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Race, Modernity, Postmodernity:
A Look at the History of People of
Color since the 1960s

"Postmodernism as it is generally understood
involves a radical break, both with a dominant culture
and aesthetic, and with a rather different moment of
socioeconomic organization against which its
structural novelties and innovations are measured:
a new social and economic moment (or even system),
which has variously been called media society, the
'society of the spectacle' ... , consumer society ... ,
the 'bureaucratic society of controlled consumption'
... , or 'postindustrial society'".[1]

Since the 1960s, as Fredric Jameson suggests in the
above quote, there have been emergent social, economic,
political, and cultural discourses and formations on the
horizon in Western societies. The emergent forms of a
new commercial culture, the rise of computer and
information networks, the mechanization of culture, the
mediation of culture by the media, and the emergence of
the decentered, postmodern subject are producing a new
social reality. And in the United States, people of color—
Asian Americans, Native Americans, African Americans,
and Hispanics—are an integral part of these transforma-
tions, this new emergent social reality, this postmodern
American society.

Many reasons have been given for the condition of
postmodernity in the West. Fredric Jameson calls post-

modernism the "cultural logic of late capitalism" where transnational corporations globalize production, thereby causing them to become devoid of loyalty to nations of origin. According to Jameson, in the shift in global economic organization, national markets grew into world markets.[2] Jean-Francois Lyotard, in *The Postmodern Condition,* attributes the emergence of postmodernity to the breakup of master narratives such as those of the Enlightenment, Marxism, and the Spirit—narratives of the gradual emancipation of humanity from slavery and class oppression. The decline of master narratives, argues Lyotard, is due to the renewal of the spirit of capitalism's free enterprise, along with the growth of certain techniques and technologies in science.[3] Without master narratives man is left without external principles of authority.

Although there is an ongoing debate about the meaning and significance of postmodernity, there is a consensus that it constitutes conceptions of space and time that are different from the conceptions of space and time as defined by modernity and racial tradition. Postmodernity, especially in the social, political, and cultural spheres, provides a critical space to assess modernity and racial tradition and the cultural objects they produced. From postmodernity's emphasis on discontinuity, the fragmented, decentered subject, and on the rejection of those postulates that are totalizing, metaphysical, and essentialist, I examine race and racial traditions in contemporary American society. Thus, I reconstruct American history and culture since the 1960s with the aim of showing how people of color have become an integral part of a postmodern American society. Finally, it is from postmodernity's anti-foundationalism that I explain certain narratives and texts written by people of color since the 1960s, focusing on how these writers engage and textualize modern and postmodern experiences in their respective racial groups.

In the contemporary literature, a vision of racial communities as being defined by racial tradition has been distilled. A racial tradition is an ideological construction that reproduces a value system that we typify and classify from our modern context as traditional. I use this term, racial tradition, to identify the ideological construction of this vision, specifically how it follows within a master narrative that, since the rise of capitalism, has dichotomized and yet conjoined two oppositions: the rural/urban and the European/non-European.

Racial tradition, particularly as it is constituted in the United States, tends to closely resemble ethnicity. Like ethnicity, a racial tradition usually connotes a self-perceived group of people who hold in common a set of what Clifford Geertz calls "primordial affinities and attachments,"[4] or traditions and folkways not shared by the other people with whom they are in constant contact and interaction. Such traditions typically include "folk" beliefs and practices, language, and a value system—an inherited cluster of mores, ethics, and aesthetics. But these primordial affinities and attachments are neither essential nor original to racial tradition. Rather, they are artifices of the moment, which construct and invent the idea of the individual who is connected to a community through a shared past. Cosmologically, a racial tradition, as it is ideologically constructed in the United States, usually has a transcendent realm—the belief that there is another reality that transcends the reality within which everyday experience unfolds. Chantal Mouffe pinpoints the conception and ideological operation of tradition in society with the following:

> Tradition allows us to think our own insertion into historicity, the fact that we are constructed as subjects through a series of already existing discourses, and that it is through this tradition which forms us that the world is given to us and all political action made possible.[5]

It is here, in this objectified and homogenized conception of tradition, that racial cultural nationalists in the United States fall into a trap of taking the rhetorical ideological construct of continuity (and unity and wholeness) as being an essential relation of continuity. In other words, continuity is a historical artifice constructed by oppressed and marginalized racial individuals through political struggle, resistance to hegemonic forms, contestations, and economic marginalization. Furthermore, this vision of racial tradition is constructed on the basis of appropriation, objectification, homogenization, and reification of heterogeneous cultures from Mexico, Central and South America, Africa, and Asia.

The underlying assumption of this ideologically racially constructed tradition is the belief that racial communities have been isolated, that they are autonomous, homogeneous, integrated, and essentially authentic. The popular and accepted belief is that

these communities are pre-modern, that they have not been affected by modern American society or the modernization process. But these racial communities, whether they are in the rural margins or pushed into urban pockets in the United States, are not pre-modern or pre-industrial communities. They are fundamentally modern. Even during legal and *de facto* segregation, people of color belong to capitalism and the modernization process. The Marxist and anthropological debates on world system models have shown that these marginalized and repressed racial communities—or these zones of internal colonialism—have been structured by the modernization process as the underbelly of modernity and that the people of these communities internalized some of the definitions, cognitive styles, and values of an emerging, commercial American culture.[6] In other words, within the topography of modernity, both as economic and cultural movement, these communities are not isolated but are integrated as variously designated sites of refuge, exploitation, underdevelopment, and future labor resources.

From this perspective it is obvious that there has been a conscious effort by some members of these communities to define/maintain these communities as zones of tradition that are constructed as pre-modern, pre-industrial, pre-commercial, and non-capitalist. This effort is in direct response to the *de facto* intrusion of capitalism and modernity, as well as to the pervasive racial oppression. To argue this is to argue precisely against the idea that the members of these communities are passive, agencyless actors whose society, cultural forms, and psychologies are determined by an imperialist or intruding capitalism. They are not. Within Marxist social science, these marginal racial communities are understood as cultures of resistance.[7] Their resistance and agency hinge on constituting their cultures as "outside the modern," specifically as being pre-modern. Thus, they fall within the modernist meta-narrative that denies "coevalness" to the rural and/or non-European other. There are several discourses within which this meta-narrative unfolds: for example, the romanticist movement within literature, the anthropological imagination of the primitive, and the sociological theorization of Gemeinshaft and Gesellschaft. All date to the birth of capitalism.

Given this broader socio-historical context, I use the concept of racial tradition to refer to a form of modernity which is nonethe-

less constructed and conceived in opposition to modernity. This racial modernity has been critical of the constitution of the classical metropolitan tradition of modernity as its mirror that reflects off this internal other. It exists as the subversive other constantly reminding the classical tradition of its limitations and exclusions. This idea pushes us to understand modernity as a tradition. Thus, I define the classical or traditional modernity as the common-sense, unmarked meaning of "modernity." Of course, the marked sense of modernity is indicated by the label "high modernism."

Thus, racial tradition, modernity, and postmodernity involve three distinct conceptions of space and time—so distinct, in fact, that racial tradition, in the political context of the United States, is effectively contradictory to modernity and postmodernity. First, racial tradition and modernity connote two different conceptions of space and time. Whereas racial tradition connotes wholeness, homogeneity, historical continuity, and a sense of common ancestry or place of origin, classical modernity connotes the loss of metaphysical meaning, rampant individualism, nihilism, hedonism, alienation, fragmentation, the lack of social identification, and the lack of historical continuity. Whereas racial traditions consider the past as a model, or a guiding example, modernity's hallmark is the impulse to experiment, to break with the past. And while the construction of racial tradition links community and culture to the land, modernity links community and culture to the city and technology.

Whereas racial tradition connotes collectivity and modernity implies the loss of metaphysical meaning, alienation, and fragmentation, postmodernity engages reflexity and fragmented authority, questions concepts of subjective consciousness and historical continuity or any totalizing and homogenizing system. Postmodernity interrogates the notion of consensus. It critiques and dispenses with not only positivism and Marxism, but humanism as well, since it calls into question Enlightenment notions of the modern subject. Whereas modernity defines the subject as a unity, postmodernity constructs the subject as decentered, as possessing various subjective positions or a network of desires. Postmodernity is characterized by late capitalism's dissolution of bourgeois hegemony and the development of a heterogeneous mass culture. This aspect of late capitalism is associated with the

shift to a so-called "information society," which has been defined as the "explosion of electronic media, the shift from print literacy to images, and the penetration of the commodity form throughout all cultural production."[8]

In political terms, the erosion of what Andreas Huyssen calls the "triple dogma modernism/modernity/avantgardism," or high modernism, and the supercession of that dogma by a new dogma, of postmodernity, is contextually related to the emergence of the problematic of otherness. This otherness includes the different experiences of women and racial and sexual minorities into the sociopolitical sphere in the United States.[9]

Yet, despite the adversity, incongruency, and antagonism that exist among them, the social formations of racial tradition (i.e., communities imagined as pre-industrial and pre-modern), modernity, and postmodernity are very much a part of the present experiences of people of color in the United States. But, as we have seen, these three modernities (post-, the classical, and the racial) have distinct conceptions of space and time. How, then, can a racial tradition, which I have identified as being modernist, be part of the birth of the postmodern? How did racial groups who view themselves as part of a collective tradition become an integral part of individualistic postmodern America?

Before the 1960s, the four major non-white racial groups—Asian Americans, African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans—in the United States were understood to practice racial cultures that were unquestionably modelled on the ideological construction of a racial tradition. In this construction, culture was a realm of value where individuals within each racial group were socialized into an unfragmented racial tradition. Institutional racism and racial loyalty reinforced these racial traditions and put into operation forms of control that sought the homogenization of the racial individual to the group. However, differences and heterogeneity existed within these communities, although they were subordinated, repressed, and overlooked. In the industrial and technological revolution that had been transforming the United States since the 1880s, people of color, as I have stated earlier, were not only affected by, but were a profoundly integral part of, this economic, social, and psychological revolution, i.e., the process of modernization, as its margin and supplement. They were excluded from mainstream institutions

and practices and, therefore, were forced to reinvent institutions and practices in their marginalized communities that were imitations of those of the mainstream society. In short, prior to the 1960s, people of color were the underbelly and anchorage of modernity.

Although people of color have been in the United States since its inception, they have been marginalized in a variety of ways. There has been a considerable attempt to fully exclude people of color from full and equal participation in and integration into America's economic, social, political, and educational institutions. Nonetheless, as I stated earlier, full exclusion is structurally impossible, for these racial communities have been forced into the position of being a labor commodity to be exploited. Thus, they serve as what Jacques Derrida calls "supplement."[10] (For Derrida, "supplement" refers to writing as a contradictory action which both replaces and adds to the putative "reality" it represents. I would like to apply the term to traditional racial communities who add to the "reality" of the modernization process.) Through their labor, racial communities make the modernization process possible in the United States. African Americans have been in the United States for more than three hundred years. Yet, most African Americans—through legal slavery and *de facto* segregation—were banned from the fruits, while directly participating in the United States' economic and social transformation. For two hundred years, slavery legally prevented African Americans from reaping the educational, social, political and economic rewards provided by the mainstream American society, despite the fact that African Americans served as a pool of cheap labor to be exploited by capitalists as they laid the foundation for the United States' economic emergence. And as slaves they were commodities; thus, in what sense can one speak of capitalist penetration into African American communities in the twentieth century? After Reconstruction, a host of Jim Crow laws were enacted that were designed to further deny African Americans access to the rewards provided by mainstream America.

Similar kinds of marginalizations and exclusions kept Asian Americans—people of Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, Korean, Cambodian, Vietnamese, and Indian descent—from receiving the educational, social, and financial compensations of being full and

equal participants in mainstream American institutions. It was not until 1952 that immigrants from all Asian groups were considered eligible for United States citizenship.[11] Asian Americans encountered this exclusion of citizenship and all of the subsequent rights despite the fact that 250,000 Chinese arrived in California between 1849 and the early 1880s, and that large immigrant populations of Japanese and Filipinos would arrive during the first half of the twentieth century. They would form a critical labor pool for agriculture and the building of the railroad system, which allowed for the western expansion of the imperial United States.

Like African Americans and Asian Americans, Hispanics were marginalized, excluded, and kept from full and equal participation in America's technological revolution until the 1960s. They too were denied the fruits while they participated directly in the economic development within the United States. Hispanics—who include immigrants and the colonized from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and Central and South America—have been in the United States for as long as five hundred years and for as recently as five seconds. Today, they may number eighteen million or twenty million or twenty-three million.[12]

Like the aforementioned groups of people of color, Hispanics were segregated socially, culturally, economically, and educationally. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which brought the northern reaches of Mexico under the United States' legal jurisdiction, explicitly guaranteed that the Mexicans who elected to stay in the United States would enjoy "all the rights of citizens of the [United States] according to the principles of the Constitution." But by the end of the nineteenth century, Mexicans had been largely dispossessed of their property and relegated culturally and socially to a lower-class status. Prior to the 1960s, and still today, they existed as sites of economic exploitation. Their political and economic status was insecure and their work was often seasonal in nature. They were forced into a dual-wage system where they received low wages, frequently below those received by white Americans for the same type and amount of work.[13] Or, as in the case of Puerto Ricans-Americans, they became an underdeveloped and cheap labor pool of domestics. In parts of Texas prior to the 1960s, Mexican Americans were segregated in movie houses, refused service in food shops, and denied access to

public facilities such as housing, employment, and education. In the Northeast, particularly in places such as New York City and Hartford, Connecticut, Puerto Ricans encountered similar *de facto* segregation in housing and employment.

Finally, the category "Native American" is an artifice of the colonial collision. It is composed of multiple socio-cultural groups who share a colonial history as Indians. They, too, were marginalized in and excluded from full and equal participation in mainstream American institutions and practices. First, there was the military conquest of the Native Americans and their subsequent removal to reservations. But, almost from their first interactions, Native Americans sought education from the United States government. In more than one-quarter of the approximately four-hundred treaties entered into by the United States government between 1778 and 1871, education was one of the specific services Native Americans requested in exchange for their lands.[14] But in the formalized education provided by the United States, Native American students were forced to embrace Western ideas and culture, whose price was the repression and denial of their own cultures. Many students were forced into a cultural no-man's land where they remained torn between two worlds. Most students simply dropped out of the system. This uniform curriculum for all Native American schools in which Native American cultural heritage, language, and traditions were ignored and deprecated continued well into the twentieth century. It was only with the establishment in 1968 of the twenty-two tribally controlled community colleges and the two tribally controlled four-year colleges, along with the establishment of Native American Studies Programs and Departments by predominantly white American universities, that Native American students received an education that stressed indigenous values and included Native American history.

But the lack of necessary skills—due to inadequate education and, more importantly, racism in employment and housing outside/beyond the reservation—denied most Native Americans the opportunities to participate fully and equally in, and therefore receive the educational, social, and financial compensations of, America's mainstream institutions and its technological revolution. Native Americans encountered these denials despite the fact that they also served as a resource for cheap labor and

economic exploitation in the United States' modernization process. They were segregated socially and physically from the general white American population as early as the 1850s. In 1849 and 1850, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Orlando Brown, devised a plan to concentrate the various Native American tribes of the plains in designated regions. Treaties were made that limited the Native American movement in the west. By 1950, most Native Americans had been effectively segregated on reservations.[15]

In delineating the legal and *de facto* social, educational, and economic barriers that marginalized people of color from central participation in and integration into America's modernization process and that prevented them from sharing equally in the fruits of its harvest, I am not arguing that people of color *were not affected* by urbanization and advancements in technology—by this technologically transformed, urban American society—before the 1960s. More importantly, and contrary to popular beliefs, I am arguing that until the 1950s and 1960s, due to legal and *de facto* segregation, the majority of Native Americans, African Americans, Hispanics, and Asian Americans lived in segregated, marginalized communities, such as the urban enclaves that became known as East L.A., Harlem, Chinatown, Japantown, etc. Within these areas of dense residential settlement, all of the different economic and social classes coexisted. They elaborated distinct institutions, catering to their special needs and tastes. They maintained ideologically constructed notions of racial communities that possessed a value system that typifies the traditional and that were represented by certain qualities such as homogeneity, wholeness, and historical continuity. Differences, struggles, conflicts, contestations did exist within these racial communities and were tolerated in varying degrees. But racism, racial loyalty, and forced segregation assisted in the subordination and repression of these differences within these communities.

A number of events and trends occurred in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s that have caused a serious threat to, or transformation of, these marginalized, racial communities and their ideologically constructed non-commercial, transcendental cultures. These events and trends propelled members of these communities into classical modernity and into a postmodern America. First, by the 1960s, the majority of people of color lived

in America's large metropolitan areas. By the 1980s, at least seventy to eighty percent of African Americans lived in cities. Since 1960, over 200,000 Native Americans have left their reservations and moved to metropolitan centers throughout the United States. According to a Department of Interior study in 1986, only twenty-five percent of Native Americans still live on reservations.[16] Although the initial Mexican immigrants were farm laborers, they have immigrated increasingly to the cities of the Southwest. In 1977, an estimated eighty to eighty-five percent of the Mexican American population lived in cities. Cuban Americans comprise the majority population in Miami, Florida. Dominicans joined with Puerto Ricans to become a dominant Hispanic presence in New York City and Chicago. Central Americans flocked into and around the District of Columbia. Asian Americans are also highly urbanized, with ninety-three percent living in metropolitan areas. Among those living in metropolitan areas, about half live in central cities and half in suburbs.[17] In short, the population of the major American cities is comprised of people of color. This means that people of color are using their numbers to change the political, cultural, educational, and economic landscape of America's metropolitan areas.

The movement of people of color into the urban areas coincides with the proliferation and extension of mass culture and the mediation of culture by the media, which increases the visibility of already existing heterogeneity in these marginalized, racial communities. As it occurs in the rest of the United States, social identity is reworked by mass media, which in turn is responding to the sociological changes that are occuring in society.

The coexistence of African Americans, Hispanics, and Asian Americans in the same communities or in close proximity to each other in the urban areas means a certain amount of political, social, and economic tension. Hispanics tend to clash with African Americans over political power and political representation as they attempt to carve out their own political turf, since these areas were once dominated by African Americans. African Americans tend to clash with Asian Americans over economic issues, since Asian Americans have become the new entrepreneurs in traditional African American communities. In political terms, this emergence of different peoples of color into the urban sociopolitical sphere in the United States contributes to its

political postmodernity and indicates a rupture of the once black-white polarized race relations in the United States.

A second event in the 1960s that reoriented the marginalization of people of color, and undermined the black-white polarization, from the mainstream American institutions and practices was a change in racial attitudes in the United States. The end of World War II marked the close of one of the most racist periods in United States history. The period between World War II and the 1960s is considered one of the most economically prosperous in the United States. In the 1950s and 1960s, middle class people of color had grown in numbers in relation to the economic prosperity in the rest of the society. Their perception of their expanding economic growth failed to comprise a corresponding elevation in their social status and political power. Thus, they began the successful challenge to the legal, educational, economic, social, and political apparatuses and institutions that had denied them full equality. With pressure from Civil Rights groups[18] and the liberal sector of the white American population, states began to pass and enforce anti-discrimination statutes. Under pressure from these Civil Rights groups, California abolished legal school segregation in 1947. Arizona granted Native Americans the right to vote in 1948, and in 1952, Asian immigrants became eligible for citizenship.[19] In 1948, the California Supreme Court ruled that anti-miscegenation laws were unconstitutional because they violated the right of equal protection.[20] In addition, with pressure, the federal government began the elimination of discriminatory practices.

The enforcement of Civil Rights laws made the political process and political self-representation a reality for people of color. These laws banned discrimination in housing and employment. They provided more economic and educational opportunities for people of color. They made available to people of color certain exclusively white social, economic, educational, and cultural traditions and institutions. In short, these Civil Rights laws legally made accessible to people of color the institutions and practices of mainstream American society.

First, opportunities became available to people of color in education. In the late 1960s, America's colleges and universities began to enroll larger numbers of students of color. The grandchildren and great-grandchildren of slaves and immigrants used education for social and economic mobility. The number of African Americans enrolled full time at American colleges and

universities nearly doubled between 1970 and 1980.[21] Black college student enrollment jumped from fewer than 350,000 students to more than a million. At the nation's law schools, where, prior to the 1970s, people of color were seldom found, African Americans are now about five percent of the total population.[22] Hispanics comprise a comparable, if not higher, percentage of the total law school student population.

The number of students attending college increased for other people of color. By the 1970s, Japanese Americans sent ninety percent of their children to college. In fact, according to the Japanese American Research Project (1978) and the Report on *The Economic Status of Americans of Asian Descent*, (published by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights in 1988), Japanese Americans have the highest median education level among both whites and non-whites in the United States, followed by Chinese Americans, then Anglo Americans. Despite the fact that Asian Americans in 1990 comprise only 5.5 percent of the U.S. population, they represent eleven percent of the students at Harvard, ten percent at Princeton, sixteen percent at Stanford, twenty-one percent at MIT, and twenty-five percent at the University of California at Berkeley.[23] Also, with the establishment of tribal colleges and an increase in Native American students on the campuses of American colleges and universities, the 1970s and 1980s produced a generation of college-educated Native Americans who moved into positions of leadership in both their respective tribes and the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

As a result of the enactment of Civil Rights laws and the rate of economic growth in the period after World War II, a second avenue of opportunity became available to people of color in the workplace, in politics, and in housing. The corporate and business worlds, including media institutions, were forced to become more sensitive to the historical exclusion of people of color. The Small Business Association and federal set-aside programs aimed at increasing the number of people of color in business. The economic growth among people of color, and their presence in America's once exclusively white institutions and practices, had a profound effect. These institutions and practices had to accommodate and adjust to the people of color's presence.

A third event in the 1960s that undermined the marginalization and exclusion of people of color from the mainstream institutions and practices was a change in industrial culture. The change

entails the emergent forms of a new commercial culture. It is associated with the shift to a so-called "information society," conceived as a larger transformation that includes the explosion of electronic media, the shift from print literacy to images. Although commodity forms generate and satisfy needs and desires, modern and postmodern individuals are not just passive agents. Rather, they are part of new sociological and cultural changes that also affect the media and commodity production.

This integration and increased visibility of working-class and middle-class people of color into America's modernization process and emergent form of commercial culture mean that a larger percentage of people of color, who have weakened ties to their ideologically constructed racial traditions, are susceptible to such modern experiences as alienation, fragmentation, hedonism, narcissism, nihilism, the lack of historical continuity, and the lack of social identification. In this sense, they have become a part of America's classical modernity, as the negative. This integration also means that racial individuals increasingly also experience the de-centering of the subject and the disconnectedness from anything human—that is, human as it is defined by the Enlightenment's concept of the unified subject, historical continuity, and profoundity—that characterizes postmodern life. Working-class and middle-class racial individuals, like their white counterparts, take on new "class" identities generated by high modernism and problematize the values of their ideologically constructed racial tradition that has become increasingly inadequate to fully explain their lived experiences.

The explicit integration of middle-class and working-class people of color into the modernization process where mass culture or a new commerical culture dominates can help us to explain the devastation of these marginalized, racial communities and the undermining of their ideologically constructed cultures. Given their various "new" accesses to mainstream institutions and practices, many people of color have had greater opportunities to participate in the continual reinscription of marginalized, racial cultures into commodity form. This reinscription has included the popular television mini-series "Roots" and "The Civil War," series such as "The Bill Cosby Show," "The Jeffersons," commercials about "real," "authentic" non-normative Hispanics and African Americans buying and selling American products, the popular

novels of Louise Erdrich, Victor Villasenor, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, N. Scott Momaday, Amy Tan, and Maxine Hong Kingston, which appropriate the cultural past into normative literary conventions, and the crossover rhythm and blues of Whitney Houston, Diana Ross, and Lionel Richie.

But the integration of people of color into America's classical modernity is a complicated event. I do not want to simply argue that people of color become insulated middle-class individuals in the same way as many of their white counterparts. Many people of color bring styles, approaches, sensibilities, racial pride, psychological scars and complexes, and other concerns to their middle classness which have been informed by historical racial oppression. They bring appropriated cultural forms and languages not only from their marginalized racial communities but also from Asia, South, Central and North America, and Africa. Many middle-class people of color continue to support, what Cornel West calls the "emergent ... political class ... primarily to ensure upward social mobility" of their racial groups.[24]

In addition, because many middle-class people of color are one generation removed from, or still have familial links with, impoverished, marginalized traditional racial communities, and because most still experience racial discrimination, they tend to be, or are forced to be, more sensitive to and aware of the pain, suffering, and injustice of those Americans who continue to be economically and socially marginalized.

The opening up of America's mainstream institutions and practices, and the educational, economical, and social integration of people of color into the modernization process in the United States have increased the number of educated, middle-class people of color. The elimination of the legal barriers has stimulated an exodus of the colored middle class from marginalized spaces in the rural and urban areas. This is a pregnant moment, because it entails the racial pluralization of institutions and practices and thus the creation of an image of America as a *newly* heterogeneous society. This has to do with the proliferation of people of color into designated public spaces such as the media, the workplace, and educational institutions where persons of multiracial identities can interact and intermix.

A more complicated process occurs with regard to residential spaces, which in various ways contributed to what has been

identified as the postmodern condition. As is well known, the suburbanization of the cities was propelled by the taking over of inner city white residential areas by middle-class blacks who were leaving their marginalized communities. As middle-class blacks moved out of traditional, marginalized racial communities and into once all-white residential areas (or into newly developed middle class black communities), whites moved to white suburban communities. In contrast, with middle-class Hispanics and Asian Americans, there was more of an infiltration by them into previously exclusively white residential areas, urban and suburban.

With this spatial and cultural break, in the case of middle-class African Americans, or dispersion, in the case of middle-class Asian Americans and Hispanics, the mythical vision of the racial community as an integral cultural whole became untenable: the importance of class, identities, alliances, and interests disrupted the modernist ideological construction of race or racial tradition as isolated cultures and homogenous communities.

Simultaneous with the integration of working-class and middle-class people of color into America's modernization process and mass culture, marginalized, racial communities are further fragmented and eroded by the emergence of the subculture of the non-middle class, particularly among Hispanics and African American youths. As William Julius Wilson argues, "the socioeconomic status of the most disadvantaged members of America's people of color has deteriorated rapidly since 1970."[25] An increasing maldistribution of wealth, the exodus of the middle class from marginalized, racial communities to predominantly white and suburban communities or to newly designed middle-class racial communities, the shift in the U.S. economy from goods-producing to service-producing industries, the international flow of wage labor migrants, the increasing polarization of the labor market into low-wage and high-wage sectors, the relocation of manufacturing industries out of the central cities, and the heavy burden of racism have increased and made visible the working poor and the urban and reservation non-middle class of Hispanics, African Americans, Native Americans, and, to a lesser degree, Asian Americans. (These economic and technological changes have also produced and made visible a large white lower middle class and working poor population, a population that would be used in the revolt against gains acquired by people of color since the 1960s.)

These post-1960s spatially demarcated marginalized communities, both rural and urban, continue to be heterogeneous, and they have developed new features and characteristics. They are the homes of Catholics, Protestants, and Muslims. They are comprised of cultural nationalists and other political activists. The unemployed, the welfare dependent, the working poor, and the unsanctioned working rich also live in these communities. African American, Asian American, and Hispanics gangs live in these communities. These marginalized communities have become sites of high unemployment. Drug use and sales have become rampant or highly visible, and life in prison has become an integral part of the way of life. Traditional family structures, in many instances, have been superseded by female-headed families, particularly among African Americans and Hispanics. In addition, there is a pervasive immersion in America's new commercial culture, and traditional notions of moral authority have been undermined or problematized, particularly as they are defined by racial tradition. In the absence of master narratives, or with racial traditions diminished, mini-narratives, new forms of sensibilities, and new conceptions of the subject become visible, which are in contrast to the modalities of the racial traditions. (Although some of these sensibilities are pathological, or are the result of some individuals' feeling alienated from a normative American society, I do not want to define these communities entirely as pathological or abnormal. To do so is to assume that there is some universal norm by which to measure all sensibilities.) However, in the case of traditional Chinese and Japanese communities, many have been revitalized by the recent Asian immigrants from Vietnam, Hong Kong, and Korea.

Finally, it is the integration or incorporation of people of color and their subjective and political experiences into the various mainstream social, political, educational, and artistic institutions in the United States that problematizes the concept of the United States as a white male, middle-class-centered society. Critics have called this incorporation political postmodernity, which operates to a complex conjuction of conditions. And as I have discussed earlier, it involves the everyday effects of the news media and communicative technology as well as the great redistribution of power and population that have accompanied the new structures of commodity production.

The emergence of various forms and experiences of "otherness"

in the cultural sphere contest, or lessen, the importance of high modernism, which Stanley Aronowitz defines as involving a "reliance on formal democratic processes, growth politics based on an unalloyed support for industrialism, and, of course, sexual and power hierarchies."[26] As "other," people of color, along with gays and women, in their emphasis on assimilating differently, in their emphasis on exhuming repressed and excluded histories, in their emphasis on exploring forms of gender- and race-based subjectivity in aesthetic production and experiences, and in their refusal to be limited to standard canonization, add a whole new dimension to the critique of a white, middle-class, male-centered society and of high modernism and help to issue forth a postmodernism that allows alternative forms of culture to emerge. Thus, the emergence of "otherness" challenges the importance of a white male, middle-class-centered society. This new field of differences articulates a new arrangement of power.

Of course, the undermining and contesting of standard canonizations have caused certain sectors of the white American population to resist this emerging heterogeneity in the educational and cultural spheres and to attempt to restore to hegemony a codified version of high modernism that is mostly white, male, and upper middle class. Several cultural and political organizations and groups resist and attack America's emerging heterogeneity. Some that come immediately to mind are: former chairwoman Lynne Cheney's and the Reagan-Bush National Endowment for the Humanities' talk of promoting classical works and traditional values of family and religion; Allan Bloom's advocating a return to the classical works in *The Closing of the American Mind;* the move by angry white men and the Republican revolt of 1994 against civil rights gains and tolerances such as Affirmative Action programs, federal set-aside programs, and the concept of multiculturalism or cultural diversity, which gave people of color some access to mainstream institutions, usually under the guise of an attack on political correctness. Of course, this resistance/reaction by certain sectors of the white American population will not disenfranchise women and people of color. It will not return America to a pre-1950s society, where only white males occupy mainstream social, economic, political, and educational apparatuses and institutions. The revolt/reaction will not reverse the proliferation of people of color into designated

public spaces where persons of different racial identities can interact and intermix. Despite the revolt, American will not return completely to a white male, upper middle-class-centered society. For several reasons, the revolt/reaction has to be interpreted as a last stand, as a refusal to accept emergent power arrangements.

History, an increased population of people of color, and mass culture are on the side of this heterogeneity. In many of the largest urban counties in the United States, and in a few non-metropolitan counties, no single ethnic or racial group is a majority. These counties are examples of the trend toward greater diversity. A high diversity rate implies new political alliances and new cultural hybrids. As a consequence of higher diversity, enormous sociological changes have occurred in American public schools, colleges, and universities over the last twenty years. The ethnic profile of both students and faculty has undergone a dramatic transformation.[27] In the public schools and on college and university campuses across the country, especially in populous states such as California, Texas, New York, and Illinois where students of color comprise from thirty-five to fifty-five percent of the student population, students of color have refused to allow a European-oriented curriculum to be forced upon them. They have demanded and are demanding a curriculum that reflects their histories and experiences.

Of course, the fact that there has been the emergence of various forms of otherness in the social, educational, and cultural spheres, which contest the notion that America is ruled by a middle-class, white-male-centered narrative, does not mean that dominant patriarchial and racial and class narratives have disappeared. As I have mentioned earlier, the ruling social order through the media and mass culture permits heterogeneity while at the same time colonizing that otherness and appropriating it for its own purposes.

In addition, the fact that people of color, gays, and women, as "other," help to usher in a postmodern eclecticism in American life does not necessarily mean that women, gays, and people of color are postmodern, or that their artistic and cultural works are disruptive and are culturally postmodern. As I will show later, people of color can be politically conservative, liberal, and radical and their artistic productions can be realistic, existential, modern,

as well as postmodern. Fredric Jameson, Andreas Huyssen, and other postmodern critics tend to see people of color as being only a part of political postmodernity, or as part of what Hutcheon calls the ex-centric who are different, marginal, and, therefore, able to disrupt the center.

However, these postmodern critics never perceive a double bind that stems from a paradox of the de/centeredness of the postmodern. On the one hand, there are members of these ex-centric groups who embody the image of sameness and therefore do not merely reinforce but also reinscribe the vision of the center in the United States. On the other hand, the highly visible racial individual who pursues an essentialized contestation of the image of the same in the United States also re-centers that which has been decentered in postmodern America. Precisely, here is the paradox. In the transformation of racial communities into a postmodern, mass-cultured American society, "there is no longer," argues Howard Winant, "any single articulating principle or axial process with which to interpret the racial dimensions of all extant political/cultural projects. In this absence of a comprehensive challenge to the racial order as a whole, racial categories, meanings, and identities, [and the notion of a centered, mainstreamed America] have become 'decentered,'"[28] except through our persistent and nostalgic reconstitution of a center that does not exist.

Because of the disintegration of traditional racial communities where most people experienced or knew common, hegemonic racial or ethnic cultures, and because of the variety of experiences across social, educational, and economic traditions that have subsequently emerged within these once-tight groups, racial groups today do not constitute monolithic entities. They can no longer be perceived as exotic, inscrutable others, or their members as noble savages without complex consciousnesses, who are incomprehensible. Racial groups can no longer be perceived as mysterious others whom white people view as belonging to different species. The modernization process and mass culture have made it possible for all Americans to share similar cognitive styles, images, social practices, and lived experiences.

Theorists of postmodernity have labelled this phenomenon I have outlined as a blurring of categories such as race, gender and class. But it would be more appropriate to understand this post-