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L'objet X: Performing Race in a Postmodern World

> When they see the girls with their bandannas and flannels, their pants hung low and boxers showing, their lipstick thick and bright as blood, their cars blasting ghetto sound, the white boys sneer, "You and your fake gangster shit." Some of these Roselawn boys shave their heads, hang White Power flags in their bedrooms, and wear Doc Martens. But before things really got hot at the school, one of the girls' loudest tormentors wore Cross Colours to classes one day. Another boy used to date one of the hip hop girls, and he wore Cool Water cologne because he heard Snoop did and his girl liked Snoop. At some point then, the boys became very self-conscious. Went back into their white skin with a vengeance. Decided to beat the girls down, as if the girls and their "fake gangster shit" reminded them of some bug-eyed innocence of their own when they wanted to be like those black gunslingers on MTV. Did they wake up one morning and see nothing but a pink-faced farm boy in the mirror whose heart beat triple-time just driving into the city?
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> —Kathy Dobie, "Heart of Darkness"[1]

> Love and desire exhibit reactionary, or else revolutionary, indices.
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> — Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*[2]

"What a history you have," declares Lucy's envious white friend Mariah in Jamaica Kincaid's novel *Lucy* — to which Lucy responds "You are welcome to it if you like."[3] This white envy of black history, even though that history is written with whips and

chains, extends to countless other visual and aural signifiers of black culture; in today's suburban enclaves it's hip-hop culture that brings the 'flava' to what many white kids apprehend as a flavorless cultural landscape. On one level, this reflects a sort of perverse romanticization of a racialized "Other," even as (and perhaps in part because) that Other is daily demonized via the media spectacle of the young, drug-dealing, gat-packing black male. Yet like the X's that adorn so many baseball caps on black and white heads, there is a strange ambivalence to these shifting racialized signifiers. Is it a hopeful or disturbing sign to see young white boyz and girlz in Indiana donning hoodies and baggy pants and pumping Ice Cube from their stereos, when at the same time many of their racial and economic peers in Idaho are donning black combat boots and shaving their heads? If gangsta rap racks up bigger sales figures in Westchester County than in the South Bronx, how should the augurers of race relations interpret this latest roll of the bones? All these questions are complicated still further by the fact that, within many middle-class African-American households, seeing the kids don ski caps and black flak jackets raises some of the same parental panic that such acts would occasion in any *white* household at the same economic level.[4] The signifiers of hip-hop style, though performative and mobile, also seem to disclose an *essence*, a countercultural twist that challenges the received politics of identity. It has reached the point where Beastie Boy Mike D can reject and even claim *not to understand* "white" culture even though he himself is "white" within the conventional senses/census of racial identity.[5]

All this takes place against a backdrop of the recurrent appropriation and commodification of black cultural styles that goes back over a century and a half to the early days of blackface minstrelsy. Indeed, as Eric Lott suggests in his recent book *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*, these representational appropriations have formed the primary grounds for race relations on a symbolic level.[6] Whiteness, indeed, seems from its origins to have figured itself in the performance of a blackness it alternately abhors and adores, while at the same time the black avant-garde has continually found grounds of resistance in a series of artistic (re)turns, from swing to bop to hip-hop. In the contemporary 'Society of the Spectacle,' indeed, *all the world's a stage*; much of what had earlier been mediated via formalized

artistic spaces is now performed directly by its former consumers. To twist the radio dial is to become a kind of instant cultural *bricoleur*, to blast it out the car window is an act of self-construction, self-performance; whether it's music or dress or diction, cultural signifiers commingle and cohere like bits of glass in a kaleidoscope.

What may have been missed, however, in previous analyses of this phenomenon, are the deeper implications for racialized subjectivity *itself*. The more playful postmodernists have hailed it as a sign of the *constructedness* of the subject, and the inter*play* of strategic subjectivities which they locate in medieval carnival, theater, or drag balls; to them the gangsta is just the latest incarnation of the prankster.[7] At the same time, reactive elements within both black nationalist and — it must be noted — white conservative circles are much more likely to see this subjective interplay as a *threat*. Either white culture is *stealing* black culture, taking the profits from the prophets, or else a sort of cultural fatal attraction is drawing white boys and girls into an apocalyptic loss of subjectivity on a par with "drugs" or "violence" (both of which, indeed, have become code-words for black culture among the acolytes of the new right). Either way, there is a crucial misprision; the ludic model imagines subjectivity "in play" in a way that, in point of fact, it is *not;* racialized identities and racism remain alive and well. On the other hand the essentialistic model, with its paranoiac machines of (bodily) fluids, contact, and contagion, is completely unprepared to deal with "the mix of black and white," whether cultural or physical. A new generation which listens to hip-hop *and* metal, grunge, or techno music presents a system-crashing anomaly to this model, which it pointedly refuses to address.

In effect, the dialectic between "essentialist" and "constructivist" turns out to be a highly unstable formation, though its very instability makes it useful to partisans of different sides. Its shifting definitions of race identity, its changes and *exchanges*, are plastic elements in a spectacular field of media-amplified discourse; within its terms, identity is both the object of desire and a kind of negative chit, a rhetorical hot potato that no one wants to hold for long. Signifyin(g) on both Lacan and Malcolm X, I would like to give black identity, within this spectacularized system, the designation "l'objet X." X here can be *both* the unknown, the lost and mythic African identity seen in essentialistic constructions of race as a simple "African" whole, recoverable once one has removed the

false patina of "slave identity," and at the same time a mark of a constructivist black identity, an identity gathered up from the fragments left by the wrenching violence of the Middle Passage, slavery, and racism, an "x" as a defiant refusal to be DEF-ined. And, as in algebra, the most astonishing quality of 'x' is its ability to be x-changed and inserted into diverse equations without its value ever being limited or divulged. The "blackness" which is emulated by white kids is similarly framed by this "x," here standing in for that bloody history, that inheritance, which the dehistoricized ethos of "whiteness" has repeatedly attempted to forget.

Within this frame, the various moral panics over gangsta rap — as well as the recurrent *attraction* of blackness to suburban white boyz can *both* be seen as instances of x-change, modes of differentiation and oscillation, spectacular modes of power. For while the discourses of "moral panic" deploy *fear* of harm to the body (whether politic or personal), the fields of representation and desire in which "blackness" is consumed/produced trade on an idealized mode of physicality, of dance, of posture. "Give me body," intones Queen Latifah in "Come Into My House " — for white kids whose physicality has been absorbed by the sanitary napkin of suburbia, this is the Pied Piper's tune.[8] As with any object of desire, there is a presumed and originary *loss*, the loss of a subjectivity, a verbal and physical dexterity whose Edenic resonances can readily be traced back to Rousseau's "noble savage." That these spectacular synecdoches of culture are stereotypical is undeniably true, but what is missed in such a dismissal is the underlying logic, the Barthian "myth" that enables — even demands — their circulation. For without this loss, the collective psyche of middle-class culture would have nothing to repress, nothing to desire. If Deleuze and Guattari are right in arguing that the reason Oedipus is fucked (or rather, *isn't*) has more to do with the economy of society than with any "family drama," then let x=a. Not one, but many desires; not the "family" but the illimitable flows of the *socius*, an unstaunched cultural cut: "it's alright Ma, I'm only bleeding."

Following Deleuze and Guattari, even the "representational" field itself is suspect. For the Oedipalized nuclear family whose picture hangs on the wall of their dining room, there is representation — for everyone else, there are only *contending forces*. Where is the desire forbidden under the Oedipal mandate to go? What other,

seemingly "lost" subjectivities, might it flow into? And here I mean not simply the subaltern forms ("black," "third world," or "poor"), which as D&G astutely point out are only bit players in the larger patriarchal dramas of capitalism and colonization), but something entirely different: an affective *flow* of desire that (re)makes subjectivity itself, that breaks the icons of the "Other" and discloses a deeper fissure in the entire social field, a faultline that runs under the very living room whose staid security the paranoiac machines had promised to guarantee. Ice T, among others, explicitly dramatizes this revolutionary interpellation in his track "Home Invasion": don't look now mom and dad, but "I stole your fuckin' kids."[9] Paranoiac fantasies, the intruder in the dark whose racial identity is always-already *black*, become the conduit for Ice T's frontal assault upon the Oedifice of "The Family." And, on some level, I suspect that both the paranoiac machines and Ice-T's tactical fantasy recognize in each other the same logic of the Spectacle, of the myth of danger and the danger of myths.

"If 60's were 90's," a recent album cover wistfully suggested, but perhaps the *real* secret is that the 90's are the 50's. The same paranoiac machines that attacked rock 'n' roll as "more dangerous than heroin, LSD, or any drug you can name" now attack rap lyrics.[10] And this time, it is the grown-up children of the 60's, the former warriors of libidinal liberation, who suddenly feel that, after all, there *was* something to be feared. Like a patient reeling down the hallway from doctor to doctor, the *socius* seeks treatment, first by liberation and then by repression. To this hypochondriac wanderer, the black arts of the 1990's offer a new form of shock therapy; Ice Cube, playing doctor in the intro cut to 1994's *Lethal Injection*, greets his patient with a raised eyebrow:

Ice Cube: "Mr. White, huh?"
Patient: "Yessir, that's me."
Ice Cube: "I heard you don't like shots."
Patient: "No, I sure don't."
Ice Cube: "Ah, you're a big boy, this won't hurt a bit, just ah, turn your head ... "
Patient: "Let's get this over with."
Ice Cube: "Yeah. Rub a little alcohol on there right here for you ... and, ah, brace yourself" [11]
BOOM!

None of this, of course, prevents or negates white listenership; in fact I suspect that on a just barely unconscious level, many are thinking "This is what I need. I have it coming." The anxiety that pervades some of the more hyperkinetic advocates of "politically-correct" language, as well as the reactive rage that leads many working- and middle-class whites to decry affirmative action and complain of "reverse discrimination," are both born of this severe case of Nietzschean "bad conscience." Is it then any wonder that so many white kids would rather be black?

Like the Nazi in NBC's miniseries "Twist of Fate," who is forced to undergo a facelift which makes him appear "Jewish" and hides out in a concentration camp, like the white journalist who underwent medical skin treatments so he could become "Black Like Me" and report on what it was like, there is a substantial part of the "white" psyche that dreams of the absolution it could have if only it could re-locate itself inside a subaltern subject. It's not the only reason that black style exercises such an attraction for white kids, but it's an inevitable part of the pull. Anger and alienation are as polymorphous as desire, and for kids who want to find that archimedian point from which they can leverage out the sins of the fathers, black culture — Bop for the 50's beats, blues for the 60's hippies, and hip-hop for the post-punk adolescents of the 90's — is just what the doctor ordered.

Which is not to conflate blackness with hip-hop, or any other particular cultural material, any more than it is to conflate whiteness with Velveeta cheese or Wonder Bread. Nonetheless, at the cafeteria of the spectacle, that's just what's being served; in place of actual conflict, cultural signifiers go toe-to-toe: Timbos *versus* wingtips, Karl Kani *versus* Ralph Lauren, Ice T *versus* Charlton Heston.[12] But rather than condemn these (mis)representations of race, we need to see in them a kind of charged flux, not "free" play, but a mythified encounter that doubles for the absent *actual* encounters between the urban subaltern and the anxious suburban hegemony. The fascistic machinery, as ever, seeks to cut off these flows, to erect barriers, to cut social services and isolate the urban poor not for their physical but for their *moral* contagion. It's easy to see the horror of confining people to a ghetto, if you have to build a wall and herd people into it; when the walls are economic, it's so much less *visible*. Against this paranoiac fear of flowing, the hip-hop generation mobilizes continuous and multiple (lyrical) flows,

a metaphorized verbal x-change that continually "flips the script" on the moral panicists. Kids who follow this flow from the suburbs to the ghetto are crossing the ultimate line, a move made all the more potent because, in the Emperor's-new-clothes-speak of post-Reagan America, it's not even supposed to exist.

Hip-hop, at its best, is a line of communication that carries messages across these barriers. It offers a distinct third possibility for the politics of x-change, both through the turned tables of verbal and musical Signifyin(g) and through its transvaluative mode of re-making consumption as production. The object of x-change in hip-hop is music itself, which both returns a prophet/profit on the at times voyeuristic interest of suburban middle-class listeners, and blows bass in the face of moral panic by threatening to invite both white and black kids to affiliate along generational lines with the disaffected black underclass, a thing of equal horror to the black bourgeoisie (Calvin Butts or Delores Tucker) and the white (Tipper Gore). As dramatized in Anthony Drazan's 1992 film *Zebrahead*, it can take a young white kid (Michael Rapaport's "Zack"), who grows up in his father's R&B record store, across the heavily drawn racial lines at his high school via the medium of his DJ skills and homemade tapes. Zack's blackness is in a sense *authenticated* by his music, his clothes, his Jeep; he consumes and produces black style and cops an attitude to match. Yet as the film discloses, Zack's style is way ahead of his own awareness of the dangers inherent in his continual crossing and re-crossing of the racial divide; when he falls in love with Nikki (N'Bushe Wright) he must consciously labor to come to terms with racism — the community's, and his *own*. In the end, he gains awareness only at a tremendous cost.

Yet cultural migration does not always lead to meaningful *affiliation*; like Madonna's appropriation of gay dance club "vogueing," it sometimes produces only a kind of dislocated simulacron, a substanceless style. In fact, it is entirely possible that the same kid who in one set of circumstances finds the beat of his alienation in Public Enemy's "Prophets of Rage," graffiti, and Cross Colours, may in another discover his angry pulse in *Deutschland über Alles*, a switchblade, and steel-toed combat boots. Such a scenario is ironically suggested by another of Michael Rapaport's performances, this time as skinhead recruit Remy in John Singleton's *Higher Learning*. Remy, a small-town farm boy with a deep well of insecurity, is left out of the crowd at college, and sticks defensively

to his own company. It's then that he is recruited by the local skinheads, who quite literally "hail" him as a "white American" before they invite him over to their digs. Remy, in a sense, is no less naive about his own identity within society as was Zack, but he's in a much tighter Oedipal orbit. It's a thin line, when you've got amorphous anger to spare, between aligning yourself with the reactionary machinery of paranoia or locating the countervaling histories, turning your *rage against the machine.*

Yet it most be borne continually in mind that such a choice, in and of itself, is a luxury affordable only by those who have class or racial status to shed. And, for many of these virtual-culture migrants, the contacts they make remain mediated by recordings, television, or film; as Rap-a-Lot records owner James Bernard remarked of white fans of gangsta rap, "They like this shit like they like the movies."[13] Meanwhile, as Hank Shocklee has ironically observed, the same white rap fan who is "entertained" by hearing hip-hop in his bedroom would never get off the train in Harlem and wander around as a form of "entertainment." The content of the song may not, in any case, make much of a dent — much as suggested by Spike Lee when, in *Jungle Fever,* one of the most racist characters in the film has a Public Enemy tape blasting out of his car stereo. When the close encounters never get any closer than a record-store checkout counter, the value of the lines of communication established by hip-hop is minimal. Nevertheless, where there is contact, there is at least the *possibility* of meaningful communication, which is the most any artform can guarantee. The troubled politics of reception that have *dogg*ed hip-hop since it began to attract significant white audiences may never go away, but a noisy phone line is still better than no phone line at all.

Yet what this connection discloses remains something far more wide-reaching than the potential for subversion inherent in an artform that crosses racial divides. For, while few critics have spent much time analyzing "white" as a cultural category, it clearly is born of a long epistemological co-dependence with "black," as Paul Gilroy decisively demonstrates in his book *The Black Atlantic.* It is a singular act of cultural amnesia that journalists and critics in the 1990's can talk about "white" in a completely unproblematic way, never so much as alluding to the multiple racialized and prejudicial conceptions which a generation ago were coin of the realm in the print media: the drunken Irishman with the face of an ape, the

greasy Italian automatically assumed to belong to the Mafia, or the mentally-deficient Pole who was the cue for all kinds of jokes hinging on mistaken logic. The history of how these and numerous other racialized ethnicities became blurred into the larger supracategory of "white" is largely unwritten, but bears as heavily on the racial politics of expression and reception as the histories of "black." Indeed, it is a signal development that one site where these pre-"white" ethnicities emerge is in hip-hop, where Irish rappers such as House of Pain make much of their Gaelic bar-room bravado.

So what does it mean when, within what Michael Eric Dyson calls the "anxiety of authenticity," a "black" rapper's music is widely enjoyed by "white" listeners? For ethnic absolutists, it's a crisis, whether they are hardcore rappers such as Ice Cube (who says he prefers to think of white listeners as merely "eavesdropping") or critics of rap such as David Samuels, who regard such reception as de-authenticating the music itself. Similarly, what does it mean when, as in the 1994 anti-gangsta rap congressional hearings, the old guard of civil rights *and* music faces off against the new black generation and those who sympathize with its message: C. Delores Tucker, Dick Gregory, and Dionne Warwick *versus* Yo-Yo, Nelson George, and Michael Eric Dyson? Even as hip-hop is often taken as the synecdoche and seal of authenticity of blackness, it's eminently clear that for many middle-class black Americans, it's seen as just the opposite: a generational regression along both race and class lines, a *betrayal.* And, at the same time, hip-hop's political moves have taken up (and been taken up by) other oppressed groups, moving the x-change of history still further.

The specific tensions between blacks and Korean-Americans in Los Angeles and New York move within a similar dynamic, exacerbated by the lack of educational opportunity, insurance-company and bank redlining, and lack of local funding that made small shops available to Koreans in neighborhoods where blacks were unable to get loans to open their own businesses. The resentment of blacks, watching yet another group climb the class ladder at their expense, combined with the Koreans' lack of familiarity with the folkways and ethos of the communities in which they did business, has proved a caustic and sometimes deadly admixture, leading to boycotts and (in one instance) the shooting of a young black girl by a Korean shop-owner.[14] Calls for everyone to "just get along,"

whether voiced by Rodney King or liberal whites, have a hollow echo given these histories.[15] The politics of pluralism have reached a kind of limit-zone in the nineties; the myth that society can, with a little cajoling, function as one big happy diverse family has done far more harm than a more realistic assessment of the multiple lines of conflict along boundaries of race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and gender. Hip-hop has issued its own (multiple) takes on this crisis, ranging from Ice Cube's threats to burn Korean stores "to a cinder" before they can turn the ghetto into "Black Korea," to Ice-T's impassioned historical message in "Race War" that "Orientals were slaves, too / Word! to this fucking red white and blue" — on the basis of which, Ice-T argues, *all* subaltern ethnicities must be seen as "black" in order to effectively resist the logic of the racist hegemony, as divisions between them can only serve the racist worldview.[16]

Yet however powerful hip-hop's messages about race relations, they too have to enter into that cultural heteroglossia where tensions *between* socially-produced identities fan the coals of resentment, over which liberal middle-class politicians then gingerly dance over like a gaggle of new-age firewalkers. And, on the larger stage of culture as spectacle, the symbolic claims and genealogies of identity politics replay this dance, pitting oppression against oppression in an age when all interests (except those of large corporations and the wealthy oligarchy of those that control them) are "special" interests, all competing for space in education, cultural and arts funding, social programs, and other national agendas. Even beyond competition for resources and recognition, there is competition among specific *histories* of oppression, which compete on a symbolic level. For instance, a measured insistence on the incommensurability of histories of oppression has long been articulated by many Jews, who object to appropriations of the word "holocaust" to situations such as Chuck-D's calling black experience in America the "holocaust still goin' on."[17] What is at stake in such instances is the *singularity* of history, a move against the appropriation and/or metaphorization of suffering. Yet this move belies the fact that almost all mass movements against oppression have drawn from the historical reservoir of the experiences of other groups; the American revolution (to take only one example) was still resonating in the mind of Ho Chi Minh when he wrote his well-known letters to President Truman asking for U.S. aid in throwing

off the yoke of French colonialism.[18] However much a group would like to *own* its histories, they are inevitably going to have unexpected lines of influence; if the Jewish captivity in Egypt becomes a metaphor for slaves in the United States, why shouldn't the alienation of young urban blacks strike a chord in the minds of other alienated groups or individuals? If no lines of commensurability can be established, the possibility of alliance is destroyed; an absolute insistence on historical difference, in the end, is potentially as counter-revolutionary as an insistence on uncritical assimilation into a homogenous mass. It's a mark of postmodernity that, even as the full "ownership" of one's own oppression becomes impossible, its appropriation becomes a site of struggle.

The Jewish experiences of diaspora, distrust, ghettoization, genocide, anxiety over assimilation, and the dream of a promised land are in each case the paradigmatic instance of such events, inevitably prepared the symbolic ground for other groups to follow.[19] The civil rights movement of the late 50's and early 60's , in which many Jews fought against racism alongside blacks, took up many of these discourses, which certainly resonated with the black historical experience; the roots of this resonance go back over two centuries via the Spirituals' metaphors of "Let My People Go" and calling the Ohio River the "River Jordan". The campus anti-war movement of the mid-to-late 60's, the women's liberation movement of the early '70's, and the post-Stonewall gay rights movement all took their cues from the struggle for black liberation, which in turn borrowed many of its political strategies from Jews, Marxists, Gandhi, Fanon, and other critics of colonialism. Translated and reflected via the multiple tangents of the black Atlantic, it's irrevocably heteroglot: you end up with Desmond Dekker singing about the "Israelites" (who are black and whose messiah arrives from Ethiopia for a Kingston motorcade), MC Solaar re-writing spaghetti Westerns as anti-colonial struggles, and Afrika Bambaataa making black anthems based on German techno-rock in the name of a "Zulu" nation he was inspired to create after watching a British film.

Yet even in this intensely heterogeneous mix, it's crucial not to abandon the readily apparent conflicts and contradictions to a simple ludic celebration. If phrases such as "complex and contradictory" are to be anything more than po-mo clichés, analyses of cultural production must resist their own desire to ameliorate

discomfort by proclaiming it comfortable. The conflicts and uncertainties which face blacks, Latinos, and others living in the pressure-cookers we call cities are painful, difficult, often *lethal.* Even when the body survives, the *soul* may perish. *Sometimes I wonder how I keep from going under.* If the rage, the pain of the cities is distilled into a kind of hypodermic stimulant for the leisured classes, then capitalism will truly have reached the *reductio ad absurdum* of Debord's Spectacle. Another possibility, however slim, is that within the commodity spaces that hip-hop has drilled through the recording industry, television, and film that some instances of actual two-way communication will take place. There is a tremendous power in narratives of endurance against all odds; they have much more staying power than the vague anxieties of a comfortable class. In the end, they may call its comfort into question to such an extent that the fascistic desire for the limitation of flow implodes on itself. Even paranoia has its limits. X marks the spot.

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Notes

[1]Kathy Dobie, "Heart of Darkness," *VIBE*, August 1994 (As downloaded from the *VIBE* World Wide Web server).

[2]Anti-Oedipus, 366.

[3]Jamaica Kincaid, *Lucy* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1990: 19).

[4]This was recently dramatized in an episode of the new black family drama, *Under One Roof*, in which the young son of one woman in the series donned a ski cap and glasses and recited raps into a mirror, unknowingly calling his mother a "bee-atch" when she told him to go to his room.

[5]"I just don't understand white people. White people like stuff that is so overtly wack: Soul Asylum, Rush, *Sports Illustrated*." (Mike D, quoted in *US*, July 1994, p. 96).

[6]Eric Lott, *Love & Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1993)

[7]Ross, Andrew. "Poverty Meets Performance: The Gangsta and the Diva." *The Nation*, vol. 259, #6 (August 22/29, 1994), 191-194.

[8]Queen Latifah, "Come Into My House," on *All Hail the Queen.*

[9]"Home Invasion," from the album *Home Invasion*, © 1993 Rhyme Syndicate music.

[10]This phrase is an actual quote from the Reverend Jack Van Impe's long-playing record, *From Nightclubs to Christ.* Among the specific attacks on rap music, one should note the hearings held in 1994 in both the Senate and the House of Representatives, which were instigated and chaired by black democrats; in the wake of Newt Gingrich, far harsher hearings may well be in store.

[11]Ice Cube, "The Shot (Intro)," © 1994 Gangsta Boogie/WB Music/Priority Records, from *Lethal Injection* (Priority CD P2-53876).

[12]Ice-T and Heston did in fact battle it out — though with the O.G. *in absentia* — when Heston read the lyrics from "Cop Killer" over the p.a. at a Time-Warner stockholders' meeting, one of several events which led to Ice-T's split from Sire/Warner.

[13]Rob Marriott, James Bernard, and Allen S. Gordon, "Reality Check." *The SOURCE*, June 1994, p. 70.

[14]I refer here of course to the case of Latasha Harlins, shot and killed by Korean shopkeeper Soon Ja Du in April of 1991; for an excellent commentary on this incident, see Wanda Coleman, "Blacks, Immigrants, and America," in *The Nation*, vol. 256 (1993), pp. 187-191.

[15]Rapper Willie D was so incensed by King's platitudes that he cut a rap called "Fuck Rodney King."

[16]Ice-T, "race War," on *Home Invasion*, Rhyme Syndicate/Priority Records P2 53858, © 1994 Warner Brothers Music/Rhyme Syndicate Music.

[17]From "Can't Truss It," on *Apocalypse '91: The Empire Strikes Black*, Def Jam/Columbia CK 47374.

[18]Ho Chi Minh modeled his own Vietnamese declaration of independence on that of the U.S., and in 1945 wrote a series of letters to President Truman and his Secretary of State, speaking of America's "noble ideals" and urging both cultural exchange and military support. Unfortunately, he had not counted on the virulent anti-communism which possessed the U.S. government in the postwar years; his letters were not even given the courtesy of an answer. See Gareth Porter, ed., *Vietnam: The Definitive Documentation of Human Decisions* (Stanfordville, NY: Earl M. Coleman Enterprises, 1979), vol. I: pp. 83-86, p. 95.

[19]Paul Gilroy offers a pioneering and lucid account of this cultural conjunction in his section on "Children of Israel or Children of the Pharaohs?" in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), pp. 205-212.