

## INVISIBILITY AND BLUE EYES: AFRICAN-AMERICAN SUBJECTIVITY

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### ABSTRACT

In this essay I theorize the relationship between African-American subjectivity and American identity. I suggest that American fiction and American culture are framed by the invisibility of African-American subject. Specifically I elaborate upon a theory of African-American subjectivity and I use Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* to frame my inquiry into African-American subjectivity. Ellison and Morrison effectively dramatize the "invisible" nature of African-American subjectivity, and this is their philosophical contribution: they articulate a post-empiricist and post-positivist account of African-American subjectivity.<sup>1</sup>

The concern with African-American subjectivity is part of a larger theoretical concern with the issue of subjectivity. Indeed for Jurgen Habermas, the modern western philosophical discourse is concerned with the subject, as he puts it "the principle of subjectivity determines the forms of modern culture" (17). And "The key historical events in establishing the principle of subjectivity are the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and the French Revolution" (17). Of specific interest here is the Enlightenment which Immanuel Kant theorized as "man's release from his self-incurred tutelage" (90) and "For this enlightenment, however, nothing is required but freedom, and freedom of the most harmless sort among its various definitions: freedom to make public use of one's reason at every point" (92).<sup>2</sup>

While Enlightenment discourses were promoting the rationality and sovereignty of the (European) subject, those discourses were at the same time producing another (racialized) narrative that negated the subjectivity of Africans and African-Ameri-

cans. An exemplary instance of this negation is David Hume's "Of National Characters," a text which inscribes racial hierarchy in nature:

I am apt to suspect the negroes, and in general all the other species of men...to be naturally inferior to the whites. There never was a civilized nation of any other complexion than white, nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufactures amongst them, no arts, no sciences... Such a uniform and constant difference could not happen, in so many countries and ages, if nature had not made an original distinction betwixt these breeds of men. Not to mention our colonies, there are Negro slaves dispersed all over Europe, of which none ever discovered any symptoms of ingenuity... In Jamaica indeed they talk of one negro as a man of parts and learning; but 'tis likely he is admired for very slender accomplishments, like a parrot, who speaks a few words plainly (Hume 33).<sup>3</sup>

Kant elaborates upon Hume's view and Kant is one of the earliest major European philosophers to equate color with intelligence. In his *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1764) Kant argues that "so fundamental is the difference between [the black and white] races of man... it appears to be as great in regard to mental capacities as in color" (55). Kant posits a self-evident correlation of "black" and "stupid" in the following anecdote:

Father Labat reports that a Negro carpenter, whom he reproached for haughty men toward his wives, answered: "You whites are indeed fools, for first you make great concessions to your wives, and afterward you complain when they drive you mad." And it might be that there were something in this which perhaps deserved to be considered; but in short, this fellow was quite black from head to foot, a clear proof that what he said was stupid (57).<sup>4</sup>

While these philosophical ideas were rationalizing the negation of African subjectivity, these ideas were not the cause of that negation. This is an important issue to raise because in today's intellectual climate idealism pervades. For example Henry Gates wishes to deconstruct hegemonic conceptual schemes because blackness signifies absence.<sup>5</sup> Therefore Gates has engaged in deconstructing metaphysical binaries of language to show, like Nietzsche, that the "truth is a mobile army of metaphors."<sup>6</sup> Gates' view may be helpful in deconstructing the naturalizing and self-evident narratives of Hume and Kant, however it is important to recognize that language in and of itself is not the cause of social marginality. Change will not come about by emancipating signs from totalities but by displacing the relations of production, for although such relations do not evade, they nevertheless always exceed the fate of signs.

The material cause of this negation for African and African-Americans was the economic system of slavery: by 1780 African-Americans numbered 800,000 and 90% of them were slaves.<sup>7</sup> Since 90% of the given population is enslaved there is the ideological/political necessity to legitimate and rationalize the practice of slavery within a democratic republic. Within this economic and philosophical context, the earliest African-American writers, such as Olaudah Equiano, Phillis Wheatley, David Walker,

and Maria Stewart, inaugurated literary projects for reclaiming subjectivity, and this issue of subjectivity was tied to social emancipation.

Perhaps it is the title of Sojourner Truth's speech, "Ar'n't I a Woman?" that best exemplifies the African-American concern with articulating subjectivity. This concern continued because slavery was followed by different exploitative economic structures, such as sharecropping and wage and domestic labor, and these structures established the dominant political/cultural/ideological conditions that shaped the African-American literary traditions urgent concern to engage the question of social difference. From the literature of the Reconstruction to the Harlem Renaissance and to the era of modernism and naturalism, the African-American literary tradition has been concerned with difference because for them difference has meant economic exploitation, political oppression and social degradation.

Ralph Ellison and Toni Morrison also foreground difference and they offer very effective dramatizations of the relational and hierarchical constitution of African-American subjectivity. Ellison and Morrison provide a concrete articulation of what has been one of the grounding and yet unsaid assumptions in African-American literary discourses: invisibility. These canonical texts directly deal with the issue of African-American subjectivity in a very sustained manner. To illustrate my point I want to examine Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*.

In the prologue of *Invisible Man*, the nameless protagonist uses the concept of invisibility to theorize African-American subjectivity: "I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows, it as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination —indeed, everything and anything except me" (3). In a similar fashion Morrison marks the "invisibility" of the young black girl, Pecola. Pecola's "invisibility" is defined when she goes to buy candy from Yacobowski's Fresh Veg. Meat and Sundries Store. Mr. Yacobowski "does not see her, because for him there is nothing to see" (48). Thus when Pecola looks up at Mr. Yacobowski she "sees the vacuum where curiosity ought to lodge. And something more. The total absence of human recognition —the glazed separateness"(48).

Ellison and Morrison provide rigorous conceptual accounts of African-American subjectivity and of course with Ellison and Morrison we also see the deconstruction of the rational subject: the nameless protagonist and Pecola are divided subjects. What is at issue here is how to understand the split subject. Is the split subject the result of linguistic operations, as proposed by postmodern theory, or a cultural effect as proposed by Ellison and Morrison? Or, is it not, as I will argue below, to be understood as an effect of the division of labor, which in turn conditions cultural and linguistic practices? The issue is this: if one accepts the premise of postmodern social theory and the implications of Ellison and Morrison's cultural view of subjectivity, then the question is no longer how to recuperate the subject but how to shift the focus of inquiry itself and engage the subject "effect." The postmodern African-American critic now must consider a subject less humanities: one that does not evolve around the production of a unitary, rational subject ready to be inserted in the dominant social formation, but one that situates itself in the spaces of diverse subject-positions produced by social apparatuses and the processes of signification that enable them.

The invisible man and Pecola desire a unitary and rational position but the difference of race occludes the realization of such a desire. Within a racially structured social order the invisible man and Pecola are invisible and yet provide presence for the dominant subjects. In other words African-American subjects provide a “mirror stage” for the dominant subjects. For Jacques Lacan the mirror stage is a space of imaginary plenitude.<sup>8</sup> For Lacan the mirror stage is an identification which marks the “transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image...” (2). The mirror stage establishes a fictional relationship: “But the important point is that this form situates the agency of ego, before its social determination, in a fictional direction...” (20). Thus Lacan regards “the function of the mirror stage as a particular case of the function of the imago, which is to establish a relation between the organism and its reality” (4). In other words the mirror stage establishes a fictional relationship in which the self and image are perceived as self-identical and thus the self misrecognizes itself as an autonomous entity who has an (illusory) control over the self and the world.

The mirror stage provides a useful analytic for theorizing race relations. The mirror stage informs race relations and it provides the illusion of presence for dominant subjects because this stage is structured by the invisibility of the African-American subjects. African-American subjects provide dominant (Euro-American) subjects with the illusion of autonomy because dominant subjects can not see the other. Of course African-American subjects exist as empirical entities and thus they are empirically visible but ideologically invisible. As Ellison’s protagonist points out “invisibility” refers to “a peculiar disposition of the eyes of those with whom I come in contact. A matter of the construction of their *inner eyes*, those eyes with which they look through their physical eyes upon reality” (3). This “inner eye” is the site of dominant ideology and it sustains the illusion of autonomy for dominant subjects and in turn this notion of the free subject resecures the logic of the free market. The ideological legitimacy of the free market depends upon the invisibility of the African-American subject. The visibility of African-American subjects would threaten capitalism because it would reveal how the illusion of freedom depends upon African-American invisibility and this invisibility masks the exploitation and oppression of African-Americans.

African-American invisibility is what distinguishes African-American subjectivity from the more frequently discussed Hegelian Master/Slave dialectic. For Hegel “Self-consciousness exists in itself and for itself, in that, and by fact that it exists for another self-consciousness; that is to say, it is only by being acknowledged or ‘recognized’” (70).<sup>9</sup> The Master/Slave relationship is a struggle for recognition and recognition presupposes that an entity exist to be recognized (that is visibility) which is of course historically denied to the African-American subject.

In the *Invisible Man* the issue of recognition is raised when the narrator converses with an implied reader, who presumably would consider the narrator “a horrible, irresponsible bastard!” (14). The narrator’s response links the issues of invisibility and recognition: “Irresponsibility is part of my invisibility” (14) and therefore the narrator asks “But to whom can I be responsible, and why should I be, when you refuse to see me? And wait until I reveal how truly irresponsible I am. Responsibility rests upon recognition, and recognition is a form of agreement” (14). The form of

agreement is denied African-Americans and other people of color because as Aime Cesaire put it “we are dealing with the only race which is denied even the notion of humanity” (79).

Because the African-American is “invisible,” the dominant subject (Euro-American) is positioned as free. The promotion of “free subjects” is a part of the ideological structure of assumptions, attitudes, and modes of understanding that produces the affective make up of individuals necessary for the continuation of the existing social order and this operation depends upon the (ideological) invisibility of the African-American subject. The point here is that the freedom for some is dialectically related to the unfreedom for the “other” and this binary relationship is difficult to grasp because the relations are not empirically verifiable. Indeed these are ideologically inscribed relations and Louis Althusser’s notion of ideology is useful. For Althusser the very effectivity of ideology, which is “a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (162) is precisely in the constitution of this space of presence and certitude.

For Althusser ideology is a set of discourses, images, myths that establish an imaginary relationship between the individual and the world. Imaginary, I should note, does not mean that this relationship is non-existent (false) since people do indeed live their lives according to these “imaginary” relationships with the world. Althusser adopts this term from Lacan’s theories on subject formation.<sup>10</sup> In Lacanian psychoanalysis, as I discussed earlier, the imaginary is a mode of relating to the world in this sense: one is situated in a subject position from which a relationship of presence and fullness is assumed; and the point I want to stress is that this imaginary phase constructs Euro-American subjectivity as self-same because, as Ellison’s narrative indicate, the African-American subjectivity is not only split/dual, as suggested by W.E.B. Dubois, but also invisible.

In theorizing African-American subjectivity I integrate Ellison’s notion of invisibility with Lacan’s notion of the mirror stage and Althusser’s theory of ideology; the African-American subject is characterized by what I call an “invisible presence.” My argument is that the (invisible) African-American subject enables an imaginary presence for dominant subjects and this provides ideological coherence to an exploitative social order. I now shift to Ellison’s *Invisible Man* and then Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* to demonstrate the relational and hierarchical constitution of African-American subjectivity. These two textually elaborate upon the notion of “invisible presence.”<sup>11</sup>

The *Invisible Man* revolves around the reflections of a nameless protagonist. Specifically the protagonist recounts his experiences and his struggle for self identity. As the protagonist puts it: “It took me a long time and much painful boomeranging of my expectations to achieve a realization everyone else appears to have been born with: That I am no body but myself. But first I had to discover that I am an invisible man!” (15). The text then provides an account of the protagonist’s discovery of his invisibility.

The protagonist starts as a naive young person with social “expectations” of success. However his experiences frustrate his expectations. For examples he wins a scholarship to the local Black college and he is expelled in his junior year by the dean, Mr. Bledsoe, for not “lying” to Mr. Norton, the white trustee (139). After the exclusion the protagonist questions: “How had I come to this? I had kept unswervingly to

the path placed before me, had tried to be exactly what I was expected to be, had done exactly what I was expected to do —yet instead of winning the expected reward, here I was stumbling along...” (146). Later his experiences in the north, especially his job at the paint factory and then his involvement with the Brotherhood ( a white radical group), also reveal the inability of modern institutions, such as the Brotherhood, to accommodate the specificity and fluidity of individual experience and thus the necessity for self-reliance.

In a larger sense the focus on individual experience is why the text attained such universal acclaim within mainstream literary establishment. The text reaffirms the dominant ideological commitment to (unique) human experience and thus in 1953 *Invisible Man* received the National Book award and in a poll conducted by *Book Week* it was judged the most distinguished work published in America between 1945 and 1965. While the mainstream literary establishment endorsed *Invisible Man*, African-American critics, especially black Nationalists and black Marxists, were extremely hostile to the text. For example in a 1952 book review John Oliver Killens argues that “the Negro people need Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* like we need a hole in the head or a stab in the back... It is a vicious distortion of Negro life.”<sup>12</sup> I also am critical of Ellison because, as I suggested in chapter one, Ellison (along with Baldwin) inaugurate a post-materialist theory and my critique of Ellison is based on his recuperation of humanism. However before elaborating my critique I want to focus on Ellison’s philosophical contribution; specifically Ellison’s post-empiricist account of African-American subjectivity and the relational and hierarchial constitution of African-American subjectivity.

In the *Invisible Man* the first example of the relational and hierarchial constitution occurs early in the novel: the battle royal. The young protagonist had been invited “to give [a] speech at a gathering of the town’s leading white citizens” (17). When he arrives and before he is able to deliver his speech, he is made to participate in the battle royal, a fight among blindfolded young black boys in a ring. After being humiliated, physically brutalized, and shocked from lunging for coins on an electric rug, he finally delivers his speech. He is introduced as the “smartest boy” in Greenwood and occupies the subject position of an accommodationist as he rearticulates Booker T. Washington’s philosophy of “Cast down your bucket where you are” (30). While endorsing Booker T. Washington’s social philosophy, the audience continued talking and laughing and ignoring him. Then “no doubt distracted by having to gulp down my blood” (31) the protagonist made a mistake and “yelled a phrase [he] had often seen denounced in newspaper editorials, heard debated in private,” social equality (31). By mistake the protagonist calls for equality and after this mistake “[t]he laughter hung smokelike in the sudden stillness... [and] They shouted hostile phrases at me” (31).

Of course being young and naive, the protagonist “did not understand” the hostility directed at him but the protagonist’s mistake/intervention opens a space to “see” the other. This opening brings the dominant subjectivities into ideological crisis and this must be contained: vision of the other indicates how the presence of dominant subjects is contingent upon the invisibility of the (racial) supplement. The Battle Royal then is an ideological state apparatus that reproduces and maintains the elite white males in an imaginary position of fullness and therefore a crisis manager, “A small dry mustached man in the front row,” (31) must intervene to recuperate presence for

the dominant subjectivities: “Well, you had better speak more slowly so we can understand. We mean to do right by you, but you’ve got to know your place at all times” (31). My argument is that this place is as the mirror stage for the dominant subjectivities—in other words African American invisibility is one of the conditions of possibility for presence of Euro-American subjectivity. Ellison suggests that African-American subjectivity is dialectically related to Euro-American subjectivity.

Again at this stage in the text the protagonist is unaware of his assignment to a zone of invisibility. One might say that the protagonist is situated in an imaginary phase. In Lacanian psychoanalysis the Cartesian subject of Western thought is deconstructed by theorizing the subject as a speaking subject, who is produced in/by language and marked by gaps and absences as a result of its internal (symbolic) structure of difference. The “difference” is the effect of the slippage of the subject and the negation of its identity which it assumes in the “imaginary” by its entrance into the “symbolic.” For Lacan the “imaginary” is the phase in which the child regards itself to be inseparable from its mother and by extension from the world, in which the child is identical with itself and with all that surrounds it. The imaginary is then the moment of presence, plenitude, and security. This is the stage the protagonist is in because he is unaware of the difference of race. For the protagonist this phase is clearly articulated when he is giving Mr. Norton a tour of the country side: “But now I felt that I was sharing in a great work and, with the car leaping leisurely beneath the pressure of my foot, I identified myself with the rich man reminiscing on the rear seat...”(39).

The imaginary phase will not last long for the protagonist; for African-Americans in a racist society it never does. After hearing the Trueblood incest narrative, the protagonist is forced to find relief for Mr. Norton, who passed out after hearing the incest narrative of Trueblood. The protagonist takes Mr. Norton to the nearest place, the Golden Day, where he meets a war veteran and the veteran’s discourse marks the invisibility of the protagonist. At the Golden Day an exchange between the African-American war veteran, a former surgeon, and Mr. Norton, the northern philanthropic liberal, the veteran “sees” the invisibility of the protagonist: “Already he is—well, bless my soul! Behold! A walking zombie! Already he’s learned to repress not only his emotions but his humanity. He’s invisible, a walking personification of the Negative, the most perfect achievement of your dreams, sir! The mechanical man!” (94).

The veteran also sees that they—the protagonist and Mr. Norton—don’t see the zone of invisibility that structures their relationship: “And the boy, this automaton, he was made of the very mud of the region and he sees far less than you. Poor stumblers, neither of you can see the other. To you he is a mark on the scorecard of your achievement, a thing and not a man; a child, or even less—a black amorphous thing. And you, for all your power, are not a man to him, but a God, a force” (95). The veteran’s discourse reveals the location of the protagonist within the mirror stage. The protagonist has not acquired language and this has forestalled his Oedipal crisis.

For Lacan the crisis marks the separation of the child from the mother and thus shatters its imaginary plenitude and presence by the intervention of the father and the injunction of the law of the Father, and consequently this crisis also marks the child’s acquisition of language. Language is paradigmatic of the symbolic order, which is the order of “difference.” If the child is to grow up, it must come to know the language of its culture and accept its place in difference, and thus distance itself from the

identity of the imaginary. For the protagonist this means accepting the difference of race, which assigns him to a zone of invisibility. In a very revealing exchange the veteran advises the protagonist to “Be your own father, young man. And remember, the world is possibility if only you’ll discover it. Last of all, leave the Mr. Nortons alone, and if you don’t know what I mean, think about. Farewell” (156).

The protagonist remains unaware of his invisibility. He leaves for New York, unknowingly carrying exclusion letters that forbid his return to the college, and the misrecognition of his social position is quite evident when the protagonist comments: “I caught myself wishing for someone to show the letters to, someone who could give me a proper reflection of my importance. Finally, I went to the mirrors and gave myself an admiring smile as I spread the letters upon the dresser like a hand of high trump cards” (163).

Although the protagonist remains blind to his invisibility, the veteran sees the relational and hierarchical constitution of African-American subjectivity and his vision derives from the racial violence that marked his own attempt to break from the zone of invisibility. For the veteran the historicity and materiality of race was manifested when, “Ten men in masks drove [him] out of from the city at midnight and beat [him] with whips for saving a human life” (93). The veteran was “forced to the utmost degradation because [he] possessed skilled hands and the belief that [his] knowledge could bring dignity —not wealth, only dignity— and other men health” (93). These experiences helped the veteran to remember “Things about life. Such things as most peasants and folk peoples almost always know through experience, though seldom through conscious thought...” (91) and these experiences dramatize the historicity of what race has meant in the US for African-Americans. For the African-American subject the options are invisibility or madness.

I want to turn here to the second example later in the novel, which also points up the relational and hierarchical constitution of African-American subjectivity; again by this I mean that the African-American subjectivity is in an invisible and subordinated relationship with dominant subjectivities. While in Harlem the protagonist becomes involved with the Brotherhood, a predominantly Euro-American radical political organization. After a fast rise through the ranks of the Brotherhood, issues come to a head over the protagonist assumption of “personal responsibility” (463) for organizing a march/funeral for ex-Brotherhood member Todd Clifton, who started selling sambo dolls after he left the brotherhood. Todd had been shot by the police and during a discussion with the Brotherhood leadership, the protagonist links the shooting to Todd’s race: “He [Todd] was shot because he was black and because he resisted. Mainly because he was black” (469). Brother Jack in turn derides the protagonist for “riding ‘race’ again” (469).

During their heated exchange over the question of race, Brother Jack makes clear the role of the protagonist within the Brotherhood was not to think: “You were not hired to think” (469). The protagonist had been hired to “talk” and “Things have been so brotherly [that][he] had forgotten [his] place” (470). His “place” whether with Mr. Norton or Emerson or Brother Jack had been the same —he was a tool for “shaping their own desires” (511) and providing them with a mirror to reflect their self-identical presence. This is the African-American mirror stage: the African-American subject enables the Euro-American desire for presence.



The protagonist now recognizes that he had been “living in a world of illusion” (511). He also recognizes that the dominant subjectivities are also fractured and thus he “no longer had to run from the Jacks and the Emersons and the Bledsoes and Nortons, but only from their confusion, impatience, and refusal to recognize the beautiful absurdity of their American identity and mine” (559). The protagonist sees that all subjects are split and this insight gives the protagonist a claim on the universal.

When Ras, the cultural nationalist, prepares to kill the protagonist for being a race traitor, the protagonist reflects on the absurdity that he should lose his life to someone who is confused over the nature of identities: “And that I, a little black man with an assumed name should die because a big black man in his hatred and confusion over the nature of reality that seemed controlled solely by white men whom I knew to be as blind as he, was just too much, too outrageously absurd” (559). Ras’ race metaphysics blinds him from seeing the contingency and fluidity of identities. The protagonist finally sees, or recognizes, his own subject position (as an invisible man) as well the split position of the dominant subjects. The protagonist has moved from his own imaginary phase, through the boomeranging of his expectations, into a self-conscious phase of recognition. He realizes his invisibility but rather than historicize this position the protagonist makes it an ontological position: “Now I know men are different and that all life is divided and that only in division is there true health” (576). By locating this division as an ontological state Ellison essentially precludes any possibility of transformative praxis and this is the political limitation of Ellison’s text. I will develop such a political critique in more detail below but next I look at another post-empiricist account of African-American subjectivity: Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*.

In Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* the relational and hierarchical constitution of African-American subjectivity is also effectively foregrounded. *The Bluest Eye* deals with the impact of racism on African-Americans and specifically Pecola Breedlove, a young African-American girl. Indeed, in the Afterword of the text Morrison states she “focused... on how something as grotesque as the demonization of an entire race could take root inside of the most delicate member of society: a child; the most vulnerable member: a female” (210). Pecola is conscious that her blackness accounts for invisibility. When Pecola visits Yacobowski’s Fresh Veg. Meat and Sundries Store, she sees the vacuum in his eyes and “[s]he has seen it lurking in the eyes of all white people. So. The distaste must be for her, her blackness... And it is the blackness that accounts for, that creates, the vacuum edged with distaste in white eyes (49). Morrison examines the impact of racism on African-Americans and she consistently foregrounds how the constitution of African-American subjectivity is an effect of the white gaze.

The hierarchical relations are brought to light in an exchange between the two sisters, Claudia and Frieda, and their friend Maureen Peal, “a high yellow dream child with long brown hair braided into two lynch ropes that hung down her back” (62). Maureen screamed at Claudia and Frieda “I *am* cute! And you ugly! Black and ugly black e mos. I *am* cute!” (73). The exchange with Maureen Peal gave the sisters a fuller sense of their lack and they question: “If she was cute—and if anything could be believed, she *was*—then we were not. And what did that mean? We were lesser. Nicer, brighter, but still lesser” (74). Although they were young, the sisters “knew that Maureen Peal was not the enemy and not worthy of such intense hatred. The

*Thing* to fear was the *Thing* that made *her* beautiful, and not us" (74). The sisters recognize that the "Thing" is what produces the "honey voices of parents and aunts, the obedience in the eyes of our peers, the slippery light in the eyes of our teachers when they encountered the Maureen Peals of the world" (74).

Claudia and Frieda consider themselves and are considered less than Maureen Peal because Maureen is closer to the ideal beauty in the dominant Euro-American culture. The dominant standard of course was exemplified by Shirley Temple and such a norm was produced and maintained in ideological state apparatuses: "Adults, older girls, shops, magazines, newspapers, window signs—all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll was what every girl child treasured" (20). Thus Pecola obsessed for blue eyes because she thought it would alter her life: "It had occurred to Pecola some time ago that if her eyes, those eyes that held the pictures, and knew the sights—if those eyes of hers were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different. Her teeth were good, and at least her nose was not big and flat like some of those who were thought so cute. If she looked different, beautiful, maybe Cholly would be different, and Mrs. Breedlove too. Maybe they'd say, 'Why, look at pretty-eyed Pecola. We mustn't do bad things in front of those pretty eyes' (46). Thus for Pecola "Each night, without fail, she prayed for blue eyes" (46).

Here again Lacan's theory of subject formation is useful because Pecola desires presence. For Lacan primary repression is repression of the desire for the body of the mother, and it is this repression that forms the unconscious like a language. However Pecola does not repress her desire, like Claudia, but actively seeks to satisfy her desire for presence or the mother, which, of course, "is a representation of a maternal object, an imago, that is distinct from the real, historical mother" (Tate 89). Pecola desires blue eyes and the blues eyes function as metaphor for imaginary plenitude. Thus Pecola does not identify with her actual mother, Pauline, who also considers Pecola ugly (126). Pecola establishes an imaginary connection with "Shirley Temple" and this desire structures Pecola's subjectivity. Throughout Pecola's life, she seeks to reobtain that imaginary plenitude. For example after buying her candy, "She eats the candy, and its sweetness is good. To eat the candy is somehow to eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane. Love Mary Jane. Be Mary Jane" (50). The Mary Jane candy is never identical with what Pecola seeks, but a mere substitute for it. This substitute is only metonymically related to the object of desire—blue eyes—which remains forever unobtainable.

Pecola's subjectivity is formed by desire, and Morrison suggests the division in African-American subjectivity—a division caused by a Eurocentric cultural apparatus, which supports dominant economic and political institutions. Morrison articulates a compelling critique of humanism by foregrounding the relational and hierarchical constitution of Pecola's subjectivity. Unlike in humanist theory where the "I" in "I am" marks fullness in Morrison it is more of a designation of the traces of "loss." Pecola's self is a social construction which is dialectically related to the hegemonic subject position. In other words Pecola acquires her identity as an "ugly" person by virtue of the fact that she does not have blue eyes. The "I" which is conventionally referred to with certainty is the effect of traces of lack and loss and thus devoid of a secure ground. This is the case for Pecola and the Invisible Man and furthermore under a racist social order their dreams will always be deferred. These subjects expose the mythology of humanism and yet there "invisible presence" is required for humanism.

What Pecola shares with the nameless protagonist is the desire for presence: Pecola desires blue eyes and the nameless protagonist desires power. For example as a young student, during his pre-invisible days, the nameless protagonist wants to be like Dr. Bledsoe because Dr. Bledsoe “was the example of everything I had hoped to be: Influential with wealthy men all over the country; consulted in matters concerning the race; a leader of his people; the possessor of not one, but two Cadillacs, a good salary and a soft, good-looking and creamy-complexioned wife” (101). Of course the dark skinned Pecola could never have been his wife and in this regard Pecola and the nameless protagonist privilege and desire color.

As African-American subjects both Pecola and the nameless protagonist are invisible and this is the common feature of African-American subjectivity. Pecola does though have an earlier recognition of her invisibility whereas the nameless protagonist does not acquire such an understanding until later in life. Early on the nameless protagonist believed he could acquire presence and he tried to achieve his desire for identity through various relationships. Then he recognised his invisibility: “I now recognized my invisibility”(508). Pecola on the other hand never had to search for an identity because her identity was presupposed: she was ugly “[a]nd no one could have convinced them [the Breedloves] that they were not relentlessly and aggressively ugly” (38); Pecola was ugly and her desire for blue eyes was an attempt to escape her prescribed social identity in a racist and patriarchal class based social order.

Another aspect of difference between the two subjects is the issue of sexual violence. Although there are gender differences I will argue that sexual violence in the African-American community, especially as expressed in *The Bluest Eye*, is conditioned by the larger social structures of racism. First though I discern the different ways the two texts address sexual violence. In the *Invisible Man* the issue of sexual violence is virtually absent except in the Trueblood episode. The issue is raised when the nameless protagonist is giving Mr. Norton a tour of the country side and they inadvertently pass by Trueblood’s cabin. Trueblood is a sharecropper and “had brought disgrace upon the black community”(46) because he had impregnated his wife, Kate, and daughter, Matty Lou, at the same time.

Trueblood recounts his experience with his daughter from his male perspective and actually profits from his experience because “They [the white men] wanted to hear about the gal lots of times and they gimme somethin’ to eat and drink and some tobacco” (53). Trueblood is interpellated into the patriarchal community because his experience is an actualization of the white male fantasy for the daughter and also Trueblood’s narrative confirms the racism of the white community. Thus even though Trueblood did “the worse thing a man could ever do in his family” (67) instead of chasing him out of the country, as Trueblood expected the whites to do, “they [the whites] gimme more help than they ever give any other colored man, no matter how good a nigguh he was. Except that my wife an’ daughter won’t speak to me, I’m better off than I ever been before” (67). Trueblood’s experience enacts the Law of the Father and consequently his wife, Kate, and daughter, Matty Lou, are silenced and (economically) compelled to submit to the Law. Trueblood confirms racists views of African-Americans and this also shapes how his incest narrative gets used by the white community.

In apparent contrast with Pecola sexual violence is foregrounded as she is raped and impregnated by her father, Cholly Breedlove. However Cholly’s practices are

conditioned by racism. Cholly is a poor drunk who is empowered by the rape of his daughter and the rape is a substitute for his powerlessness within a racist society. Cholly learned the lessons of his social marginality at a young age. At the death of his Aunt Jimmy some relatives met for a family gathering. Cholly and Darlene, a young black girl, went for a walk in the fields and while there they began sexual intercourse when they were discovered by two white men.

The white men made Cholly and Darlene perform for them at gun point and Cholly experienced feelings of hate not toward the white men but toward Darlene: "He hated her. He almost wished he could do it—hard, long, and painfully, he hated her so much" (148). Cholly "Never once consider[ed] directing his hatred toward the hunters. Such an emotion would have destroyed him. They were big, white, armed men. He was small, black, helpless" (150). Darlene and then later Pecola are the social outlets where Cholly is empowered through displacing his anger and frustration on the black woman's body. The empowerment that Cholly is denied in a racist and class divided society he violently appropriates.

Racist stereotypes allow Trueblood to profits from impregnating his daughter, and racism destroys Pecola sense of self. In fact Pecola's pregnancy becomes the subject of ridicule and disgust: "Ought to be a law: two ugly people doubling up like that to make more ugly. Be better off in the ground" (190). Everybody wanted the baby dead and for this reason Claudia "felt a need for someone to want the black baby to love—to counteract the universal love of white baby dolls, Shirley Temples, and Maureen Peals" (190). The only assistance Pecola gets is from the two young sisters Claudia and Frieda, who plant seeds and bury money in an attempt to help Pecola's baby live. For Pecola no one "pays" to hear about "A little black girl who wanted to rise up out of the pit of her blackness..."(175). In the *Invisible Man* Matty Lou is silenced and peripheral but the narrative focus on Pecola articulates the effects of racial oppression from the vantage point of the African-American female subject, who is also invisible.

Of course later the invisible man becomes aware of his invisibility and indeed the protagonist's aim is to recount his discovery of his invisibility. Although patriarchy allowed the invisible man a short lived illusion of presence, the invisible man, like Pecola is marked by race and this structures their invisible subjectivity. Even at her birth Pecola's mother, Pauline Breedlove, characterizes Pecola as ugly: "But I knowed she was ugly. Head full of pretty hair, but Lord she was ugly" (126). Morrison clearly indicates that Pauline's notion of beauty is not natural but produced through the ideological state apparatuses, specifically movies: "She [Pauline] was never able, after her education in the movies, to look at a face and assign it some category in the scale of absolute beauty, and the scale was one she absorbed in full from the silver screen" (122). How can Pecola be seen as beautiful when Pauline notions of beauty is Jean Harlow. Pauline even tried to style her hair after Jean Harlow's by putting "A part on the side, with one little curl on my forehead" (123).

Pauline looked "almost just like" (123) Jean Harlow and here Morrison's language signifies Pauline's lack and this lack is metaphorically represented when Pauline, while watching a film, takes a bite of candy, and loses a front tooth. The lost tooth signifies her own sense of lack: "I could of cried. I had good teeth, not a rotten one in my head. I don't believe I ever did get over that. There I was, five months pregnant,

trying to look like Jean Harlow, and a front tooth gone. Everything went then. Look like I just didn't care no more after that. I let my hair go back, plaited it up, and settled down to just being ugly" (123). Unlike Pecola, Pauline copes with her ugliness by becoming the "ideal servant" for the Fisher family. As the ideal servant she acquired "Power, praise, and luxury" (128). For example "The creditors and service people who humiliated her when she went to them on her own behalf respected her, were even intimidated by her, when she spoke for the Fishers" (128). Within the Fisher household Pauline found "beauty, order, cleanliness, and praise" (127) and this is in direct opposition to her house where "The things she could afford to buy did not last, had no beauty or style, and were absorbed by the stingy doorfront" (127) and thus "More and more she neglected her house, her children, her man" (127).

Because "All the meaningfulness of her life was in her work" (128) Pauline could construct a "private world" (128) in which she could suspend the contradictions of her daily life. What is unavailable to her in her daily life under racialized patriarchal structures she is able to invent for herself as the "ideal servant." Pauline is so committed to protecting her private sphere, because such a sphere provides a space of presence, that she becomes an agent for protecting (bourgeois) private property. When Pecola visits her mother at the Fisher household and accidentally drops a blueberry pan, Pauline enters the kitchen and intervenes quickly to restore order: "In one gallop she was on Pecola, and with the back of her hand knocked her to the floor" (109). Pauline chases away her "crazy daughter and then looks after "hushing and soothing the tears of the little pink-and-yellow girl" (109). Pauline has to contain the threat of the other from intruding in her private space and when Morrison contrasts the outside and the inside it is set up in binary oppositions.

Another example is when Pecola is confronted by Geraldine and falsely accused of killing Geraldine's cat. Geraldine is the mother of Louis and described as the type of woman "who did not sweat in her armpits nor between her thighs, who smelled of wood and vanilla, [and] who made souffles in the Home Economics Department" (86). One day Louis invited Pecola over to his house to play and ultimately Louis wrongly accuses Pecola of killing Geraldine's beloved cat. Geraldine returns home and sees the dead cat and Pecola who is the direct opposite of everything Geraldine represents. The episode acquires intelligibility through a set of binary oppositions:

Geraldine went to the radiator and picked up the cat. He was limp in her arms, but she rubbed her face in his fur. She looked at Pecola. Saw the dirty torn dress, the plaits sticking out on her head, hair matted where the plaits had come undone the muddy shoes with the wad of gum peeping out from between the cheap soles, the soiled socks, one of which had been walked down into the heel of the shoe. She saw the safety pin holding the hem of the dress up... She had seen this girl all of her life. (91)

Pecola is constructed as the outside, the margin, which is in opposition, and only meaningful in relation to the center, Geraldine. Morrison's engagement with Pecola and the outside world revolves around a margin/center binary oppositions and this is in tension with the overall polyvocal construction of the narrative. Morrison constructs a polyvocal narrative but all the tensions revolve around race; race mediates

all of the relationships. For example consider a minor character like Soaphead; his West Indian family was so obsessed with maintaining whiteness that “they married ‘up,’ lightening the family complexion and thinning out the family features” (168). Of course Geraldine and middle class blacks like her are so committed to the white aesthetic that they “get rid of the funkiness. The dreadful funkiness of passion, the funkiness of nature, the funkiness of the wide range of human emotions” (83).

The polyvocal structure undermines the fundamental structure of race. Here the political significance of deploying a polyvocal rather than binary structure: with dialectical binary oppositions there is an implicit logic of transformation; whereas the space of dialogic, the dominant structure of *The Bluest Eye*, there is not an impulse toward transcendence and as I will show this is the narrative/theoretical/political limitation of the text.

From a philosophical view the usefulness of Ellison and Morrison is in the articulation of a post-positivistic and post-empiricist account of African-American subjectivity. In the *Invisible Man* the protagonist offers a self-conscious reflection on his status in the first line of the prologue: “I am an invisible man” (3). Then the protagonist recounts an incident in which he accidentally bumps into a tall blond man. When the man refused to apologize for calling the protagonist an insulting name, the protagonist was going to kill the man “when it occurred to me that the man had not seen me, actually; that he, as far as he knew, was in the midst of a walking nightmare!” (4). Similarly Pecola wanted “blue eyes” to acquire visibility. Ellison and Morrison offer an understanding of African-American subjectivity that is based on experience but is derived from concepts (of invisibility) and not observed fact.

The narrative effort to operate outside empiricism is necessary because empiricism accepts the world in its present form (the status quo) as the only natural and thus inevitable form of organization of the real and thus unchangeable. The empiricist modality ensures that knowledge is always tied to experience and sense data and thus all theories and statements about the world must produce evidence of their truth and be tested. However from the empiricist view how do you test invisibility? And also if the African-American subject is invisible, then, according to empiricism we must accept this condition as “natural.” Of course invisibility is not testable and therefore from the empiricist frame Ellison and Morrison have produced a non-knowledge.

Ellison and Morrison problematize positivism and in doing so mark the limits of modernity. Modernity, specifically modern industrial development, assigned African-Americans a marginal social position and then privileged a mode of understanding, positivism, that occluded “seeing” African-American marginality because African-Americans were invisible.

The protagonist recognizes that “The world in which we lived was without boundaries” (498) and his cognitive awareness enables him to deconstruct the concept race as metaphysical; that is to say that the concept of race is reunderstood as a violent stabilizing of the precariousness and ambiguity of racial identity to some self-identical essence. These categories are ontologically empty and this is perhaps where the anti-essentialist views of the protagonist and poststructuralist converge. Although both deconstruct metaphysical categories and post-structuralist in particular displaces the unitary subject and points out the awareness of its constituted and not constitutive character, neither provides an effective understanding of the mechanisms that struc-

ture these metaphysical constructions. In other words if these categories are constructed then there are other possible constructions, so why are they constructed in such a way as to inscribe racial hierarchies? These relations are historical and obtain from dominant economic/political/cultural practices that structure and legitimate asymmetrical social positions that are endogenously generated in class societies.

The protagonist is aware of historical class struggle as he remarks that “They’d asked us for bread and the best I could give was a glass eye” (506) but the logic of the narrative suppresses intelligibility of such a struggle as the Brotherhood and the protagonist engage over the imaginary resolution of social contradictions (515). When the Harlem rebellion takes place it is completely unexpected by the Brotherhood and even though the protagonist had some awareness of its inevitability, a character like Dupre “was a type of man nothing in [his] life had taught [him] to see, to understand, or respect, a man outside the scheme till now” (547). What is ideologically revealing is that what has been left out his “scheme” is the urban proletariat—the very class whose interests he had committed to advance. What must have been even more shocking for the protagonist was that the masses had a plan: “They organized it and carried it through alone; the decision their own and their own action” (548).

The narrative possibility for the protagonist to align himself with mass struggles is negated because the protagonist sees the “author” as the “originator” of meaning and controlling agent of history and his underlying humanism structures his response to history. One early example occurs when the protagonist witnesses an eviction of an elderly African-American couple in Harlem. He becomes involved in protesting the eviction and delivers a speech, which he intends to morally stabilize the situation, but instead it leads to conflict between neighborhood residents and the police. For the protagonist the conflict is reduced to the “individual” as “The whole thing had gotten out of hand” (284) and he wondered “What had [he] said to bring on all this?” (284). Of course what brought on the social conflict was nothing he had said but rather it was the underlying oppressive social and economic conditions that structured the conflict.

The underlying humanism is evident later in the text during the Harlem riots. After the police arrive on the scene, the protagonist reunderstands the riot/rebellion not as a “suicide” but as “murder” because he thinks the “committee had planned it,” and furthermore he believes that he has been a tool “at the very moment [he] had thought himself free. By pretending to agree I had indeed agreed, had made myself responsible for that huddled form lighted by flame and gunfire in the street, and all the others whom now the night was making ripe for death” (553). Of course the committee could not have planned it because the protagonist had been giving the committee false reports (he had matched their illusion with a “counter-illusion” (515) and as such they could not have been aware of the obtaining material conditions; and it was precisely those oppressive conditions responsible for the uprising and not the protagonist.

The consequence of his humanism is that the socio-economic dimensions of subjectivity are occluded. The protagonist is now able to theorize life as an absurdity because the categories are (ontologically) empty and he consequently reifies the “real” because for him “outside the narrow borders of what men call reality... you step into chaos... or imagination” (576); and therefore you must remain within the existing “real.” Pecola also “stepped over into madness” (206) because the existing real could

not accommodate her. Both Ellison and Morrison reduce intelligibility to the “narrow borders” of the real, and both texts enact an ideological operation that diverts attention from the politics of cognition and from the ideological struggles over the real.

Ellison’s text frames the protagonist’s existential crisis as an ontological condition and not a social and historical condition that can be transformed through struggling over the real. The consequence of his reification is that the protagonist sees the world “Not like an arrow, but a boomerang” (6), which resonates closely with Nietzsche’s theory of the “eternal recurrence.” It is difficult to see how then the protagonist can see his world as “one of infinite possibilities” (576) except in his imaginary because for him the narrow border of the “real” is beyond change, and therefore the conditions that make him invisible are given immunity from historical transformation—it is no wonder that “life seen from the hole of invisibility is absurd” (579) because from the logic of the narrative there is no way out because the world moves like a “boomerang.”

Thus it is not surprising that the protagonist can not see the “next phase” thus the task for African-American literary critics of the 21st century is to open and maintain a literary and cultural space to theorize the conditions of possibility for the visibility of the other; and this returns us to the crucial question raised by the invisible man —“what kind of society will make [them] see me”?

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Although there is extensive critical commentary on Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* and Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*, there is very little examination of their philosophical contribution. Specifically there is little exploration of what I call their post-empiricist and post-positivist account of African-American subjectivity. I list below some of the relevant scholarship on Ralph Ellison and Toni Morrison. For Ralph Ellison see: Robert O’Meally, *The Craft of Ralph Ellison* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1980); Robert List, *Dedalus in Harlem: The Joyce-Ellison Connection* (Washington: UP of America, 1982); John Reilly, ed., *Twentieth-Century Interpretations of “Invisible Man”* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice, 1970); Ronald Gottesman, ed., *The Merrill Studies in “Invisible Man”* (Columbus: Merrill, 1971); Joseph Trimmer, ed., *Casebook on Ralph Ellison’s “Invisible Man”* (New York: Crowell, 1972); John Hersey, ed., *Ralph Ellison: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice, 1970); Kimberly Benston, ed., *Speaking for You: The Vision of Ralph Ellison* (Washington: Howard UP, 1987). The following journal issues have been dedicated to Ellison: *CLA* 13 (1970); *Black World* 20 (1970); and *Carleton Miscellany* 18 (1980). Finally also see Ellison’s *Going to the Territory* (New York: Random, 1986) and *Shadow and Act* (New York: Vintage, 1972).

For Toni Morrison see: Patrick Bryce Bjork, *The Novels of Toni Morrison: The Search for Self and Place within the Community* (New York: Lang, 1992); Karen Carmean, *Toni Morrison’s World of Fiction* (New York: Whitson, 1993); Trudier Harris, *Fiction and Folklore: The Novels of Toni Morrison* (Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1991); Denise Heinze, *The Dilemma of Double Consciousness: Toni Morrison’s Novels* (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1993); Karla F.C. Holloway and Stephanie A. Demetrakopoulos, *New Dimension of Spirituality: A Biracial and Bicultural Reading of the Novels of Toni Morrison* (Westport:



Greenwood, 1987); Dorothea Drummond Mbalia, *Toni Morrison's Developing Class Consciousness* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna UP, 1991); Terry Otten, *The Crime of Innocence in the Fiction of Toni Morrison* (Missouri: U of Missouri P, 1989); Barbara Hill Rigney, *The Voices of Toni Morrison* (Jackson: U of Mississippi P, 1994); Harold Bloom, ed., *Toni Morrison* (New York: Chelsea, 1990); Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and K. A. Appiah, eds., *Toni Morrison: Critical Perspectives Past and Present* (New York: Amistad, 1993); Nellie Y. McKay, ed., *Critical Essays on Toni Morrison* (Boston: Hall, 1988); Valerie Smith, ed., *New Essays on "Song of Solomon"* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1995). Finally see Morrison's *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1992), and "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature." *Michigan Quarterly Review* 28.1 (1989):1-34.

<sup>2</sup> Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What is the Enlightenment?," *Postmodernism: A Reader*, ed. Patricia Waugh (New York: Edward Arnold, 1992) 89-95.

<sup>3</sup> David Hume, "Of National Characters," *Race and the Enlightenment*, ed. Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1997) 30-33.

<sup>4</sup> Immanuel Kant, "On National Characteristics, So Far as They Depend upon the Distinct Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime," *Race and Enlightenment*, ed. Emmanuel Chukwudi (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1997) 49-57.

<sup>5</sup> Henry L. Gates, "Preface to Blackness: Text and Pretext," *Afro-American Literature: The Reconstruction of Instruction*, ed. Dexter Fisher and Robert B. Stepto (New York: Modern Language Association, 1979) 67-68.

<sup>6</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense," *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking, 1968) 46.

<sup>7</sup> Victor Perlo, *Economics of Racism II: The Roots of Inequality, USA* (New York: International Publishers, 1996) 10. Also scholarly resources for literature on pre-slavery Africa, specifically the status of the African subject in classical writing see the following: Samir Amin, *Eurocentrism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1989) 13-68; J. M. Blaut, "Colonialism and the Rise of Capitalism," *Science and Society* 53 (1989): 260-296; Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1987); Cheikh Anta Diop, *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality* (New York: Lawrence Hill, 1974); Basil Davidson, *African Civilization Revisited: From Antiquity to Modern Times* (New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1991); St. Clair Drake, *Black Folk Here and There*. (Los Angeles: Center for Afro-American Studies, 1987); Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (New Jersey: Zed, 1983); Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Washington, DC: Howard UP, 1982) chapter 2; Ivan Van Sertima, *They Came Before Columbus* (New York: Random House, 1976); Chancellor Williams, *The Destruction of Black Civilization: Great Issues of a Race from 4500 B.C. to 2000 A.D.* (New Jersey: Third World Press, 1975).

<sup>8</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977) 1-7

<sup>9</sup> Frederick G. Weiss, ed., *Hegel: The Essential Writings* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974) 70.

<sup>10</sup> Although Jacques Lacan and Louis Althusser both theorize the imaginary as illusory presence, Althusser situates the imaginary within ideological processes and this what I find most useful about Althusser's account of imaginary.

<sup>11</sup> I use the concept of "invisible presence to theorize race relations and this "invisible presence" constitutes African-American mirror stage. In philosophical terms the presence (self-identical) of dominant subject depends upon the invisibility of African-American sub-

jects. The production of self-identical subjects, in turn, is tied to humanism, which in turn is the ideological arm of capitalism. In the critical literature the idea of “invisible presence,” or similar ideas is developed in Toni Morrison’s *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1992) and Kenneth W. Warren’s *Black and White Strangers: Race and American Literary Realism* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1993). Also Ed Guerrero’s “Tracking ‘the Look’ in the Novels of Toni Morrison,” *Toni Morrison’s Fiction: Contemporary Criticism*, ed. David Middleton (New York: Garland, 1997). In primary literary texts a similar idea is expressed by those writers that I classify as “philosophers of difference” (chapter one). Writers such as James Baldwin, Richard Wright, Nella Larsen, Zora Neale Hurston, Jessie Redmon Fauset, Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, Sterling Brown, and Dorothy West among others. With “invisible presence” I attempt a theoretical articulation of race relations and foreground political economy.

<sup>12</sup> John Killen, *Freedom* (June 1952): 7

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