggests the equation of language and home, for Brathwaite unites Africa, the Caribbean, and the United States in the space of a nation, in the sound of the voice, in the ideological continuum of the African Diaspora. All of these spaces then become a home in the classic sense of diaspora, for as Brent Hayes Edwards avers:

> The "African diaspora"…adheres to many elements considered to be common to the three "classic" diasporas (the Jewish, the Greek, and the Armenian): in particular, *an origin in the scattering and uprooting of communities, a history of "traumatic and forced departure," also the sense of a real or imagined relationship to a "homeland," mediated through the dynamics of collective memory and the politics of "return."* (52) (emphasis added)

Indeed, for Africana people the history of traumatic and forced departure recalls the deracination and dispossession of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and Western slavery; and the spiritual bond is the ancestral home of Africa that is tied to the collective cultural memory evinced in nation language. Sophia Lehmann further concludes that among a diasporic people language is more than a form of communication; it becomes the cultural marker of a shared historical experience: "…in diaspora, language works both to define and to create this sense of commonality between people who share history and experience" (103). For a people (dis)connected to their homeland, language seemingly becomes that lost place of ancestry. Thus, Lehmann notes that:

> Through the necessity of redefinition, diaspora itself becomes the basis for creating culture and bridging cultural differences: The uniformity of a fixed rigidly bounded culture is replaced by a more open and mutable one in which the spaces between languages and

> countries become sites of new creation rather than marginality. (104)

Lehmann's focus on the cultural connections that arise out of a people's diasporic consciousness is particularly relevant to nation language, for in Brathwaite's homeland of Africa and the African diasporic language of its nation, he traces lines of historical and cultural commonality among the bordered geographic regions of the United States and the Caribbean. For Brathwaite there is no Barbajan nation language that is distinct from African American nation language, just as there is no Jamaican blues that is separate from African American blues. These lines of cultural connectivity are perhaps best evinced through "Voice's" closing paragraph of theoretical text. Here Brathwaite begs readers to hear the voice of Miss Queenie, a Kumina[125] queen because:

> …without hearing her…you would miss the dynamics of the narrative – the blue notes of that voice; its whispers and pauses and repetitions and stutters and elisions; its high pitch emphases and low pitched trails; and that hoarse quality which I suppose you know from Nina Simone. With Miss Queenie we are in the very ancient dawn of nation language, and to be able to come to terms with oral literature our critics must be able to understand the complex forces that have led to this classical expression. (298)

By equating the blues tones of Jamaican Kumina priestess Miss Queenie, who invokes African ancestors and gods, to famed African American blues/jazz singer Nina Simone, Brathwaite confirms one of nation language's most polemic claims: that the voice is the carrier of Africana memory, history, and culture. Both women give voice to the Africana creative protest tradition through voice.

[125] Brathwaite explains Kumina as, "a memorial ceremony for calling down ancestral spirits and African gods and is similar to vodoun in Haiti." See *Creole Society* p. 224.

Miss Queenie's calls on African gods and the ancestors in a voice that dips and pauses with the cadence of Jamaican nation language. Nina Simone sings of "Four Women"[126] in a similar voice that resounds with the rhythms and timbre of African American nation language. Geographically these women are regions apart, but in the total expression of nation language, in their same blue tones, their voices occupy a creative space of resistance that has shaped Africana culture in the Americas since the sixteenth century.

Brathwaite's disruption of hegemonic discourse marks a chasm in Western theory in the same way that Frederick Douglass, David Walker, W.E.B. Du Bois, C.L.R. James, and Frantz Fanon's work does. Yet Brathwaite surpasses his predecessors in his designation of Africana music as the orignary source of a New World linguistic and cultural discourse of resistance against not only Western slavery, but Western hegemony as a whole. Brathwaite's theoretical intent is clear, yet it is concomitantly informed by the seemingly paradoxical specter of Western influences. This is unavoidable, for Brathwaite, like all of his predecessors, is still a part of the very Western tradition his work destabilizes.

Though this discursive paradigm, I would like to posit that in Kamau Brathwaite we find the Africana theorist as not only griot, but as the trickster. The trickster is the West African god of duality, the spiritual embodiment of opposing forces like: "…disruption and disclosure, betrayal and loyalty, closure and disclosure, encasement and rupture…" (Gates 6). While embodying these forces,

[126] Nina Simone penned the song "Four Women" and performed it during the height of the Black Power Movement on July 1, 1967 at the Newport Jazz festival. The song describes four different African American women who evoke related historical tropes of African American womanhood: the mammy figure, the tragic mulatta, the jezebel, and the ghetto avenger.

the trickster should not be reduced any half of its many binaries. The trickster exists as all at once. In the same manner, Brathwaite's theory of nation language binds the opposing forces of Empire to the resistive, creative forces of New World liberation. Brathwaite engages in counter-hegemonic discourse while still acknowledging Western discourse's ineluctable cultural influences on his own radical formulations. Thus nation language is of the West just as it is of Africa. And with Brathwaite's nation language theory we may apprehend the conundrum of progressive Africana scholars: We are forever bound to the very Western discourse that negates us; we seek to subvert the intellectual tradition of which we have become a part. We use "individuality, satire, parody, irony, magic, indeterminacy, open-endedness, ambiguity…chance"[127] to continually announce our historical, philosophical, and epistemological relevance.

We are tricksters leaving our mark in the world of Western letters.

[127] Henry Louis Gates, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) 6.

Conclusion

When I began this work, I imagined it as a comparative analysis among W.E.B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk*, C.L.R. James's *The Black Jacobins*, Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, and Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*. I planned to reveal that Du Bois and James's treatments of Being and Freedom predate both Sartre and Heidegger's by decades, while underscoring unexpected thematic similarities between these Africana and European thinkers treatments of Being and Freedom. This comparison was to be my direct challenge the existentialist canon's Eurocentricity. I wanted to de-center Europe as the originary source of existentialist concerns, and effectively relocate this philosophical nexus within the African Diaspora. My primary goal, then, was to demonstrate that these Africana scholar-activists works should be considered inaugural existentialist texts, as opposed to those of Sartre and Heidegger. I did not anticipate the journey that would follow, namely a much broader analysis of Western history, discourse, and the development of ideological racism therein.

During the research process I was compelled to analyze Western history and discourse prior to the development of existentialism in Europe, since existentialism represents just one branch of Western thought that, as a whole, seemed unable to accommodate the presence of Africana scholarship in general and its related ontological exegeses of Being and Freedom in particular. And since Being and Freedom most often arise within the Africana canon as responses to institutionalized racism at the discursive and material levels, like Fanon, I felt

compelled to undertake a more thorough investigation to deepen my own understanding and to, hopefully, shed light for my students as well. This investigation led to a reconsideration of my primary texts and a reformulation of the dissertation's intervention into Western theory. This is where my teaching came in.

I teach a survey course on African American Literature and, in it, I regularly expose my students to the doctrines of scientific racism apparent in David Hume, Thomas Jefferson, and G.W.F. Hegel's writings. I do this to demonstrate the manner in which ideological racism has become part and parcel of the Western canon, reminding them that that these writings were used to justify four centuries of Western chattel slavery. At the same time, however, I also wanted to show them examples of nineteenth-century Africana scholars who refuted Hume, Jefferson, and Hegel's racist claims. To provide my students and myself with evidence of a counter-tradition among Africana scholars, I had to do further research, and in doing that research I opened my own eyes as well as my students'. I found the work of David Walker, Frederick Douglass, and others and identified an Africana counter-hegemonic literary discourse that these scholar-activists created to redirect Western history's narrative axis and reaffirm their humanity.

Many years ago I had identified that Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* spoke to the existentialist themes of Being and Freedom, particularly in his apostrophe to the sailboats on Chesapeake Bay[128] and in his battle with slave-breaker Covey. But I had not identified these ontological themes

[128] Douglass Op. Cit. 293

as part of a larger nineteenth-century Africana counter-hegemonic discourse that challenged Western discourse's nullification of Africana humanity. When dealing with nineteenth-century Western discourse, I had to examine the ways that anti-African racism become part of a larger hegemonic imperative, and consequently how it came to be codified. I researched the contemporary trends in American thought and remembered three key terms: Empire, social Darwinism, and the nation-state. In these I saw the unmistakable influence of G.W.F. Hegel and other German universalist theorist and it became very clear how racism came to be further codified in the United States' governing documents.

As Douglass redefined himself as a freeman and as a historical agent in his autobiographies, I knew that his work had to be included as a primary text. The issue of the Africana subject as a historical agent became pressing, so when I moved onto twentieth-century Africana scholars, my reading of C.L.R. James's *The Black Jacobins* begged a reading of the text that greatly inspired James himself, W.E.B. Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction*. Initially, I thought I would use Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folks* as a primary text, especially because of its exposition on double-consciousness but my dissertation advisor, Robert Reid-Pharr, very wisely encouraged me to go forward with *Black Reconstruction*. And I am so thankful that he did; he was more than right in his observation that a contrapuntal reading of *Black Reconstruction* and *The Black Jacobins* would provide a much richer analysis of Africana scholars' intervention into the then radical discourse of early twentieth-century thought – Marxist theory.

I had never read *Black Reconstruction* before undertaking this study, and I had only read sections of *The Black Jacobins* many years ago, so I read them both very closely. Not doing so would have been a grave mistake, for Du Bois *Black Reconstruction* and James's *The Black Jacobins* represent a historical tour de force. These men were prescient in their theoretical (re)vision and it is a tragedy that their works are not read by every student of history and theory, regardless of specialization.

Black Reconstruction and *The Black Jacobins* demand a complete reordering of Western radical theory's primary terms of engagement as well as it historical timeline for proletariat mass action and revolution. Both Du Bois and James rename enslaved Africans black workers and a black proletariat respectively; thus they implicitly equate slavery with unpaid wage labor. In so doing Du Bois and James shift the geographic locale of working class exploitation from Europe's urban proletariat to the New World's enslaved African masses. Du Bois and James also identify Western chattel slavery as the primary source of capitalist accumulation by linking its enormous profits to the growth of trade, cotton, railway, and textile industries in the United States and France. This redirection of capitalist accumulation to the plantations of the American South and San Domingo problematizes Marx's identification of European urban proletariat exploitation as the source of modern capitalist accumulation. In so doing, Du Bois and James force within their readers a global understanding of chattel slavery's place within Western history. Western slavery may no longer be

understood as the "peculiar institution;" rather it must be seen as the source of modern Western capitalist development.

Du Bois and James redirect the timeline of dialectical materialism in two significant ways. Du Bois renames the cessation of slave labor during the Civil War a general strike, and James situates the Haitian Revolution within a historical context that reveals its earlier seventeenth-century antecedents and its stark actualization of Enlightenment principles. In a lecture on *The Black Jacobins*, C.L.R. James remarks on Du Bois's stunning achievement in *Black Reconstruction*; particularly that his renaming of the cessation of slave labor as a general strike deals a heavy blow to Marxist theory. James tells his audience that in this renaming, Du Bois says there was a general strike – an organized mass action against capitalist exploitation – *before* the strike that started the Russian Revolution; the revolutionized workers who started it were right here in the United States and they were enslaved black workers. Du Bois and James seemingly say, "Yes, that's right, we *are* historical agents; we too are the makers of history."

Using the Haitian Revolution, James's *The Black Jacobins* also contributes in revision of Western radical theory's timeline. The commonly held belief among Western scholars, both conservative and radical alike[129], is that the Haitian Revolution occurred solely because of the French Revolution; that the revolutionary army of San Domingo slaves was only successful because of their

[129] I am making this distinction because as an undergraduate history major, I took a Caribbean history course with a conservative historian for whom the Haitian Revolution was treated as an outgrowth of the French Revolution. In addition, I took a graduate seminar with a self-professed radical scholar who taught the Haitian Revolution in the very same manner.

ability to mimic the efforts of the French bourgeoisie. James' text proves this to be a complete fallacy to be completely untrue by situating the Haitian Revolution within a historical narrative of two prior revolutionary attempts in San Domingo.

The first attempt occurred during the seventeenth century under Mackandal, a charismatic leader who spread the word of rebellion by mouth from plantation to plantation. The plot was to poison every slave-owner's water supply. Though it was unsuccessful, Mackandal's rebellion revealed a great network of slaves ready to fight and die for Freedom. The second attempt occurred in the eighteenth century under Boukman, a Papaloi, or high priest in the religion of Haitian Vodoun. Boukman and his 12,000 followers aimed to seize Le Cap, the capital of San Domingo, and claim the colony for themselves. The plan also failed, but in narrating these prior attempts at liberation, James shows that Toussaint L'Ouverture's successful revolution was one in a series of wars for independence, and that Toussaint was no colonial mimic. If anything he was equally inspired by Mackandal and Boukman, as well as by the turn of events in France.

I would like to say that Du Bois and James's text led me to Frantz Fanon, but this would be untrue. I knew for quite some time that Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* would figure prominently in this study even in its earliest stages. Unlike Du Bois and James whose scholarship was informed by the historical and ideological legacy of chattel slavery, Fanon, a colonial subject, focuses his work on identifying and destroying the colonized subject class's inferiority complex. Fanon engages quite vigorously with the classics of Western radical theory,

psychoanalysis, dialectics, and existentialism but he does so to put forth his own methodology that reveals the colonial subject's inferiority complex as the result of material, psychological, and existential causes.

Perhaps it was Fanon's break with his mentor Aimee Cesaire's Negritude Movement that made for *Black Skin, White Masks* its relatively short, and somewhat dismissive, references to the import of history. Fanon makes several short stinging references to set *Black Skins, White Masks* apart from works on Negritude by emphasizing his text is not a work of history that would resurrect fallen African kingdoms and therefore restore his sense of race pride. Rather than do that, he sets *Black Skin, White Masks* in the contemporary times of its 1952 publication – the colonial world – without examining the four-century history of Western imperialism that created it. Yet the ending of *Black Skins, White Masks* does suggest that Fanon is concerned with making history occur in the future through the colonized subject's actualization of Freedom.

Fanon's chapter on "The Negro and Language" did lead me to Kamau Brathwaite but, once again, it was my teaching of the vernacular tradition that allowed me to fully appreciate and contextualize Brathwaite's nation theory. Like many others, I was swayed by the power of the written word and I had forsaken my own visceral responses to the force of the voice. Jamaican nation language, and its expression in reggae music, has shaped my life since childhood. And though I recognized that nation language shared the same themes of alienation, liberation, and African diasporic unity as works from the literary tradition, I considered nation language a similar but separate oral tradition. It was not until I

took a class with Kamau Brathwaite and read more of his theoretical texts that I came to appreciate the voice and music's discursive import for the literary tradition.

It seems that nation language theory is the key to formulating an African diasporic existentialist literary criticism that would eliminate the disciplinary divides between African American and postcolonial literatures. Through nation language we may apprehend the areas of commonalities, rather than difference, between Africana texts from the United States and the Caribbean, just as we may through a textual analysis of Being and Freedom. Disclosing mutual sites of existential exploration in African diasporic texts foregrounds the manner that Africana thinkers have continually challenged Western theory and discourse while also fulfilling their own creative and discursive missions. Chapter two's reading of Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction* and C.L.R. James's *The Black Jacobins* offers one such diasporic-existentialist critique that presents several areas of thematic overlap between these two African diasporic thinkers – one from the United States, the other from Trinidad. It is this very critique that I would like to push further by using the works of women scholars from the African Diaspora.

For a future project, I would like to initiate in-depth readings of the following Africana female thinkers' works: Mary Prince, Harriet Jacobs, Ida B. Wells, Zora Neale Hurston, Toni Morrison, Maryse Conde, Angela Davis, Michelle Cliff, and bell hooks. I wish to examine how gender further complicates female Africana thinkers' apprehension of Being and Freedom, and how this

ontological understanding dictates the discursive trajectory of their work. I anticipate that I will learn as much from this future project as I have from the one I have just begun.

Works Cited

Afro-American Folktales: Stories from Black Traditions in the New World. Ed. Roger D. Abrahams. New York: Pantheon Books, 1985.

After Africa: Extracts from British Travel Accounts and Journals of the Seventeenth, Eighteenth, and Nineteenth Centuries Concerning the Slaves, their Manners, and Customs in the British West Indies. Eds. Roger D. Abrahams and John F. Szwed. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983.

Althusser, Louis. Lenin and Philosophy. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971.

Anderson, Benedict. Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism. London: Verso, 1983.

Baker, Houston A. Blues Ideology and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.

Baucom, Ian. "Frantz Fanon's Radio: Solidarity, Diaspora, and the Tactics of Listening." Contemporary Literature 42 (2001): 15-49.

Benitez-Rojo, Antonio. The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective. Trans. James E. Maranis. Durham: Duke University Press, 1996.

Bergener, Gwen. "Who Is That Masked Woman? Or, the Role of Gender in Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*." PMLA 110 (1995): 75-88.

Bernal, Martin. Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization. Vol. 1 The Fabrication of Ancient Greece 1785-1985. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987.

Bhabha, Homi. "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation." Nation and Narration. Ed. Homi K. Bhabha. London: Routledge, 1990.

----, Foreword. Black Skin, White Masks. By Frantz Fanon. Trans. Charles Lam Markmann. London: Pluto Press, 1986.

----, The Location of Culture. London: Routledge, 1994.

Birt, Robert. "Existence, Identity, and Liberation." Existence in Black: An Anthology of Black Existential Philosophy. Ed. Lewis R. Gordon. London: Routledge, 1997.

Bobb, June D. Beating a Restless Drum: The Poetics of Kamau Brathwaite and Derek Walcott. Trenton: Africa World Press, 1998.

Bogues, Anthony. Black Heretics, Black Prophets: Radical Political Intellectuals. Africana Thought. London: Routledge, 2003.

Brathwaite, Kamau. "History of the Voice." Roots. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993.

----, "Jazz and the West Indian Novel." Roots. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993.

----, The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770-1820. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971.

Bruce, Dickson D. "Ancient Africa and the Early Black Historians, 1883-1915." American Quarterly 36.5 (1984): 684-699.

Buhle, Paul. C.L.R. James: The Artist as Revolutionary. London: Verso, 1988.

----, "The Culture of Socialism in the United States." Monthly Review 54 (2002): 1-12.

Butler, Broadus. "Frederick Douglass: The Black Philosopher in the United States: A Commentary." Philosophy Born of Struggle: Anthology of Afro-American Philosophy from 1917. Ed. Leonard Harris. Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1983

Cabral, Amilcar. Unity and Struggle: The Speeches and Writings of Amilcar Cabral. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979.

Caute, David. Frantz Fanon. New York: Viking Press, 1970.

Cesaire, Aime. Discourse on Colonialism. Trans. Joan Pinkham. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972.

Churchill, Ward. A Little Matter of Genocide: Holocaust and Denial in the Americas 1492 to the Present. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1997.

The C.L.R. James Reader. Ed. Anna Grimshaw. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992.

Cooper, Wayne. Claude McKay: Rebel Sojourner in the Harlem Renaissance. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 1987.

Cox, Oliver C. Capitalism as a System. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1964

Davis, Angela. "Unfinished Lecture on Liberation – II." Philosophy Born of Struggle: Anthology of Afro-American Philosophy from 1917. Ed. Leonard Harris. Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1983.

D'Costa, Jean and Barbara Lalla. Language in Exile: Three Hundred Years of Jamaican Creole. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1990.

Diop, Cheikh Anta. The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality. Trans. Mercer Cook. New York: Lawrence Hill & Company, 1974.

Douglass, Frederick. My Bondage, My Freedom. 1855. New York: Washington Square Press, 2003.

----, "Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass." 1845. The Classic Slave Narratives. Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. New York: Penguin, 1987.

----, Life and Times of Frederick Douglass. 1892. New York: Collier Books, 1962.

Du Bois, W.E.B. Against Racism: Unpublished Essays, Papers, Addresses, 1887-1961. Ed. Herbert Aptheker. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1985.

----, Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880. 1935. New York: Antheneum, 1962.

----, Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Towards an Autobiography of a Race Concept. New York: Schocken Books, 1968.

----, "The Souls of Black Folk." 1903. Three Negro Classics. New York: Avon Books, 1965.

----, The World and Africa. 1946. New York: International Publishers, 1965.

Eagleton, Terry. Ideology: An Introduction. London: Verso, 1991.

Edmonson, Belinda. "Black Aesthetics, Feminist Aesthetics, and the Problems of Oppositional Discourse." Cultural Critique 22 (1992): 75-98.

----, "Race Tradition and the Construction of the Caribbean Aesthetic." New Literary History 25.1 (1994): 109-120.

Edwards, Brent Hayes. "The 'Autonomy' of Black Radicalism." Social Text 19.2 (2001): 1-13.

----, The Practice of Diaspora: Literature Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003.

----, "The Uses of Diaspora." Social Text 19.1 (2001): 45-71.

Fanon, Frantz. A Dying Colonialism. 1959. Trans. Adolfo Gilly. New York: Grove Press, 1967.

----, Black Skins, White Masks. 1952. Trans. Charles Lam Markmann. New York: Grove Press, 1967.

----, The Wretched of the Earth. Trans. Constance Farrington. New York: Grove Press, 1963.

Forbes, Jack D. Africans and Native Americans: The Language of Race and the Evolution of Red-Black Peoples. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993.

Fuss, Diana. Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference. New York: Routledge, 1989.

----, "Interior Colonies: Frantz Fanon and the Politics of Identification." Diacritics 24. 2-3 (1994): 19-42.

Gates, Henry Louis. "Critical Fanonism." Critical Inquiry 17.3 (1991): 457-470.

----, "The Perception of Black Literature as a Necessary Road to Membership in the Human Community." The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education 22 (1998): 108-109.

----, The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Gendzier, Irene. Frantz Fanon: A Critical Study. New York: Random House, 1973.

Gikandi, Simon. "E.K. Brathwaite and the Poetics of Voice: The Allegory of History in *Rights of Passage*." The Critical Response to Kamau Brathwaite. Ed. Emily Allen Williams. Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2004.

Gilroy, Paul. The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993.

Gordon, Lewis R. Existentia Africana: Understanding Africana Existential Thought. New York: Routledge, 2000.

Gramsci, Antonio. Selections from the Prison Notebooks. Ed. and Trans. Quintin Hoare. New York: International Publishers, 1971.

Hall, Kim F. "Beauty and the Beast of Whiteness: Teaching Race and Gender." Shakespeare Quarterly 47.4 (1996): 461-475.

Hanchard, Michael. "Identity, Meaning, and the African-American." Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives. Eds. Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti, and Ella Shohat. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997. 230-239.

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. Lectures on the Philosophy of World History. 1857. Trans. H.B. Nisbet. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975.

Heidegger, Martin. Being and Time. 1953. Trans. Joan Stambaugh. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996.

Hinchman, Lewis P. and Sandra K. Hinchman. "In Heidegger's Shadow: Hannah Arendt's Phenomenological Humanism" The Review of Politics 46.2 (1984): 183-211.

Hitchcock, Peter. Imaginary States: Studies in Cultural Transnationalism. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003.

Hodge, John L. "Equality: Beyond Dualism and Oppression" Anatomy of Racism Ed. David Theo Goldberg. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990.

Hooks, Bell. "Postmodern Blackness." The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism. Ed. Vincent B. Leitch. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2001. 2478-2484.

Huggins, Nathan Irvin. Harlem Renaissance. London: Oxford University Press, 1971.

Hulme Peter, "The Locked Heart: The Creole Family Romance of *Wide Sargasso Sea*." Colonial Discourse/Postcolonial Theory. Eds. Francis Barker, Peter Hulme, and Margaret Iversen. New York: Manchester University Press, 1994. 72-88.

Hume, David. "Of National Characters." 1777. Selected Essays of David Hume Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Hurston, Zora Neale. "Characteristics of Negro Expression." 1934. African American Literary Theory. Ed. Winston Napier. New York: New York University Press, 2000. 31-44.

----, Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica. 1938. New York: Harper and Row, 1990.

James, C.L.R. A History of Pan-African Revolt. Washington: Drum and Spear Press, 1969.

----, Beyond a Boundary. 1963. Durham: Duke University Press, 1993.

----, "Lectures on the Black Jacobins." Small Axe 8 (2000): 65-112.

----, The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution. New York: Random House-Vintage Books, 1963.

----, Wilson Harris: A Philosophical Approach. St. Augustine, Trinidad: University of West Indies, 1965.

James, Winston. Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America. New York: Verso, 1998.

Jameson, Fredric. Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971.

Jones, LeRoi. Blues People. New York: Morrow Quill Paperbacks, 1963.

Kelley, Robin D.G. "'But a Local Phase of a Global Problem': Black History's Global Vision, 1883-1950." The Journal of American History 86.3 (1999): 1-37.

Kelley, Robin and Tiffany Ruby Patterson. "Unfinished Migrations: Reflections On the African Diaspora and the Making of the Modern World." African Studies Review 43.1 (2000): 11-45.

Lehmann, Sophia. "In Search of a Mother Tongue: Locating Home in Diaspora." Melus 23.4 (1998): 101-118.

Le Sueur, James D. Uncivil War: Intellectuals and Identity Politics During the Decolonization of Algeria. Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2001.

Mackey, Nathaniel. "Other: From Noun to Verb." Representations 39 (1992): 51-70.

----, Paracritical Hinge: Essays, Talks, Notes, Interviews. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005.

Martin, Tony. "Rescuing Fanon from the Critics." African Studies Review 13.3 (1970): 381-399.

McClintock Anne. "'No Longer in a Future Heaven': Gender, Race, and Nationalism." Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives. Eds. Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti, and Ella Shohat. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

Miller, Patrick B. "The Anatomy of Scientific Racism." Sport and the Color Line: Black Athletes and Race Relations in Twentieth-Century America. Eds. Patrick B. Miller and David K. Wiggins. New York: Routledge, 2004.

Moore-Gilbert, Bart. Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices, Politics. New York: Verso, 1997.

Morrison, Toni. Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination. New York: Random House-Vintage Books, 1993.

Mudimbe, V.Y. "African Gnosis Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge: An Introduction." African Studies Review 28.2-3 (1985): 149-223.

Ngugi, Wa Thiog'o. Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature. Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann, 1986.

Niane, D.T. Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali. 1960. Trans. G.D. Pickett. Edinburgh: Pearson, 2006.

Nixon, Rob. "Caribbean and African Appropriations of *The Tempest*" Politics and Poetic Value. Ed. Robert von Halberg. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987. 185-206.

Nursey-Bray, Paul. "Race and Nation: Ideology in the Thought of Frantz Fanon." The Journal of Modern African Studies 18.1 (1980): 135-142.

On Our Own Ground: The Complete Writings of William Apess, A Pequot. Ed. Barry O'Connell. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992.

Patterson, Orlando. Slavery and Social Death. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982.

Retamar, Roberto Fernandez. Caliban and Other Essays. Trans. Edward Baker. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.

Robinson, Cedric J. Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. Being and Nothingness. 1943. Trans. Hazel E. Barnes. New York: Washington Square Press, 1992.

----, Critique of Dialectical Reason. 1960. Trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith. New York: Verso, 2004.

----, Existentialism and Human Emotions. New York: Philosophical Library, 1957.

Schrader, George Alfred. Existential Philosophers: Kierkegaard to Merleau-Ponty. New York: McGraw Hill, 1967.

Shinnie, Margaret. Ancient African Kingdoms. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965.

Simpson, Hyacinth. "'Voicing the Text': The Making of an Oral Poetics in Olive Senior's Short Fiction." Callaloo 27.3 (2004): 829-843.

Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies. Ed. John W. Blassingham. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977.

Smitherman, Geneva. Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America. Detroit: Wayne State University, 1977.

Tucker, Gerald E. "Machiavelli and Fanon: Ethics, Violence, and Action." The Journal of Modern African Studies 16.3 (1978): 397-415.

Tyrell, Ian. "Making Nations/Making States: American Historians in the Context Of Empire." The Journal of American History 86.3 (1999): 1015-1044.

Walker, David. Appeal to the Colured Citizens of the World, but in particular, and very expressly, to those of the United States of America. 1829. New York: Hill and Wang, 1965.

Willett, Cynthia. "The Master-Slave Dialectic: Hegel v. Douglass" Subjugation and Bondage: Critical Essays on Slavery and Social Philosophy. Ed. Tommy L. Lott. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998. 151-170

Williams, Eric. Capitalism and Slavery. 1944. New York: Capricorn Books, 1966.

Williams, Emily Allen. "Kamau Brathwaite Talks with Emily Allen Williams about Four Decades of Critical Response." The Critical Response to Kamau Brathwaite. Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2004.

Williams, Raymond. Marxism and Literature. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.

Wright, Richard. Black Power: A Record of Reactions in a Land of Pathos. 1954. New York: Harper Collins, 1995.

Yancy, George. "Geneva Smitherman: The Social Ontology of African-American Language, the Power of *Nommo*, and the Dynamics of Resistance and Identity Through Language." Journal of Speculative Philosophy 18.4 (2004): 273-299.

Zamir, Shamoon. Dark Voices: W.E.B. Du Bois and American Thought, 1888-1903. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.