To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Carter A. Mathes entitled "'It's Nation Time': Cultural Nationalism in the Artistic Projects of Walt Whitman and Amiri Baraka." I have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.

Kenneth Mostern, Major Professor

We have read this thesis
and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council:

Associate Vice Chancellor and
Dean of the Graduate School

"IT'S NATION TIME": CULTURAL NATIONALISM IN THE ARTISTIC PROJECTS OF WALT WHITMAN AND AMIRI BARAKA

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Abstract

This is a comparative study of cultural nationalism in the work of Walt Whitman and Amiri Baraka. I am using these two artists to investigate the different ways that poetry can be used to instill national consciousness. In this thesis I will show how Whitman and Baraka used similar poetic methods and theories of nationality to fulfill agendas that are perceived very differently. The purpose of my study is also to evaluate cultural nationalism in the United States as a political practice which can operate at different moments as both American patriotism and black nationalism.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I want to give two accounts of what cultural nationalism has looked like in the United States through a comparison of Walt Whitman and Amiri Baraka. I think that an examination of these two poets who were both writing in politically volatile and formative moments in American history, can complicate our ideas of America (as a concept or ideology) and what it can mean to be American. It will be helpful to start with the image that Benedict Anderson has proposed of "imagined communities." How and why do people embark on this process of revolt through discovery? How do successive national imaginings in one country build on each other?

Nationalism is often thought of as a bad word -- something politically reactionary and hegemonic. While it is not a concept I am completely comfortable or uncomfortable with, the point of my study is not so much to judge nationalism as a problem as it is to show the way that nationalisms (within the same borders) are always related and in some sense derivative. By focusing on Whitman and Baraka I plan to show how this type of historical influence operates within American literary history. The main outline of my comparison is that both Whitman and Baraka use prophet-like identities to emphasize different versions of masculinity and eugenic promise as the bases for their respective nations. They attempt to expand the role of artists to address the perceived needs of their communities as social healers and leaders. Of course they both attempt to make "their people" universal categories"; a problematic move that essentializes identity in different and divisive ways through a new form of humanism. More than just saying Whitman and

Baraka produced nationalistic work that looks very similar, in this thesis I give an account of how cultural nationalism in America has an artistic distinctiveness which -- seen in the comparison of Whitman and Baraka -- has established, reacted against, and perhaps reproduced the racial and sexual formations in the United States.

In chapter one I will focus on Whitman's long essay Democratic Vistas as a document outlining the post-Civil War possibilities for American nationality through a "native art." The labelling of native will be my main connection between Whitman and Baraka as I look at Baraka's pre-nationalist stage, when he worked through being black in America before rejecting American nationality altogether. The main point of this chapter will be figuring out how artists think about the intersection of nationality, art, and identity.

After setting up cultural nationalism as a type of impulse or movement to (re)assert the strength of group identity through culturally defined artistic models and practices, in chapter two of this thesis I will discuss the prophetic situations that Whitman and Baraka create as artistic leaders of the people; as replacements for institutional belief structures who merge their sense of personal identity with that of the forming nation.

In chapter three I will see how people are left out of these prophetic visions of nationality. Where and how did these two artists draw boundaries for their nations? I will focus on gender, sexuality, and race to explain how social division operates as both a distancing from the outside enemy, and within, as a way of maintaining strict identities that will define the nation.

Overall, one of my central concerns in bringing together these two writers is being able to use Baraka's work to measure the political and poetic legacy of Whitman; while

using Whitman's work to show generally where Baraka is coming from (in terms of speaking for the people in America). It is clear that a tradition of populist poetry began with Whitman and has been modelled by many subsequent artists as part of a leftist or radical agenda. At the same time though, it is very clear that some versions of Whitman's vision constitute the artistic component of American imperialism and do not ideologically sustain many of those who see him as a heroic predecessor.[1] While my essay is not focused strictly on the racial component of nationalism, or concerned with pointing out that Baraka *said* that he admired Whitman's style or content, I do feel that it is important to bring up the fact that Whitman's positive influence has been extensively cited in twentieth century black writing.[2] It is my opinion that we need to appreciate the way that Whitman's style of "poetry for the people" has been a useful guide and inspiration for many blacks, gay activists, third world revolutionaries, and other radical social activists in their causes. It is also important that we find a way to bracket this issue and be able to clearly see that the political institutionalization of Whitman's desire to harness the differences within America under one poetic voice has in many ways led to social and political situations that have necessitated articulations from many of the people who cite him as an influence. By juxtaposing Whitman and Baraka then, I think we will see the

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[1]For a discussion of Whitman as American imperialist, see David Simpson, "Destiny made manifest: the styles of Whitman's poetry."

[2]For commentary on specific examples of this influence see the introduction to Klammer's, *Whitman, Slavery, and the Emergence of Leaves of Grass*, Hutchinson, "Whitman and the Black Poet: Kelly Miller's Speech to the Walt Whitman Fellowship," and Gibson, "The Good Black Poet and the Good Gray Poet: The poetry of Hughes and Whitman."

train of populist poetic inheritance preserved and modified as it is used against the ideology from which it originally emerged.

CHAPTER II

THEORIZING THE "NATION"

Walt Whitman and Amiri Baraka both saw themselves as leading masses of people away from a colonized status toward a new and revolutionary identity. The colonial setting is important to both Whitman and Baraka for different reasons that nevertheless overlap. For Whitman the colonized identity of Americans is defined against the dominant forms of European art and government. In Baraka's case black people constitute a colonized group living within a racist, imperialist America. Both artists, then, rely on "manichean" portrayals of the relationship between those they speak for and the forces which they are fighting.[1] To me, manichean is a word that tries to define the psychological feelings of superiority and inferiority that guide the definitions of who is a "minority" (which might outnumber the majority) in certain situations. In this instance, they attempt to overturn this manichean polarity which inscribes the colonizer as morally "good" and enlightened, while the colonized is characterized by savagery and vulgarity. In this case the manichean definition is operating at different moments in the United States. Whitman

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[1]See Abdul R. JanMohamed's introduction to *Manichean Aesthetics*, as well as Ato Seki-Otu's *Fanon's Dialectic of Experience*, for discussions of Fanon's use of manicheanism (which can be seen in the chapter "Spontaneity: It's Strengths and Weaknesses," from *The Wretched of the Earth*, and as a theoretical frame for *Black Skin, White Masks*). JanMohamed uses the term primarily to discuss the "pains and pleasures" of colonial society in Africa that were alternately felt by black and white, European and African writers in Africa. Seki-Otu, who is more specifically writing about Fanon, investigates how the description of manichean polarities in Fanon's texts are used to narrate the development of knowledge,"truth," and philosophical systems. In fact he points out how Fanon depicts that colonized knowledge must escape the determinism of the manichean world to allow for a politics based on liberation, and not limited by "race as the principle of moral judgement" (116).

is able to use the label "colonized" as grounds for figuring out a native literature as basically white (but not European), while marginalized, "ethnic" populations (who are themselves victims of colonization at the hands of Whitman's colonized) exist only as symbols in the "native" literature. In Baraka's case the manichean description fits as a way of distancing blackness as a separate nationality from mainstream, white America. They do this by presenting their nationalist positions through voices which contain the possibilities for a revolutionary humanity that will elevate the status of the oppressed over the forces which hold them down. It is interesting to note that both Whitman and Baraka use the supposed barbarism of their people as a natural or transcendent basis for humanity. We should keep in mind then, the fact that the manichean description is present on two levels; for as a means of correcting the imbalance between colonizer and colonized, Whitman and Baraka create identity within their imagined nations by re-inscribing moral and metaphysical differences as determining factors for who will be included in their visions. The manichean impulse thus begins as a way of defining what it means to be colonized, and then guides definitions within the colonized people as to who is the most properly nationalist.

In listening to and thinking about how Whitman theorized the nation, it is clear that his work is marked by a manifest destiny which is both political (that is land-based) and social (the desire to speak for and encompass the people who make up the nation), which together create a kind of eugenic program for constructing a race of native artists and people that will be responsive to them.[2] When we read Whitman's pronouncements

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[2]Harold Aspiz discusses this issue in "The Body Politic and *Democratic Vistas*."

about America, we are surrounded by the rhetoric of democracy and egalitarianism. The duty of the American poet is to fuse the people of the nation with an artistic force that is stronger than legislation. We can see these ideas set forth within the 1871 essay *Democratic Vistas*.[3]

> I suggest therefore, the possibility, should some two or three really original American poets (perhaps artists or lecturers) arise. . . they would give more compaction and more moral identity (the quality today most needed) to these States, than all its Constitutions, legislative and judicial ties. . . there could hardly happen anything that would more serve the States, with all their variety of origins, their diverse climes, cities, standards, etc., than possessing an aggregate of heroes, characters, exploits, sufferings, prosperity or misfortune, glory or disgrace, common to all, typical of it all -- no less, but even greater would it be to possess the aggregation of a cluster of mighty poets, artists, teachers, fit for us, national expressers, comprehending and effusing for the men and women of the States, what is universal, native, common to all, inland and seaboard, northern and southern (323).

Clearly the time at which this was written is important, for after the dissolution of the Union Whitman feels more of a mandate to assert the potential strength of cultural nationalism over a strictly political unification. This tension between culture and politics is

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[3]All references to *Democratic Vistas* are taken from the 1973 Viking edition of The Portable Walt Whitman, edited by Van Doren and revised by Cowley.

one of the main thrusts of Whitman's essay, thus allowing him to define democracy as an equalizing artistic force rather than a political institution:

> For, I say, the true nationality of the States, the genuine union, when we come to a mortal crisis, is, and is to be, after all, neither the written law, nor (as is generally supposed) either self-interest, or common pecuniary or material objects -- but the fervid and tremendous Idea, melting everything else with resistless heat, and solving all lesser and definite distinctions in vast, indefinite, spiritual, emotional power (324).

It is the liberalizing "Idea" that can be established by a native literature and is at the center of Whitman's egalitarianism; an idea that needs to be interrogated as we read the poet. One of the necessary ways of doing this involves figuring out who exactly constitutes his nation. What are the expressed and implied limitations of the body politic?

As I have read critical work on *Democratic Vistas*, I have been struck by the nearly unmentioned imbalance, or gap, that Martin Klammer has pointed out regarding race in the essay[4]: ". . . Whitman's postwar vision for America's future, *Democratic Vistas* (1871), begins with the question of universal suffrage but then turns away from any consideration of blacks, an absence all the more remarkable in light of the recently passed Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments" (162). Whitman was obviously attuned to the specifics of black suffrage because the issue was highlighted in the Carlyle essay, *Shooting Niagara*, which *Democratic Vistas* was written in response to. Carlyle opposes universal suffrage on the grounds that it will amount to the destruction of culture

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(defined by the white, capitalist, patriarchy). Whitman is trying to defend America and the project of democracy from Carlyle's attack while admitting that he will not, ". . . gloss over the appaling [sic] dangers of universal suffrage in the United States" (318). His defense, however, amounts to a fusion of America and the concept of democracy which evades the specifics of black suffrage as well as notions of a multi-racial American democracy.

How is it that Whitman can do this after consistently speaking for black people in his earlier poetry? Perhaps Klammer provides an adequate answer by showing that Whitman's poetic references to blacks decreased throughout his career, from the frequently idealized status of black people in his work (predominately men), as slaves who needed to be free in order for the democracy to be legitimate, to a virtual absence after the Civil War when the reality of black suffrage and black and white coexistence became to much for Whitman to handle.[5] We can see these doubtful thoughts on the possibility of black life in America in Whitman's manuscript, "Of the Black Question"[6]:

> After the tender appeals of the sentimentalist, the eloquence of freedom's hottest orators, and the logic of the politico-economist, comes something else to the settlement of this question -- comes Ethnological Science, cold remorseless, not heeding at all the vehement abstractions of equality and fraternity, or any of the formulas thereof -- uninfluenced by Acts of Congress, or Constitutional Amendments -- by noiselessly rolling on like

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[5]See Klammer, Whitman, Slavery, and the Emergence of Leaves of Grass.

[6]See Geoffrey Sill, "Whitman on 'The Black Question': A New Manuscript."

> the globe in its orbit, like summer's heat or winter's cold, and settling these things by evolution, by natural selection by certain races notwithstanding all the frantic pages of the sentimentalists helplessly disappearing by the slow, sure progress of laws, through sufficient periods of time.

As a nationalistic document, then, *Democratic Vistas* proceeds from the premise that American democracy shall be preserved for white working men, procreated by white women (biological workers), and trumpeted by white poets; therefore re-inscribing the manichean identity of colonized and colonizer. The absence that Klammer shows us becomes all the more frightening when we read contemporary appraisals of the essay that have nothing critical to say about race, yet wish to discuss Whitman as a political writer/ theorist.[7] This lapse in both Whitman's writing and how it has been read, is symptomatic of how America has been established as a land and concept which, contrary to the many slogans, takes freedom for granted through an assumed tautology, where the state seeks to preach to the choir.

Finally Whitman bases his nationalistic argument on the premise that America represents a New World which needs to sufficiently break with the feudalism of Europe. He is concerned with defining America's newness through its "native" authenticity,

> . . . I, now, for one, promulge, announcing a native expression-spirit, getting into form, adult and through mentality, for these States, self-

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[7] In particular I am thinking about Harold Aspiz, "The Body Politic in *Democratic Vistas*," and Betsy Erkkila, Whitman The Political Poet. While Erkkila does point out that Whitman dodges the issue of black suffrage, and was pessimistic in his thoughts about blacks becoming part of the nation, she fails to critique this outside of , ". . . his age's racial views" (150).

> contained, different from others, more expansive, more rich and free, to be evidenced by original authors and poets to come, by American personalities . . . and by a sublime and serious Religious Democracy sternly taking command, dissolving the old, sloughing off surfaces, and from its own interior and vital principles, reconstructing, democratizing society (365).

The image of a "native expression-spirit" functions as a distancing from European forms, while also reserving the space of native for those Americans who *must* have descended from Europe (in order to not want to be like them). The conditions that create the need for national consciousness as a vehicle for liberation have to begin with such a relationship of perceived or actual domination. Benedict Anderson describes this situation well by distinguishing the formation of the Americas as a "Creole nationalism."[8] He explains that,

> . . . whether we think of Brazil, the USA, or the former colonies of Spain, language was not an element that differentiated them from their respective imperial metropoles. All, including the USA, were Creole states, formed and led by people who shared a common language and common descent with those against whom they fought.

Anderson depicts American nationalism as a special case which is defined Enlightenment ideals and print-capitalism. It is these forces rather that show clear lines of nationality against the dynastic rule of Europe rather than a discernible biological difference. That is why we can see consciousness becoming so important to Whitman. The colonial psychology that Whitman uses is then double-edged; for it represents both an escape from

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[8]See chapter four of Imagined Communities, "Creole Pioneers."

and a reproduction of imperialist hierarchy. Partha Chaterjee has pointed out that this type of contradiction is an inherent part of nationalist discourse that shows a dependence on Enlightenment ideals:

> . . . the problem of nationalist thought becomes the particular manifestation of a much more general problem, namely, the problem of the bourgeois-rationalist conception of knowledge, established in the post-Enlightenment period of European intellectual history, as the moral and epistemic foundation for a supposedly universal framework of thought which perpetuates in a real and not merely metaphorical sense, a colonial domination. It is a framework of knowledge which proclaims its own universality; its validity, it pronounces, is independent of cultures. Nationalist thought, in agreeing to become 'modern', accepts the claim to universality of this 'modern' framework of knowledge. Yet it also asserts the autonomous identity of national culture. It thus simultaneously rejects and accepts the dominance, both epistemic and moral, of an alien culture (11).

Chaterjee recognizes nationalism as a ". . . different discourse, yet one that is dominated by another. . . "(42). Nationalist thought wants to find an essence that exists naturally within the people, yet that very desire can often fall into the trap of asserting a universal where there is none, or on a level that might be far too local. Specific identity locations become broad systems of knowledge in order to realize their nationality. There is nothing absolutely wrong with this effort, but it must be done carefully or the system which is

fought against will ultimately reproduce itself. In Whitman's case "American" becomes a nationality *and* racial category that does not acknowledge difference. The strength of this conflation is what provides Whitman's idea of American poets with their native power:

> Subtly interwoven with the materiality and personality of a land, a race -- Teuton, Turk, Californian, or what not -- there is always something -- I can hardly tell what it is -- history but describes the results of it -- it is the same as the untellable look of some human faces. Nature, too, in her stolid forms, is full of it -- but to most it is there a secret. This something is rooted in the invisible roots, the profoundest meanings of that place, race, or nationality; and to absorb and again effuse it, uttering words and products as from its midst, and carrying it into highest regions, is the work, or a main part of the work, of any country's true author, poet, historian, lecturer, and perhaps even priests and philosophs (366).

There are two ideas that Whitman expresses here that can help us begin to think about the connections between his and Baraka's nationalist projects. First of all, as one of the clearest theoretical statements of cultural nationalism in the essay, Whitman tries to describe the *feeling* of national consciousness as one that is secular in its ability to replace traditionally held belief systems with a more tangible spirituality.[9] National liberation, then, is thrown into a situation in which it must negotiate various pitfalls that might be a

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[9] See Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities, for a detailed look at how nationalism replaces traditional belief systems within societies. He situates nationalism as a by-product of the Enlightenment in its effort to make sense of cultural systems that begin to operate outside of dynastic and religious realms.

part of human emotions. What I want to do now, is use Whitman and Baraka to show the difference that race makes with respect to claiming that one is colonized within the borders of the United States.

In his 1967 assessment of African American cultural nationalism, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, Harold Cruse explains that America is

> . . . an unfinished nation -- the product of a badly-bungled process of inter-group cultural fusion. America is a nation that lies to itself about who and what it is. It is a nation of minorities ruled by a minority of one -- it thinks and acts as if it were a nation of white Anglo-Saxon Protestants. This white Anglo-Saxon ideal, this lofty dream of a minority at the summit of its economic and political power and the height of its historical self-delusions, has led this nation to the brink of self-destruction. And on its way, it has effectively dissuaded, crippled and smothered the cultivation of a democratic cultural pluralism in America (456).

Cruse offers an analysis of how Whitman's democratic nationalism has ultimately failed and left us with a nation of white oppression that has disabled the possibilities for a truly inclusive American art. Cruse also shows the desire to work within the concept of America. For him, African American nationalism can provide an insightful critique of, and cure for a diseased America. Thus Cruse explains that we have come to a point where Whitman's "native artists" of the New World necessarily must not be white. I want to look at how Baraka begins from this perspective of interrogating the ideology of Whitman in an effort to heighten the artistic status of African American artists in America, and then

eventually shifts to reproduce Whitman's style of nationalism, even as he completely abandons the idea of America as a workable concept.

In the 1962 essay "Myth of a Negro Literature," Baraka expresses the American nationalism of African American artists as a double-consciousness that can save and ameliorate American society:

> At this point when the whole of Western society might go up in flames, the Negro remains an integral part of that society, but continually outside it, a figure like Melville's Bartleby. He is American, capable of identifying emotionally with the fantastic cultural ingredients of this society, but he is also, forever, outside that culture, an invisible strength within it, an observer. If there ever is a Negro literature, it must disengage itself from the weak, heinous elements of the culture that spawned it, and use its very existence as evidence of a more profound America (114-15).

Initially, Baraka is not concerned with the specifics of a separate nationalism that will revolt against America; instead he contends that, "The American Negro has a definable and legitimate historical tradition, no matter how painful, in America, but it is the only place such a tradition exists, simply because America is the only place the American Negro exists" (111). To support this view Baraka explains how the slave trade represents a starting point in African American culture because, "It is only the American experience that can be a persistent cultural catalyst for the Negro. In a sense history before the Negro, before America, must remain an emotional abstraction" (111). The "legitimate cultural tradition" of the Negro artist is "the entire spectrum of the American experience

from the point of view of the emotional history of the black man in this country: as its victim and its chronicler" (111-12).

The problem that Baraka is trying to solve is how to create a tradition of African American art that will not be stifled by the white, middle class tradition of American art, but will become American through the strength of communicating the political reality of being black. Baraka is trying to redefine what it means to be an American. Like Cruse, he sees the artistic strength of the nation resting in black artists who do not have to prove to white people that they are "American" by doing what has been done before by whites, or by creating art in a way that will make the mainstream comfortable. He laments the many black imitators of "bourgeois idealistic projections," and "disembowelled Academic models of second-rate English poetry," that turn African American life into nothing more than a false invention (112-13). In an echo of Whitman, Baraka's answer to this dilemma is to break away from these stifling European models (which have also become white American), and establish a truly native literature which is both black and American:

> A Negro literature, to be a legitimate product of the Negro experience in America, must get at that experience in exactly the terms America has proposed for it, in its most ruthless identity. Negro reaction to America is as deep a part of America as the root causes of that reaction, and it is impossible to accurately describe that reaction in terms of the American middle class; because for them, the Negro has never really existed, never been glimpsed in anything even approaching the complete reality of his humanity. The Negro writer has to go from where he actually is,

> completely outside of that conscious white myopia. That the Negro does exist is exactly the point, and as an element of American culture he is completely misunderstood by Americans (113).

Although this is an echo of Whitman it is also a critique, for what Baraka is saying is that the reaction to American racism is what should define Negro art in America. In this case "racism" is defined as an invisibility or myopia that does not allow white America to truly appreciate African American art because it is always already defined as indistinguishable from American art. He sees the position of the black artist as, "[a] no man's-land, a black country, completely invisible to white america, but so essentially part of it as to stain its whole being an ominous gray. This identity of DuBoisian outsider needs to be looked at as a stage leading to a more focused black consciousness. We can see how Baraka's early, pre-nationalist writing in many instances exhibits the tortured passage of a black Bohemian who is searching for his artistic and social space in a divided America. I think it is also important to look at Baraka's work before the Black Arts Movement because it was written during a time in which he was LeRoi Jones -- living in Greenwich Village, circulating within white Bohemian circles, and marrying a white woman. While my study is not focused on biography, these are important facts to remember about Baraka since the inception of the Black Arts Movement involved his divorce from that part of his life -- a condition that required a black spiritual purging -- as we will see in my later discussion of prophetic nationalism.

There are two poems, one from each of his early published volumes, Preface to a Twenty-Volume Suicide Note and The Dead Lecturer, that I want to discuss as

descriptions of Baraka's dilemma as a black intellectual and signs of his nationalist development. To make this last point very clear, I will also refer to Frantz Fanon's long essay "On National Culture."

In the last poem from *Preface*, "NOTES FOR A SPEECH," Baraka opens with the lines:

> African blues
> does not know me. Their steps, in sands
> of their own
> land. A country
> in black & white, newspapers
> blown down pavements
> of the world. Does
> not feel
> What I am .

These thoughts are not unheard of in the tradition of African American writing. They represent a landmark or rite of passage that is felt when a black artist recognizes the disconnection from what can be thought of as native roots. The unstated importance of Baraka's words is that he has indeed been moved by an element of his consciousness to consider this relationship between blackness, Africa, and America. His reflection seems to end in despair; as we can hear in the conclusion of the poem:

> . . . Black
> words throw up sand

to eyes, fingers of

their private dead. Whose

soul, eyes, in sand. My color

is not theirs. Lighter, white man

talk. They shy away. My own

dead souls, my so called

people. Africa

is a foreign place. You are

as any other sad man here

american.

The fact that the poem ends on such a despairing note, depicting American identity to be something incomplete and unfulfilled for a black citizen, is most likely the starting point of the poem, and still leaves us with questions about how this emptiness can be best addressed. Fanon is quite clear in his description of this psychological yearning for a national culture of one's own:

> The Negro, never so much a Negro as since he has been dominated by the whites, when he decides to prove that he has a culture and to behave like a cultured person, comes to realize that history points out a well-defined path to him: he must demonstrate that a Negro culture exists. (212)

Fanon must be read with the awareness, however, that his narrative is dialectical and symbolic of the intellectual development that is undergone by the subjects of his study. Therefore, we cannot abstract this quote and claim that Fanon simply believes that the

path to a Negro culture is actually "well-defined" and free of pitfalls. We need to focus on the beginning of the quotation and realize that the white dominance Fanon refers to is historically determining to the degree that the search for a Negro culture (in which the term Negro is the focus) can become an exercise that only has whiteness or the West as a measuring stick. The search for national culture, then, does not come without the price of psychological rupture -- a rupture defined by the seemingly incompatible identities black, American, African. This rupture and its consequences are played out through the body and mind of the native intellectual, but cannot be separated from the influence of the white world. Consider the next lines of his essay: "And it is only too true that those who are most responsible for this racialization of thought, or at least for the first movement toward that thought, are and remain those Europeans who have never ceased to set up white culture to fill the gap left by the absence of other cultures" (212). Thinking about the combination and complexity of Fanon's words, Baraka's poem, and the way we have been taught to read Whitman as the great poet of America -- as both a sociological description and carefully articulated warning -- allows us to appreciate the different stages that are involved in developing a national consciousness in the shadow of white imperialism.

This stage of pre-revolutionary development is also hauntingly worked through in Baraka's volume The Dead Lecturer. The poem "I Substitute For The Dead Lecturer" ends with the type of questioning that Fanon proposes regarding the move toward national culture.[10] In this case though, Baraka seems to question if he is black enough, and

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[10]See p.224 Wretched of the Earth. I will provide one quote which summarizes much of Fanon's critique:

> The man of culture, instead of setting out to find this substance, will let

conveys his idea of what will happen if he does not separate his art from whiteness:

> . . . For all these wan roads
> I am pushed to follow, are
> my own conceit. A simple muttering
> elegance, slipped in my head
> pressed on my soul, is my heart's
> worth. And I am frightened
> that the flame of my sickness
> will burn off my face. And leave
> the bones, my stewed black skull,
> an empty cage of failure.

At this point, then, Baraka has arrived at the brink of black nationalism. He feels the need to break from a determined course which will deny the relevance of his color, and replace the power of his words with "a simple muttering elegance." The visceral imagery of his words leaves no doubt that, for him, whiteness has become a disease; while championing blackness represents not only comfort (not becoming "an empty cage of failure"), but a duty to "his people." Fanon describes this psychological brink of national consciousness as a complex feeling where the individual wants to become part of (and create) a larger system of familiarity, and is poised to accept the possible sacrifice such a project might

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himself be hypnotized by these mummified fragments which because they are static are in fact symbols of negation and outworn contrivances. Culture has never the translucidity of custom; it abhors all simplification. In its essence it is opposed to custom, for custom is always the deterioration of culture.

involve:

> In order to ensure his salvation and to escape from the supremacy of the white man's culture the native feels the need to turn backward toward his unknown roots and to lose himself at whatever cost in his own barbarous people. Because he feels he is becoming estranged, that is to say because he feels he is the living haunt of contradictions which run the risk of becoming insurmountable, the native tears himself away from the swamp that may suck him down and accepts everything, decides to take all for granted and confirms everything even though he may lose body and soul (218).

Fanon theorizes this desire to escape from cultural estrangement as a reaction to the contradictory nature of black intellectual identity and practice. The issue of how *real* these contradictions are is a question that must take into account the manichean structuring of a society in which certain positions are seen as more natural to particular racial groups. Fanon explains that a black person may feel intellectual activity as a practice that is defined by whiteness. There is a need, then, for the black intellectual to assert an "authentic" black identity based on common roots. As Fanon says, these roots are "unknown" because they are invented in order to supply the black intellectual with a connection to the perceived community, while possibly denying the reality of the specific individual's racial history. At this point the issue of sacrifice becomes a part of nationalism that is more clearly seen in Baraka's theorization than that of Whitman. There is more at stake for a black person who must orchestrate nationalism as a return to the people along

strict racial lines than there is for a white person to invoke the idea of America as a revolutionary concept. It is evident that the construction of a black national consciousness can involve a denial of the many identities contained within blackness even as the impulse asserts a kind of recapturing. Baraka's transition between Beat poet and black nationalist shows us how he must first consider the cultural politics of blackness within the idea of America. Baraka's pre-nationalist ideas theorize America as a revolutionary idea that needs to be defined by its black artists. In this sense Baraka is continuing the tradition of Whitman's cultural nationalism, but making black thinkers the reciters and receivers of the legacy.

The creation of the Black Arts Movement, and the idealization of a black cultural nation shows a transformation in Baraka's thinking from "Negro-ness" to "black consciousness."[11] That is he moved from hoping for social change through art as a black American, to asserting blackness as a universal humanism that Houston Baker has termed, "a black sense of manifest destiny" (97). I think that this move is both a rejection and reproduction of Whitman's articulation of America. For as Fanon points out, "It is always easier to proclaim rejection than to actually reject" (219). This is what must be kept in mind as we examine the height of Baraka's black nationalism. Although he is able to violently dismiss the outward signs and symbols of white America, his style and enunciation of black nationalist tenets ultimately rests on the act of *demonstrating* the

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[11]See chapter four of Baker, *The Journey Back*, Benston, *Baraka: The Renegade and the Mask*, Hudson, *From LeRoi Jones to Amiri Baraka: The Literary Works*, and Sollors, *Amiri Baraka/ LeRoi Jones: The Quest for a 'Populist Modernism'*, for textual and biographical analyses of the stages of Baraka's work and life.

existence of a black culture as an end in itself; borrowing heavily from the methods Whitman used to construct the idea of America that Baraka is fighting against.

CHAPTER III

NATIONALIST PROPHETS

As nationalist prophets Baraka and Whitman saw themselves as healing figures that needed to speak for their "people." They wanted to structure their nations as idealized images of themselves. There are several problematic notions about political prophesy that I will investigate in their work. First of all, how successful were they in defining their constituencies through a "we" experience? How did their speech-acts function in relation to the realities they were dealing with? What types of social divisions were engendered during this process? First it will be important to explain why the role of prophet is so attractive to nationalist poets, and then to show how the aesthetics of the work display a prophetic nature.

Constructing a national consciousness is very ritualistic. There has to not only be a perceived crisis at hand to unite the people, there must also be something there for them -- a reward in the guise of tradition -- once they make the commitment to be "black" or "American." I am not denying that there is something political about proclaiming one's nationhood, but to me, particularly when speaking of a nationalism that is based on cultural celebration and not specifically oriented around physically battling over land, the process seems to depend on more of a psychological and "spiritual" bond among the people, which is in itself a political act. By discussing the function of prophesy in cultural nationalism I hope to show how Whitman and Baraka both combine personal beliefs with the political crises of their times in order to reify their positions in the eyes of the people.

For Baraka, the Black Arts Movement represented the realization of the black race

as a cultural nation; one that is separate from, and an improvement upon mainstream America. In his autobiography, Baraka describes his 1965 migration uptown to Harlem as a theoretical and emotional journey:

> The arrival uptown, Harlem, can only be summed up by the feelings jumping out of Cesaire's *Return to My Native Land* or Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* or Cabral's *Return to the Source*. The middle-class native intellectual, having outintegrated the most integrated, now plunges headlong back into what he perceives as the blackest, native-est. Having dug, finally, how white he has become, now, *classically*, comes back to his countrymen charged up with the desire to be black, uphold black, &c. . . . a fanatical patriot (202).

The last sentence is a strong signal that now Baraka has gone from questioning his blackness in America, to asserting its collective strength among his "countrymen." The unsettled "I' of the Dead Lecturer and early artistic life among white people, now has found the comfort of a specifically black patriotism.

As a black prophet, Baraka wanted to follow the lead that Malcolm X played in the development of black consciousness. His statements and practice make it clear that he saw Malcolm X primarily as a role model who effectively made black people aware of the importance of a national consciousness. In his 1965 essay, "the legacy of malcolm x, and the coming of the black nation," Baraka shows how the call for nationality is a rallying cry for black people to realize the political reality of race in America:

> The point is that Malcolm had begun to call for Black National

> Consciousness. And moved this consciousness into the broadest possible arena, operating with it as of now. We do not want a Nation, we are a Nation. We must strengthen and formalize, and play the world's game with what we have, from where we are, as a truly separate people. America can give us nothing; all bargaining must be done by mutual agreement. But finally, terms must be given by Black Men *from their own shores* -- which is where they live, where we all are now. The land is literally ours. And we must begin to act like it (from *Home* 239-40).

What is essential to Baraka's use of Malcolm X here, is the conclusion that African Americans represent a nation within a nation. There is however a tension within the essay between the need for actual land and the cultural consciousness needed in order to build the nation. This is a signal that Baraka wants to locate blackness, "the nation," as something internal to the people. It seems that he is moving away from the "Garvey times" that told black people they were "from another place" and "alien," as a political analysis (244), to a position which emphasizes literal racial separation as a form of black cultural autonomy. Furthermore, the difference between Baraka's and Garvey's outline of black nationalism is that instead of going "back to Africa," Baraka wants black people to realize their status as domestically colonized rather than displaced people.[1] The land that

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[1]There are several intellectuals who describe the African American identity as a domestically colonized status. Robert Allen begins his book Black Awakening in Capitalist America with the claim, "Black America is an oppressed nation, a semicolony of the United States, and the black revolt is emerging as a from of national liberation struggle"(1). He goes on to document and critique Baraka's leadership in the move for black political autonomy in Newark in 1967-68.

must be fought over is to be found in the "chocolate cities" of America. Since there is no pilgrimage to a promised land, the nationalistic imperative must be enacted through the mind and "flesh" of black people:

> So that now we must find the flesh of our spiritual creation. We must be conscious. And to be conscious is to be cultured, processed in specific virtues and genius. We must respond to this National Consciousness with our souls, and use the correspondence to come into our own.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> If we take the teachings of Garvey, Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X (as well as Frazier, Du Bois, and Fanon), we know for certain that the solution of the Black Man's problems will come only through Black National Consciousness. We also know that the focus of change will be racial. (If we feel differently, we have different ideas. Race is feeling. Where the body, and the organs come in. Culture is the preservation of these feelings in superrational to rational form. Art is one method of expressing these feelings and identifying the form, as an emotional phenomenon.) In order for the Black Man in the West to absolutely know himself, it is necessary for him to see himself first as culturally separate from the white man. That is, to be conscious of this separation and use the strength it proposes (244, 246).

Knowing oneself as a positive, black individual is central to the Black Arts Movement. What exactly is meant by positive, we will investigate in the following pages. The

important point is that this thinking does situate Baraka's Black Arts theory in a larger framework of cultural nationalism in which it is the duty of the artist to produce work and lead a life that is coterminous with that of the people. Baraka identifies his idea of black cultural nationalism as the production of autonomous images of blackness:

> The Black artist, in this context, is desperately needed to change the images his people identify with, by asserting Black feeling, Black mind, Black judgement. The Black intellectual, in this same context, is needed to change the interpretation of facts toward the Black Man's best interests, instead of merely tagging along reciting white judgements of the world (248).

This outlook shows a combination of personal and public motives in which the individual artist becomes symbolic of the community for which he is speaking. It is this space of articulation that becomes so interesting as we see artists attempt to merge with and define the body politic through an embrace and a set of instructions.

Whitman's prophetic nature, or"literary shamanism", as many critics have termed it, also starts from the idea that it is the duty of the poet to heal the nation by celebrating the people through a distinctly native artistic form. While Baraka goes about this process through a rather focused definition of what it means to be black, Whitman's work is marked by a desire to enclose the largeness of America by insisting that the poet is open to everything, since he views all life as a form of poetry, as he states in the preface to the

1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*[2]:

> Of all nations the United States with veins full of poetical stuff most need poets and will doubtless have the greatest and use them the greatest. Their Presidents shall not be their common referee so much as their poets shall. Of all mankind the great poet is the equable man. Not in him but off from him things are grotesque or eccentric or fail of their sanity. . . He bestows on every object or quality its fit proportions neither more nor less. He is the arbiter of the diverse and he is the key. He is the equalizer of his age and land. . . (714)

Enclosing and equalizing the population is a heavy duty and desire. To be able to speak for so many requires a conviction that Whitman expresses through many assumptions. He is not only speaking for people, but forces a merge with all exemplary American artists, and assumes an imminent merging with readers, through alternating second person and first person plural pronouns:

> The messages of great poets to each man and woman are, Come to us on equal terms, Only then can you understand us, We are no better than you, What we enclose you enclose, What we enjoy you may enjoy. Did you suppose there could only be one Supreme? We affirm there can be unnumbered Supremes, and that one does not countervail another anymore than one eyesight countervails another. . . and that men can be good or

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[2]From Leaves of Grass. Ed. Sculley Bradley and Harold Blodgett. New York: Norton, 1965. All subsequent references to Whitman's work are taken from this edition.

grand only of the consciousness of their supremacy within them (719-720).

The precise end of Whitman's need to merge with others (who will ideally become the same) is to fuse the contradictions of America into a narrative poetics that will validate the position of the poet by placing him within the different styles of life that are, in his mind, American.[3] I want to look at how Whitman and Baraka construct this space as prophet-poets. If we find out how their conceptions of this secular, yet spiritual space converge and diverge in respect to different aesthetic concerns, perhaps we can come to a better understanding of the ambiguities that mark the inheritance of a populist poetic tradition amidst ideological reaction.

One of Walt Whitman's most famous statements is the opening to "Song of Myself," in which he proclaims that "I celebrate myself, and sing myself,/ And what I assume you shall assume,/ For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you (1-3)." While many readers have attacked this presumptiveness as a sign of the poet's exploding megalomania, critic James Nolan wants to distinguish this rhetoric as an instance of Whitman donning a shamanic mask. Nolan points out that a trait of prophet figures is that they must create a "persona" that is "large enough to contain the varying tribal parts they wish to unify. . . Unlike the romantic poet who dramatizes the aspirations and sad limitations of the individual self, through the use of a mask the shamanic performer

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[3]See Karen Sanchez-Eppler, "To Stand Between: A Political Perspective on Whitman's Poetics of Merger and Embodiment," for an examination of how Whitman tries to mend political crises and solve differences of blood through mediating between bodies and identities. She focuses on his slave imagery and shows how Whitman's poetic nationalism can only place slave identity as indeterminate rather than attempting to address and heal the social division slavery represents.

assumes an otherness that allows him to abandon this self in the ecstasy of his performance" (135, 137). In this way, Whitman is able to write himself into American humanity as a presence who represents everyone:

> Every kind for itself and its own . . . for me mine male
>
> and female,
>
> For me all that have been boys and that love women,
>
> For me the man that is proud and feels how it stings to be
>
> slighted,
>
> For me the sweetheart and the old maid . . . for me mothers
>
> and the mothers of mothers,
>
> For me lips that have smiled, eyes that have shed tears,
>
> For me children and the begetters of children (lines 139-144).

"Song of Myself" can be read as an extended prophetic performance, in which Whitman is constantly negotiating his relationship to the reader and America. As George Hutchinson has argued, we can read Whitman as a "prophet of revitalization;" one who attracts disciples and points toward the establishment of a new social organization.[4] In

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[4]In *The Ecstatic Whitman: Literary Shamanism & the Crisis of the Union*, Hutchinson discusses Whitman as both a shaman and a revitalization prophet. He states the main differences as:

> (1) the revitalization prophet arises in rare instances, whereas the shaman may be called at any time, depending mainly upon his individual development, and (2) the revitalization prophet, if successful, attracts a coterie of disciples and eventually points toward the establishment of a new social organization, whereas, the shaman remains an individualist and forms no 'church.' Other distinctions can be made, such as the contrast between the shaman's traditional training and mundane functions, and the prophet's lack of training and lesser interest in immediate 'practical' matters, but these

this case, the social organization that the poem attempts to delineate can really only be seen as the literal vision of Whitman's that catalogues and sees firsthand the breadth of America, while also establishing the more figurative vision of comradery. The fourteenth section of the poem combines these two elements as Whitman merges himself, nature, the land, and the people under the label of "the same old law"of democracy:

> The wild gander leads his flock through the cool night,
> Ya-honk! he says, and sounds it down to me like an
> invitation;
> The pert may suppose it meaningless, but I listen closer,
> I find its purpose and place up there toward the
> November sky.
> The sharphoofed moose of the north, the cat on the
> housesill, the chickadee, the prairie-dog,
> The litter of the grunting sow as they tug at her teats,
> The brood of the turkeyhen, and she with her halfspread
> wings,
> I see in them and myself the same old law (lines 245-252).

If the "same old law" is indeed democracy, here Whitman uses animal life to describe democracy as a mode of existence that is removed from direct political concerns. It is a transcendent category that can bind the land, poet, and population. While the point seems to be that democracy is already within the people, the next lines of the section also

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distinctions are not of major importance to the current discussion (xxvii).

propose that it is only the poet who can recognize and celebrate this. He must lead, and be accepted by the people in order for the nation to progress in a healthy way:

> The press of my foot to the earth springs a hundred affections,
> They scorn the best I can do to relate them.
>
> I am enamoured of growing out-doors,
> Of men that live among cattle or taste of the ocean or woods,
> Of the builders and steerers of ships, of the wielders of axes and
> mauls, and the drivers of horses,
> I can eat and sleep with them week in and week out.
>
> What is commonest, cheapest, nearest, easiest, is Me,
> Me going in for my chances, spending for vast returns,
> Adorning myself to bestow myself on the first that will take me,
> Not asking the sky to come down to my goodwill,
> Scattering it freely forever (lines 253-263).

Like Baraka, Whitman is able to make claims to nationality as being a social organization that relies on the dramatic presence of the poet as inventor and interpreter; inventor of a way of seeing and describing life, and an interpreter of the relevance of everyday life. We are given a picture of Whitman travelling through the land as a larger than, yet equal to life figure. The act of walking, "the press of my foot to the earth," inspires the "hundred affections" of democratic union. We can see the same kind of immediacy of the prophetic

drive toward unification in Baraka's poem "Sad Cowboy," as he attempts to be a beacon and interpreter for black people:

> All the world is hatred
>
> and I think I am love, or where are you fool
>
> to think you're different from some body,
>
> you've felt pain, your mind has opend as meat
>
> and sweat. The place, is in the final determination.
>
> What is your place in the order of your feelings?
>
> As the runner for your nation, focused on their needs,
>
> what can you say or dream or float wild copper love in place of,
>
> what you had, which was white and soft, and the vision of the farm
>
> boy, standing in his shit. Replacing the man, and defining his demise
>
> But that crap is finished. I move with the rest, as strong as they,
>
> knowing my own mind to be the unneeded rationale, the kindly explanation
>
> (from *Target Study*, 66)

"The place is the final determination," because it is what the poet and reader can most easily share. Whereas Whitman valorizes the pastoral aspects of America ("Of men that live among cattle or taste of the ocean or woods"), Baraka sees, ". . . the vision of the farm/ boy, standing in his shit." The point of this comparison, however, is not so much to focus on how particular lines might be linked, as it is a picture of how poetic presence is much more intimately connected to the reader through the natural world in Whitman, while Baraka moves the location of nationality more directly to a mind that he shares with

his followers. The line between the two positions (leader and follower) is blurred, however, as Baraka refers to, ". . . the runner for your nation, focused on their needs." The poem may operate as both an address to black readers and a personal act (or proof to the reader) of spiritual cleansing, as he shows a ritual of self-questioning that must be gone through before the reality and comfort of blackness can be grasped. For Baraka, the place is the mind, body, and nation; all of which are brought together by the "kindly explanation" of the prophet. Of course he is hopeful that his words will be "unneeded" as the black nation realizes its strength and moves together as a collective force.

The immediacy of the prophetic poets is also enhanced by the direct addresses to the readers. In this way conversations are formed that can question and validate the bonds of nationality. There are striking similarities in how Whitman and Baraka use these passages. Whitman is perhaps most famous for these types of poetic utterances. In the nineteenth and twentieth sections of "Song of Myself," he engages the reader in a series of riddle-like questions that intend to make his spiritual leadership more explicit to the reader:

> Do you guess I have some intricate purpose?
> Well I have . . . for the Fourth-month showers have, and the mica on
> the side of a rock has.
> Do you take it I would astonish?
> Does the daylight astonish? does the early redstart twittering
> through the woods?
> Do I astonish more than they?

This hour I tell things in confidence,

I might not tell everybody, but I will tell you.

. . . . . .

What is a man anyhow? what am I? what are you?

All I mark as my own you shall offset it with your own,

Else it were time lost listening to me (lines 382-386, 391-393).

The poetic voice comes through as though it is a substance or occurrence in nature. The reader should interpret the poet's "purpose" as a natural process, the goal of which cannot be named separately from the shared "confidence" (both secretive and faithful) between poet and reader. This confidence can be thought of as an ultimate contingency that guides Whitman's poetics and politics. What goes unnamed is any *real* basis for connection between people. By real I mean that rather than invoking ancestry, looks, or geography (which are very important to Whitman in other places), he focuses on belief, trust, and desire to know. Therefore, a vague sense of equality is created, one that is not tested by anything preexisting. Wai Chee Dimock has analyzed versions of this problem in "Song of Myself":

> . . . there is an intimate connection between Whitman's poetic language and political philosophy, a shared commitment to syntax, which . . . not only underwrites the universality of the self in "Song of Myself," but also inscribes in it a democratic hospitality to the world, a refusal to tolerate exclusions, a refusal, indeed, to register distinctions, an openness as impartial as it is impersonal (71).

Although many would find a distinction between the political thrusts behind Whitman and Baraka to be the difference between an open democracy and a restricted separatism, this line becomes blurred as both poetic imperatives base the formation of the nation on the submission and trust of the reader to something unknown, and to a shared space in the present tense. Because both Whitman and Baraka are working to condition their followers to the idea that the nation is something new and not something that needs to be revived through memories of past glories, the invocation of the present allows them to join themselves and the readers into an active process of identity construction, as we can see in Baraka's "Numbers, Letters":

I cant say who I am
unless you agree I'm real

I can't be anything I'm not
Except these words pretend
to life not yet explained,
so here's some feeling for you
see how you like it, what it
reveals, and that's me.

Unless you agree I'm real
that I can feel
whatever beats hardest

at our black souls

I am real, and can't say who

I am. Ask me if I know, I'll say

yes, I might say no. Still, ask (from *Target Study*, 47).

This relationship to the reader, which is based on trust that is determined by the poet, allows Baraka to determine the morality of the forming black nation through a voice that is unquestioned in its spiritual tone and immediacy. We can also feel the strength of Baraka's position in the commandments relayed to black readers in the middle section of the poem "A School Prayer." He depicts white people as a corrupting force that must be avoided at all costs:

Do not obey their laws

which are against God

believe brother, do not

ever think any of that

cold shit they say is true. They are against

the law. Their "laws"

are filthy evil, against

almighty God. They are

sick to be against the animals and sun,

against thought and feeling

against the world as it most commonly

is. That is they are against

beauty. Do not let them show you

a beer can, except believe their profundity

is as easily read. Do not believe or shelter them.

Do not let them eat your children. Do not believe

or shelter them, or shelter their slickbullshit

for one second in your heart (121).

In proposing anti-whiteness as a rallying cry, Baraka is imposing a black unification based on following his lead. His instructions are to be read as a natural basis for black identity that should be shared by the poet, reader, and black people in general. Anti-white racism is being used as a way of determining allegiance within the black community rather than being a focused attack on white people. He reinforces this claim with an assertion of community in the conclusion of the poem, for, "We are so beautiful we talk at the same time/ and our breathing is harnessed by divinity."

In Baraka's vision of blackness, the racial community becomes a universal that is negotiated between his "self" and the surrounding, listening black people. The tension between "I" and the hopeful "we" guides most of the work in *Black Art.* Placing this work in the larger context of Baraka's life, remembering the tortured road of self doubt that he traveled to arrive at the authority of his role in the Black Arts Movement, it is clear that his prophetic personality has much to do with the attempt to resolve inner racial conflict. The Black Arts Movement, for Baraka, represents a narration of his developing black consciousness which is measured in its relation to the nation building process as we can

see in the poem "leroy":

> I wanted to know my mother when she sat
> looking sad across the campus in the late 20's
> into the future of the soul, there were black angels
> straining above her head, carrying the life from our ancestors,
> and knowledge, and the strong nigger feeling. She sat
> (in that photo in the yearbook I showed Vashti) getting into
> new blues, from the old ones, the trips and passions
> showered on her by her own. Hypnotizing me, from so far
> ago, from that vantage of knowledge passed on to her passed on
> to me and all the other black people of our time.
> When I die, the consciousness I carry I will to
> black people. May they pick me apart and take the
> useful parts, the sweet meat of my feelings. And leave
> the bitter bullshit rotten white parts
> alone (217).

The poem presents Baraka's life in a timeline that focuses on the black strength of his ancestry while eliminating the "rotten white parts." His black consciousness is a guideline that he wishes to "will to black people." The act of personal reflection becomes a political statement of blackness which must move between Baraka and his audience.

There is definitely less certainty for Baraka in the ability to simply proclaim nationality through the kind of presence that Whitman exhibits. The main reason for this

is that Baraka is more obviously involved in figuring out the reality of race as the basis for nationality. We could say that for Whitman, America becomes a concept which he can equate with nature, while making certain assumptions about racial identity in the nation (which we will see later). Baraka, on the other hand, must investigate possible spaces for liberation within the various determinations of blackness in America. Although the two poets show many of the same prophetic attributes, the difference between singing America and singing blackness reveals a sharp contrast in the level of optimism that we hear.

If we hold up Baraka's ideas of prophesy as a type of personal and public fusion to those of Whitman, we can see how important it is for prophesy to be felt as a collective act, even as it depends on a hierarchy. Furthermore we can see the luxury that is afforded to one who wishes to define American identity as the great equalizing force. What I mean is that Whitman's Americanism and Baraka's black nationalism emanate from very similar poetic voices, yet are read very differently: Whitman as a great "democrat" of America, and Baraka as a militant separatist. The actual content of the poetry has much to do with these assessments, but the respective tones that are used also show a relationship to the ideological formation of America which is rarely questioned. Being a prophet cannot be done solely through an innocent gathering of the people; lines must be drawn to show the people what they are a part of. The prophet of the nation must be nurturing and to different degrees exclusionary. After the people are collected, how are they supposed to function within a nationalist vision? What do their representations, and the instructions given to them tell us about the deeper ideological levels of cultural nationalism? Looking at social division as a method of prophetic poetry can show some of the problems that

Whitman and Baraka had in arriving at a national vision that could encompass their perceived constituencies. The issue of tone is central in this comparison because analyzing it will allow us to see the differing methods that both poets used in trying to solidify nationality through social division.

CHAPTER IV

DIVIDING LINES: RACE, GENDER, AND SEXUALITY

Masculinity plays a central role in the cultural nationalism of Whitman and Baraka. Both artists assert the love and strength of men as the binding force of the community. The key difference is that Whitman is often read as a gay hero, while Baraka's Black Arts work is seen as notoriously homophobic. Although there are obvious differences in how this is portrayed, it is clear that masculine identity is an unquestioned basis for nationhood that has many implications for the sexual and racial politics of both men.

In the poem "I Sing the Body Electric," we can see the importance that Whitman places on assimilating difference into the democracy. He does this through describing the nation as an interaction of bodies. What needs to be discussed is how the different bodies are treated, and how differences are described as part of the American body politic. He begins the poem with the pronouncement:

> I sing the body electric,
>
> The armies of those I love engirth me and I engirth them,
>
> They will not let me off till I go with them and respond to them, (lines1-3)

The armies of those that surround Whitman are awaiting his acknowledgement and "love." Conversely they are also surrounded by Whitman in a way that establishes his presence as larger than life. This identity allows him to contain the hopes and aspirations of so many people, perhaps too many for the political realities of America. Whitman obviously sees his body as politically important, and it can only be so through his relationship to others. What then, are the varying terms of these relationships?

In the next section he shores up his identification with the people through an extended poetic catalog of manual laborers, common men and women, and people who are engaged in physical activities. He also takes time to show how bodily perfection is so integral to the aesthetic quality of the nation, and a metaphor for the power of his poetry:

> But the expression of a wellmade man appears not only in his face,
> It is in his limbs and joints also, it is curiously in the joints of his hips and wrists,
> It is in his walk,the carriage of his neck, the flex of his waist and knees, dress does not hide him,
> The strong sweet supple quality he has strikes through the cotton and broadcloth,
> To see him pass conveys as much as the best poem, perhaps more. . . (lines 11-15)

While this poetic rendering can be read as an open-ended celebration of America, Robin Wiegman has argued that such lines convey the fact that Whitman is "affirming instead the phallocentric origins of American democratic rhetoric" (16). If we turn to the fifth section of the poem we can judge the merit of Wiegman's words in relation to Whitman's attempts to describe the role of women in America:

> This is the female form,
> A divine nimbus exhales from it head to foot,
> It attracts with fierce undeniable attraction,

I am drawn by its breath as if I were no more than a helpless
vapor, all falls aside but myself and it,
Books, art, religion, time, the visible and solid earth, and what was
expected of heaven or feared of hell are now consumed,
Mad filaments, ungovernable shoots play out of it . . the response
likewise ungovernable,
Hair, bosom, hips, bend of legs, negligent falling
hands all diffused, mine too diffused,
Ebb stung by the flow, and flow stung by the ebb . . .
loveflesh swelling and deliciously aching,
Limitless limpid jets of love hot and enormous . . .
quivering jelly of love, white-blow and delirious juice,
Bridegroom night of love working surely and softly into the pros-
trate dawn,
Undulating into the willing and yielding day,
Lost in the cleave of the clasping and sweetfleshed day (lines 51-62).

What is most evident in this long passage is that "the female form" is regarded for its ethereal, "undeniable attraction," which encloses Whitman as if he were a "helpless vapor." Women are translated into a consumptive and "ungovernable" force of femininity. On one level the ungovernable nature could be interpreted as a positive description for a poet who disdains strict forms of art and legislation. Whitman's vision becomes uncomfortable and questionable though, when we realize that the "mad filaments" and "ungovernable shoots"

need to be confined somehow by the masculine "loveflesh swelling and deliciously aching," and the "[l]imitless limpid jets of love hot and enormous." The spermatic thrust of his words is a reflection of dominant gender ideology in America which (among many other constraints) reinforces the limits of being a woman with the role(s) of being a mother[5]:

> This is the nucleus -- after the child is born of woman, man is born of woman,
>
> This is the bath of birth, this is the merge of small and large, and the outlet again.
>
> Be not ashamed women, your privilege encloses the rest, and is the exit of the rest,
>
> You are the gates of the body and you are the gates of the soul (lines 64-

---

[5]For a more extensive discussion of this point, see Vivian R. Pollak, "'In Loftiest Spheres': Whitman's Visionary Feminism." She argues both sides of Whitman's gender representations, showing him to be at once a nineteenth century feminist and adherent to the "cult of domesticity." Her conclusion is worth quoting here:

> . . . Whitman the social visionary found himself in a classic double bind which may be summarized as follows. On the one hand, he wished to reinscribe the role of the mother as an enduring archetype of personal and national strength; on the other hand, he wished to liberate women from the inevitable confinements of this role, just as he sought to liberate himself from the confinements of his role as dutifully successful son. This situation of ambivalence toward the mother and toward the social and economic obligations of the son proved discursively productive. At one end of the spectrum, the mother, for Whitman, came to represent "the origin of all poems" rather than a fixed social identity. At the other end of the spectrum, the mother represented a social and biological fate. At the heart of his poetic project, then, lay a complicated relationship to a personal mother, to the social institution of motherhood, and to the literary institution of sentimental domesticity by which "motherhood" was discursively constructed. (109)

68).

There is obviously nothing inherently negative about being a mother, it is the way that Whitman places this role as an alternative to the "sweet supple" ease of being a man, that opens his work up to questions about the gendered nature of democratic equality. The revolutionary possibilities for women are really quite traditional and constantly come back to the idea of (re)production. Women are ". . . to conceive daughters as well as/ sons and sons as well as daughters." They are ". . . the bearer[s] of great fruit. . . " For a poet who is noted for his rebellious celebration of homosexuality there is a striking contradiction in his reliance on heterosexual conventions. Wiegman has thoughts on this tendency that I second:

> While Western culture has a strong taboo against homosexuality, it actually operates on the basis of privileging male unions -- from traditionally male boards of directors to sports teams and the Kiwanas. This homosociality can include actual sexual consummation although such literal bonding is not necessary to the maintenance of male dominated society. To relate this concept to Whitman's canon reflects a surface struggle wih the cultural formations of patriarchy, not an enduring argument against its basic organizational strategy (20).

With these thoughts in mind we should look at how homosociality and homosexuality preserve patriarchy as the basis for Whitman's Americanism.

In the "Calamus" cluster of poems which became a part of *Leaves of Grass* in the 1860 edition of the collection, many critics have seen a radical and liberating fusion of

homosexuality and democratic union. For instance, Betsy Erkkila, in her study *Whitman: The Political Poet*, claims:

> The *Calamus* cluster is Whitman's most radical sequence personally and politically, in both what it reveals and what it conceals. By placing his personal love poems in a more public, democratic frame and by his ambiguous use of the 'compact' *you*, Whitman has it both ways: He is at once the poet of homosexual love and the bard of democracy. . . He infuses the abstractions of democracy with the intensity of erotic passion, giving literature some of its first and most potent images of democratic comradeship; and by linking homoeroticism with a democratic breaking of bounds, he presents one of the most moving and tender accounts of homosexual love in Western literature (183).

Erkkila sees Whitman's homoeroticism as something separate from the political ends of homosocial nationalism, yet a force that is in itself liberatory because writing about homosexuality is already a revolutionary act. While I agree that we need to appreciate the homosexual power of Whitman's words, we should be aware of both the homosexuality and the more ambivalent "power" of his speech-acts (which Erkkila ignores the implications of) as democracy and "manly love" are conflated into a still patriarchal vision of nationality which can be seen in the lines of "For You O Democracy":

> Come, I will make the continent indissoluble,
> I will make the most splendid race the sun ever shone upon,
> I will make divine magnetic lands,

With the love of comrades,

With the life-long love of comrades.

I will plant companionship thick as trees along the rivers of

America, and along the shores of the great lakes, and all

over the prairies,

I will make inseparable cities with their arms about each other's

necks,

By the love of comrades,

By the manly love of comrades.

For you these from me, O Democracy, to serve you ma femme!

For you, for you I am trilling these songs (lines 1-11).

While the celebration of "manly love" can validate homosexual desire, the merging of sexuality with larger political motives creates confusion in this case. In this case the fact that the poetry was written during the beginning of the Civil War (which Whitman observed firsthand as a nurse) shows "manly love" to be the hopeful ideal for national unification and the antithesis of a battlefield in which countrymen kill one another. In such a self-consciously nationalistic work, what are we to do with a patriotism that positions women solely as symbols ("ma femme!") of the republic? The creation of a "splendid race" and the masculine magnetism that emanates from Whitman is represented as a new form of a nationality, yet does not obviously break from a gender hierarchy. If cultural nationalism tries to erect, as Sneja Gunew has explained, a "counter-public sphere" that

"qualifies and interrogates" the self-legitimizing conventions of society[1], then a line needs to be drawn with Whitman that acknowledges his relevance to gay pride while critiquing the absence of a gender-inclusive nationality where women can be part of the nation formation outside of biological reproduction.

When we turn to Baraka's views of gender and sexuality in black national consciousness, deviations from the patriarchal norm of America are ironically counter to positive notions of blackness. I am actually using the word ironically rather ironically because one would expect that a movement that is counter to established notions of America would try to heighten and explore differences from the "state"; yet what we see in Baraka's work is the use of these potential spaces of political liberation as representations of evil whiteness. With Baraka these issues are obviously more complex due to the fact that he looks at the United States one hundred years later. Thus there is also the added category of raced-woman.

In the poem "Babylon Revisited," he condemns white femininity, "the great witch of euro-american legend," for destroying the life of his friend, the painter Bob Thompson. The last three stanzas are particularly divisive and unforgiving:

> This bitch killed a friend of mine named Bob Thompson
> a black painter, a giant, once, she reduced
> to a pitiful imitation faggot
> full of American holes and a monkey on his back
> slapped airplanes

---

[1]From "Denaturalizing cultural nationalisms: multicultural readings of 'Australia'."

from the empire state building

May this bitch and her sisters, all of them,

receive my words

in all their orifices like lye mixed with

cocola and alaga syrup

feel this shit, bitches, feel it, now laugh your

hysteric laughs

while your flesh burns

and your eyes peel to red mud

"Babylon," as a reference to America and/or the West as a whole, is symbolized by the evil intentions of its women. Although one would not expect a black nationalist movement to embrace any form of whiteness, this depiction seems to short circuit any attempt at configuring black liberation as a movement against white male oppression. Much like Whitman's assertion of the personal goals of homosexuality which are made public and political at the expense of women, Baraka elevates blackness at the expense of a more complexly developed political consciousness. Of course, the sixties were a time of extremely heightened tensions regarding interracial sex[2] (not that the tension has receded all that much since then), but it is clear that true liberation from oppression must involve a

[2]See Calvin Hernton, *Sex and Racism in America* and Michelle Wallace, *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*, for accounts of race and sex that were written during the sixties.

thorough analysis of the "white capitalist patriarchy."

Within blackness, however, Baraka relies on rather stereotypical roles of femininity. Consciousness is something to be shared, but it has to come from the man and be grasped by the woman as related in "For a lady i know":

> Talk the talk I need
> you, as you resurrect
> your consciousness above
> the streets, as you walk
> with me, and lay
> with me, and wonder
> what is on
> my mind. Oh talk, talk,
> lady, and remind yrself
> that you are dealing
> with a spirit, deal, madam,
> in your bigassed smiling eyes
> in the world of real things --
> as I have pronounced the life
> in our fingers, real, so you must be
> and grow to love me, as I must, of
> course, finally, fall on my knees,
> with love for you.

While there is a measure of equity in shared love, it is the consciousness of the black man as spiritual leader that must be understood as the guiding force that "pronounces" the reality of their blackness. The bedroom becomes an important location for nationalist politics, as Baraka continues his prophetic teachings at home. In a way this attitude is similar to many male dominated populist religious movements that assume the duty of the man is to bring home the truth to the women.

In comparison to Whitman, however, there is more potential for gender equality because as seen in earlier references, women for Whitman are most important to the republic as procreators. The following lines from "A Woman Waits for Me" explain, "[a] woman waits for me, she contains all, nothing is lacking,/ Yet all were lacking if sex were lacking, or if the moisture/ of the right man were lacking" (1-3). The sexual function of women is vital to the health of the nation because they need to receive life-giving sperm and turn out fit citizens. Whitman is adamant about this fact and in the context of his Calamus poetry, we realize that his attitudes are not only politically exclusionary to women, but love becomes something that is defined not only by the man, but more specifically by the power of his non-eroticized penis. In many ways "A Woman Waits for Me" presents an image of a breeding stable in which Whitman is the stud, offering the possibility of his democratic, heroic lineage to fertile women:

> It is I, you women, I make my way,
> I am stern, acrid, large, undissuadable, but I love you,
> I do not hurt you any more than is necessary for you,
> I pour the stuff to start sons and daughters fit for these

States, I press with slow rude muscle,

I brace myself effectually, I listen to no entreaties,

I dare not withdraw till I deposit what has so long

accumulated within me.

The reason I am bringing this instance up separately from my earlier discussion of women as procreators is that this poem should also be noted for its verbal authority in commanding women to accept sex as a duty to the nation. This acceptance involves a frightening interaction because without any erotic dynamic the act of having sex becomes a forced act or biological performance that can be read as a literal rape for the eugenic sake of the state.[3]

There is a curious reversal then, in considering Whitman's and Baraka's nationalist sexual politics. As we have seen, Whitman -- in an effort to celebrate "manly love" as the basis of American democracy -- is not able to sufficiently work through the possibilities for women in the nation. Conversely Baraka is able to think about *black* men and women as close to equal (although the position of man/ teacher is still dominant), but as we will see he absolutely cannot think of homosexual desire as anything but evil. It becomes a clear metaphor for the sickness of the (male)white world and a convenient marker for social division within Baraka's outline for black identity.[4]

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[3]Michael Moon, in *Disseminating Whitman*, does analyze male-male rape in several poems, yet it is interesting to note that in a "sexual-political" reading of Whitman's revisions of Leaves of Grass, Michael Moon does not address the issue of rape in "A Woman Waits for Me."

[4]There is much more work to be done on Baraka and (homo)sexuality. One striking fact that is not often discussed is the degree to which his early drama revolves

In the 1965 essay, "american sexual reference: black male," Baraka points to an American history of emasculation as the main problem impeding black liberation:

> The black man in America has always been expected to function as less than a man; this was taken for granted, and was the ugliest weight of his enslavement. The liberal white man has always promised the de-testicled black some progress to manhood. In other words, "We will let your balls grow back. . . one day! Just be cool." (221)

He attempts to address this injustice by characterizing white masculinity as lacking any basis in reality. White men have become removed from the tangibilities of the world through their dependence on a non-white labor force. In this way white men ". . . are trained to be fags," who are caught in a cycle of production where the material comfort to which they have become accustomed consigns them to a "feminine" role. Baraka explains that masculinity should truly be identified with the black men who have secured this luxury for whites through physical exertion (216, 220).

Homosexuality becomes a trope that can supply articulations of Black Power with critical authority to the detriment of any movement toward sexual liberation, as Robyn Wiegman explains:

> Black Power's rhetorical inversion -- to assert the black phallus in the context of metaphorical and literal castration -- elides black liberation struggle with a universal masculine position, thereby displacing both the specificity and legitimacy of black female articulations of political

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around homoerotic motifs that establish racial identities.

disempowerment, as well as a variety of claims from African-American sexual minorities. (86)

As Wiegman points out, Black Power makes a claim to black representation that allows the politically liberated identity position "Black" to be filled only by heterosexual black men.[5] Furthermore, this position allows Baraka to police the boundaries of the black nation, using homosexuality as a brand of disloyal distinction. In "CIVIL RIGHTS POEM," Baraka employs this method to condemn the non-violent civil rights leader Roy Wilkins for being a "sell-out" :

Roywilkins is an eternal faggot
His spirit is a faggot
his projection
and image, this is
to say, that if i ever see roywilkins
on the sidewalks
imonna
stick half my sandal
up his
ass (from *Black Art*, 140)

The negative characterization of homosexuality leads to a violence that must expunge it. This can be seen most clearly in the epic piece "Black Art," which combines masculinity,

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[5]See Phillip Brian Harper's *Are We Not Men*, pp.39-53, for a discussion of female Black Arts poets who work within this paradigm.

violence, and homophobic discourse in order to propose a blending of art and action that will guide black cultural nationalism:

> Poems are bullshit unless they are
> teeth or trees or lemons piled
> on a step. Or black ladies dying
> of men leaving nickel hearts
> beating them down. Fuck poems
> and they are useful, wd they shoot
> come at you, love what you are,
> breathe like wrestlers, or shudder
> strangely after pissing. We want live
> words of the hip world live flesh &
> coursing blood. . .

Obviously the active qualities of art are defined through masculine functions. The description of a "Fuck poem" is even specifically described from the phallic, projective position of a man. Later in the poem it is related that the physical nature of the verse should be used as a corrective to the, ". . . girdlemamma mulatto bitches/ whose brains are red jelly stuck/ between 'lizabeth taylor's toes." Baraka also uses the black masculinity of the poem as a contrast to the, ". . . negroleader/ on the steps of the white house one/ kneeling between the sheriff's thighs/ negotiating cooly for his people." The list of those people whom the poetry will seek out and punish goes on to include "dope selling wops," "the liberal spokesman for the jews," and "a jewlady." While antiwhite and more

specifically anti-Semitic racism is definitely a part of Baraka's method, the depth of his racial anxiety seems to rest within determining authenticity within blackness.[6]

The crisis of racial authenticity that Baraka feels, as we have seen, comes from trying to figure out how to dis-integrate black people from white America. Whitman, in most people's minds, represents the opposite impulse, the need to incorporate everyone into the nation. As we have seen so far though, there are certain priorities that he assigns to his inclusion, which begin to narrow the identity possibilities within his America. Now I want to examine how his and Baraka's attitudes towards race in their nations can possibly be read as historically related positions.

Discussing Whitman's racial attitudes really must be done with a knowledge of his early political development as a free-soil Jacksonian Democrat, who believed that the slavery debate was primarily an issue concerning the rights of white working men.[7] As many historians have noted, the egalitarianism of Jacksonian Democrats largely rested on the assumption that equality was an end for whites to be reached through expansion and the negotiation of the slavery issue to allow more opportunity for white men to succeed. Alexander Saxton describes this platform as a "legitimizing construct," one that combines the various needs of the people into a majority ethic of getting ahead in life.[8] We need to approach Whitman, then, with the idea in mind that slavery was a political problem that

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[6]See Harper pp. 44-46.

[7]See Klammer, *Whitman, Slavery, and the Emergence of Leaves of Grass*, for an in depth study of Whitman's racial attitudes.

[8]See chapter six of Alexander Saxton's, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic.*

needed to be solved for the benefit of an already defined America.

I want to go back to the poem "I Sing the Body Electric," because it contains one of the longest of Whitman's meditations on slavery and difference in America. The two concluding sections of the poem show the problems of addressing race against the backdrop of egalitarianism. In section seven we are placed in the middle of a slave auction. Whitman announces that, "I help the auctioneer . . . . the sloven does not half know/ his business." This rhetorical move allows Whitman to present the body of the slave through the voice of the auctioneer. He is indeed appropriating the stance in order to outline why the slave should not be a commodity:

> Examine these limbs, red black or white . . . they are
>
> very cunning in tendon and nerve:
>
> They shall be stript that you may see them.
>
> Exquisite senses, lifelit eyes, pluck, volition,
>
> Flakes of breastmuscle, pliant backbone and neck, flesh
>
> not flabby, goodsized arms and legs,
>
> And wonders within there yet.
>
> Within there runs his blood . . the same old blood . .
>
> the same red running blood;

The liberatory or in this case egalitarian nature of the verse rests in the fact that the slave should be recognized as part of Whitman's America, for he has ". . . the same old blood . . . / the same red running blood[ ]." The position of auctioneer for Whitman shifts the auction block from a space to celebrate the body as commodity to describing how it is part

of the nation. He uses the same type of corporeal appreciation that is bestowed on the white working men. The final two stanzas of the section show the biological possibilities for black people in America:

> This is not only one man . . . he is the father of those
>
> who shall be fathers in their turns,
>
> In him the start of populous states and rich republics,
>
> Of him countless immortal lives with countless embodiments
>
> and enjoyments.
>
> How do you know who shall come from the offspring of
>
> his offspring through the centuries?
>
> Who might you find you have come from yourself if you
>
> could trace back through the centuries?

On one level Whitman is being quite revolutionary for his time by publicly proposing that blackness is a very real part of America. At the same time there is a large amount of denial going on. While it is obvious that Whitman is striving for inclusion, it can only be done without preserving difference and by suggesting racial amalgamation. I am not arguing that there is a biological basis to racial categories that needs to be upheld, but that if the answer to the slave's plight can only be found through the hope that black people will be like white people in an already defined racist state, then we can see how Whitman's depiction of this situation essentially ignores the political realities of being black, in favor of constructing a common genealogy of assimilation.[9] This point is not so much a

criticism of Whitman directly as it is with the ideology that surrounds his words. Assimilation is a loaded concept that needs to be worked through on both sides. Frustration with this idea is what leads Baraka to propose a reaction to it (which is not simply reactionary) through black nationalist racial stratification. In order to see the specifics of this division, I want to quote the "Poem for HalfWhite College Students" in its entirety:

> Who are you listening to me, who are you
> listening to yourself? Are you white or
> black, or does that have anything to do
> with it? Can you pop your fingers to no
> music, except those wild monkies go on
> in your head, can you jerk, to no melody,
> except finger poppers get it together
> when you turn from starchecking to checking
> yourself. How do you sound, your words, are they
> yours? The ghost you see in the mirror, is it really
> you, can you swear you are not an imitation greyboy,
> can you look right next to you in that chair, and swear,
> that the sister you have your hand on is not really

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[9]It might be helpful to think of assimilation in this case as a form of "official nationalism" that Benedict Anderson describes as, ". . . a means for combining naturalization with retention of dynastic power . . . for stretching the short, tight skin of the nation over the gigantic body of the empire" (86).

so full of Elizabeth Taylor, Richard Burton is

coming out of her ears. You may even have to be Richard

with a white shirt and face, and four million negroes

think you cute, you may have to be Elizabeth Taylor, old lady,

if you want to sit up in your crazy spot dreaming about dresses,

and the sway of certain porters' hips. Check yourself, learn who it is

speaking, when you make some ultrasophisticated point, check yourself

when you find yourself gesturing like Steve McQueen, check it out, ask

in your black heart who it is you are, and is that image black or white

you might be surprised right out the window, whistling dixie on the way in.

So as a reaction to whiteness constituting mainstream American identity, Baraka upholds blackness as something that is defined by not being white at all. The "halfwhite" status of the college student is ambiguously presented as a possible skin tone, mind state, or both. It is noteworthy that Baraka assaults images in popular culture as a whitening, corrupting force. The poem is not a diatribe against white people as much as it is a critique of the way society produces the status quo as white; the harshest words being reserved for those black (obviously Baraka would not agree with this adjective here, but it is part of my point) individuals who are drawn away from their "roots" (as Baraka knows them), and cannot decide on an identity position. Ultimately we have to see Baraka's implicit outline of blackness as something more constraining than it is liberating. His tendencies have to be examined, however, as products of the construction of American identity.

In his chapter from *Black Skin, White Masks*, "The Fact of Blackness," Fanon

narrates his development and later critique of black consciousness, or Negritude. His narrative is dialectical, and starts with a description of black self-recognition, before black consciousness:

> Like a magician, I robbed the white man of "a certain world," forever after lost to him and his. When that happened, the white man must have been rocked backward by a force that he could not identify, so little used as he is to such reactions. Somewhere beyond the world of farms and banana trees and rubber trees, I had subtly brought the real world into being. Between the world and me a relation of coexistence was established (128).

This stage is realized to be incomplete psychoanalytically because the recognition of self is still guided by its relationship to the white world. Coming into existence is a victory with its reality taken out as the white majority seizes on blackness as a form of "human sustenance," that will keep society from becoming too mechanized (129). The search for black consciousness becomes then a re-discovery of racial identity through the assertion of a collective group humanity that bases its strength on recognition within the group. Whiteness is then effectively removed, but for what? This brings us back to Baraka's poem; where does one go with a black consciousness that is, ". . . held out as an absolute density, as filled with itself, a stage preceding any invasion, any abolition of the ego by desire" (134). The obvious answer is that one must not search for oneself in a totality of experience, but should look for a way to express individuality within a group. As Fanon points out, though, it is fear and sadness that guides the rationality of race relations within and between individuals:

> Nevertheless with all my strength I refuse to accept that amputation. I feel in myself a soul as immense as the world, truly a soul as deep as the deepest of rivers, my chest has the power to expand without limit. I am a master and I am advised to adopt the humility of the cripple. Yesterday, awakening to the world, I saw the sky turn upon itself utterly and wholly. I wanted to rise, but the disemboweled silence fell back upon me, its wings paralyzed. Without responsibility, straddling Nothingness and Infinity, I began to weep. (140)

If it is the search for existence that guides cultural nationalist thought, we cannot just dismiss the ways in which this desire and intention are played out. As we can see through Fanon's analysis, there is more at stake when one tries to realize what it means to be black in a white world. By no means is it easy to realize whiteness, in fact the recognition might be harder because of one's surroundings, but the life can be easier because of the privilege and luxury connected to it. We can see this occurring during Whitman's time as American and white were combined into one identity position within these borders. This legacy is still with us today (in more creative forms), as we look at the institutionalizing of multiculturalism that markets difference as just that, "something different" not something completely equal to the identity "American." For all that, it is also easy to see how the Black Arts Movement and Black Power articulations have left us with a version of black identity that needs to be expanded in order to fit a true constituency of "black people." One that has a more of a focus on political ends than black authenticity as an end in itself. The connection that I see is a narrowness that is present due to overcompensation, and

due to the fact that the narrow definition of blackness is heard as already being nationalist and separatist because it is not part of America. Unfortunately we are too hesitant to see the fact that there has always been a pervasive nationalism at work called "Americanism," which is hard to react kindly to, and even harder for people to critically remove themselves from.

What both poets do provide though, is a voice, a means of making art part of political responses for those who feel at odds with their surroundings. Stylistically, Whitman brought the presence of the poet among the people into the forefront of American literature. It is easy to see how the stance Whitman created has provided many after him with already established elements of cultural nationalism. June Jordan in her essay, "For the Sake of People's Poetry: Walt Whitman and the Rest of Us," tells us what it means to be a New World, black poetic descendant of Walt Whitman:

> In the poetry of the New World, you meet with a reverence for the material world that begins with a reverence for human life. There is an intellectual trust in sensuality as a means of knowledge, an easily deciphered system of reference, aspirations to a believable, collective voice and, consequently, emphatic preference for broadly accessible spoken language. Deliberately balancing perception with vision, it seeks to match moral exhortation with sensory report. (14)

Likewise, we can see the admiration Gwendolyn Brooks had for Baraka's ability to "call black people":

> My aim, in my next future, is to write poems that will somehow

> successfully "call" (see Imamu Baraka's "SOS") all black people: black people in taverns, black people in alleys, black people in gutters, schools, offices, factories, prisons, the consulate; I wish to reach black people in pulpits, black people in mines, on farms, on thrones. . . [10]

Perhaps then, we can combine these factors -- the negative social division within cultural nationalisms and the ability to bring people together for a cause, as a nation -- to redefine what the possibilities for nationality can be. Along these lines, Homi Bhabha recognizes that:

> What is theoretically innovative and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These "in-between" spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood - singular or communal - that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself. (1-2)

As a strategy, it seems that a kind of nationalism could have the ability to move political consciousness forward without being implicitly or explicitly based on the race of the

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[10]Quoted from p.109 of Houston Baker's *The Journey Back.* Baraka's poem "SOS" reads as follows:

> Calling black people
> Calling all black people, man, woman child
> Wherever you are, calling you, urgent, come in
> Black People, come in, wherever you are, urgent, calling
> you, calling all black people
> calling all black people, come in, black people, come
> on in. (from *Black Magic*, 115)

nation, but being based instead on the performance of this difference as a kind of political identity in itself. How quickly, though, can we (or do we want to) move forward from race when it is the condition that has determined so much modern thought. Racial kinship and nationality, as Paul Gilroy points out, is intimately tied to the project of modernity and must be thought through as a political projects:

> In particular this legacy conditions the continuing aspiration to acquire a supposedly authentic, natural, and stable "rooted" identity. This invariant identity is in turn the premise of a thinking "racial" self that is both socialised and unified by its connection with other kindred souls encountered . . . within the fortified frontiers of those discrete ethnic cultures which also happen to coincide with the contours of a sovereign nation state that guarantees their continuity. (30-31, 1993)

Reading Whitman and Baraka is, then, a way of reading two sides of ethnic particularity in a nation. By examining them together, we can see how nationalism in the United States has always been present, but takes on different (yet historically related) appearances, depending on one's relationship to the ideology of America. Such a combination also shows us the potential problems in, and possibilities of constructing a national consciousness that seeks to merge division into an entity that can easily be represented. As a vehicle of liberation, then, cultural nationalism -- from whichever position one chooses -- attempts to (and in many cases can) give power to the people, but cannot adequately sustain itself outside of a hierarchy of prescribed identities. Is this, then, a pessimistic reading of cultural nationalism? Well, not exactly. I think we need to hold on

to the idea of using art to call people together for political ends. What is ultimately important, though, is doing this in a way that will acknowledge the many variables which might define "culture" without assuming that political identity and nationality are exactly the same.

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