

## ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: Infant Nation: Childhood Innocence and the Politics of Race in Contemporary American Fiction

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Infant Nation considers literary representations of childhood as sites where anxieties about race, class and gender inequalities converge. Popular and canonical representations of American childhood often revere it as a condition that precedes history, lacks knowledge, and thus, avoids accountability. I argue that invocations of this depoliticized ideal mask systems of privilege, particularly relating to white middle-class masculinity. My study highlights literature published between 1970 and 1999, a period marked by growing concern regarding boundaries of race and nation. With special attention to postcolonial and critical race theories, I argue that the authors here portray the United States as a nation infantilized by its desire to reclaim a mythically innocent past. In untidy formulations of nation that mirror their disjointed narrative styles, the novels interfere with the operation of nostalgia in American memory. They revise the ideal of innocent childhood to model a form of citizenship deeply engaged in acts of historical recuperation. I respond to theories of postmodern literature and cultural studies that emphasize the central role memory plays in shaping our future, presenting an analysis I feel is especially urgent at a time when neo-conservative policy-makers subscribe to a Trent Lott-style nostalgia for a mythically innocent pre-Civil Rights era.

Chapter One examines Jessica Hagedorn's Dog eaters (1990). I argue that Hagedorn cedes authentic history to the corrosive powers of assimilationism and consumerism, invoking multiple stories of history's loss instead. In Chapter Two, I shift focus to the white middle class of Don DeLillo's White Noise (1984). I argue that DeLillo implicates patriarchal families and profiteering universities in the cultivation of "innocent" consumer identities that ultimately turn violent. In Chapter Three I discuss Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye (1970). Morrison challenges the myth of American meritocracy, I contend, suggesting that race, class and gender oppressions exist not only in American culture, but in American childhoods. Finally, I examine Lois Ann Yamanaka's Blu's Hanging (1997). I argue that by representing children as historically savvy social critics and not as innocents, Yamanaka models a new adult citizenry. With the other novelists here, she warns a forgetful nation against embracing the infantilized present.

INFANT NATION: CHILDHOOD INNOCENCE AND THE POLITICS OF RACE IN  
CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN FICTION

by

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INTRODUCTION  
Nostalgia and the Utopian Past:  
Searching for a Race-Free America

Americans have never even heard of history, they still believe that  
legend created about the Far West, and cowboys and Indians, and  
cops and robbers, and black and white, and good and  
evil...Americans are afflicted by innocence.  
—James Baldwin<sup>1</sup>

Why connect childhood innocence with oppression? Infant Nation considers literary representations of childhood as sites where anxieties about race, class and gender inequalities converge. Popular and canonical representations of American childhood often revere it as a condition that precedes history, lacks knowledge, and thus, avoids accountability. I argue instead that invocations of this depoliticized ideal mask systems of privilege, particularly relating to white middle-class masculinity. My aim is to strip away these masks and illusions of childhood.

Childhood has long engaged the literary imagination. From the early European example of Jean-Jacque Rousseau's Emile: or On Education (1762), to William Blake's Songs of Innocence and Experience (1789) and Charles Dickens' nineteenth-century orphans, writers have debated questions of progress, industry, morality and family through representations of children. American literature in particular moves children into the threshold between wilderness and civilization where, as veritable outsiders, they gauge society's virtues and its hypocrisies in works like Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter (1850), Mark Twain's The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1876) and Harper Lee's To Kill a Mockingbird (1960).

Social and critical debate regarding childhood has circulated for centuries. From the eighteenth-century debates regarding natural vs. disciplinary modes of childrearing, to the nineteenth-century controversies over child labor, education and

abandonment, to the late twentieth-century discovery of childhood as a social construction, broad questions of power have been raised.<sup>2</sup> My dissertation both builds upon and departs from this work by highlighting the under theorized relationship between childhood's discursive development and other Enlightenment discourses regarding race, nation, gender, family and class. While numerous studies have explored the connections between constructions of race or gender and the nation in literature, no extensive study has focused specifically on childhood. My approach will help to change the way we look at other novelistic representations of children by showing that the trope of childhood innocence can tell us more about the nation than it can about the empirical life of the child.

I draw from critical race studies and related theories of nation, postnation and postcoloniality. Immanuel Wallerstein, Michael Omi and Howard Winant all study the construction of racial identities in capitalist societies. In addition, I am particularly indebted to the ways that George Lipsitz, David Roediger and Henry Giroux connect whiteness to institutional, ideological and economic privilege in the United States. For a better understanding of the nation as an unstable but homogenizing principle, I turn to Lauren Berlant, Norma Alarcón, Caren Kaplan, Mino Moallem and Jenny Sharpe. These writers theorize the uneven relationships to power experienced by groups who are united by nation, but who are otherwise divided according to race, ethnicity, gender and class. Finally, postcolonial theorists such as Homi Bhabha, E. San Juan, Jr. and Rob Wilson inform my understanding of race and nation as they specifically relate to the United States as a colonial power in Hawaii and the Philippines.

I am indebted to the theoretical and materialist grounds of “cultural studies” that Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula Treichler define in their edited collection, Cultural Studies (1992). The collection both contributes to and records a volatile time in American academia. Following what Stuart Hall and others call the “linguistic turn,” theorists recognized both a multiplicity in symbolic meaning as well its representational power. The development advances an understanding of identity derived from symbolic rather than from biological or other essentialist qualities.<sup>3</sup> While contributing to the evolution of studies in race, gender, ethnicity and postcoloniality, it also enables the work of cultural critics who question the ways various identities are formulated through representation in literature and other media.<sup>4</sup> In the tradition of theorists like Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall, I connect the social and political to the cultural. Pursuing what the editors of Cultural Studies call the “*how* and *why*” of a work, I treat the figure of the innocent child as more than a clever literary trope.<sup>5</sup> To understand *how* representations of childhood innocence function in American literature and *why* they occur, I consider the sociohistorical contexts *of* and *in* particular novels. I also ask *how* and *why* representations of persecuted children might affect the contemporary nation’s innocent self-concept.

The myth of American innocence, I argue, stems in part from the nation’s faith in itself as a meritocracy. Americans who believe that social and economic hierarchies derive from merit alone must erase the varied relationships to power experienced by individual citizens. Lauren Berlant develops this idea with her discussion of “abstract citizenship.”<sup>6</sup> She argues that Americans assume all citizens have access to the Rights of Man, regardless of race, class and gender differences. In reality, Berlant maintains,

only white male citizens possess these Rights. As the norm by which the nation defines citizenship, the white male body *is* the abstract body. White men only appear to suppress their race and gender to fit a standard they embody in the first place. Other bodies, according to Berlant, exhibit “surplus corporeality”—the impossible-to-suppress features such as skin color or gender that defy the abstract and leave bodies vulnerable to racism and sexism. Through abstraction, Americans suggest that any body can fit the standard. Thus, they “[veil]” white male privilege, allowing it to stand in for the experience of all citizens.<sup>7</sup> As a universal, however, an abstracted view of citizenship contradicts the celebrated differences of liberal individualism. In their collection of essays on nation and gender, Norma Alarcón, Caren Kaplan, and Mino Moallem identify a similar conflict “at the core of the modern nation-state.” They explain that the “universalization of difference” stresses individuality, while an “epistemological metanarrative...denies the marginalization of difference” experienced by people according to race and gender.

In her theory of the “bodiless citizen,” Berlant identifies one manifestation of such a “metanarrative.”<sup>8</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein articulates another. He argues that capitalist economies rely on a combination of “universalism-meritocracy” and “racism-sexism” to function. Through the former, society assumes that a generic workforce earns its place. With the latter, it explains the low wages that sustain capital at the expense of workers who could never have “earned” such pitiful compensation. Wallerstein alleges that sexist ideology devalues women’s work by dissociating it from wage labor. Defined “housekeepers” instead of laborers, women receive little or no compensation for household duties performed. Similarly, Wallerstein contends that

racism accounts for the unpaid work of slaves as well as their eventual exploitation in the work force. Assumptions about worker homogeneity, however, make workers interchangeable. With the flexibility, Wallerstein argues, employers can justify the undercompensation of white men by inventing “White niggers.”<sup>9</sup>

Working-class whites who want to avoid such derogatory race-labels perpetuate racist stereotypes. David Roediger explains that after American Revolutionary rhetoricians identified white colonists as “slaves” to the British crown, white workers began to associate individual enterprise with political freedom. Ultimately, they viewed wage labor, with its possibilities for upward mobility, as the opposite of slavery. Since the continuation of slavery rested on arguments of essentialized race, white workers invested in the social and psychological advantages that W.E.B. DuBois calls the “wage” of whiteness. Roediger claims that white laborers still accept this “wage” in place of fair pay.<sup>10</sup> With the complicity of lower-class whites, therefore, the *privilege* of white middle-class men continues to pass as the *merit* of individual American citizens.

My use of childhood innocence as an analytic framework contributes to these studies by tapping an unexplored mode for glossing the exclusions implicit in homogeneous conceptions of Americanness. Toni Morrison’s dialectical work on whiteness in literature entitled, Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination (1992) enhances my study. Morrison argues that American literature and its critics assume that “the characteristics of our national literature emanate from an ‘Americanness’” that ignores the “Africanist presence” pervading America’s literary canon.<sup>11</sup> She asserts that marginalized African and African American characters

silently define their white counterparts in works by such writers as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allan Poe, Herman Melville, Mark Twain and William Faulkner. “Africanism,” she contends, is “the vehicle by which the American self knows itself as not enslaved, but free; not repulsive, but desirable; not helpless, but licensed and powerful; not history-less, but historical; not damned, but innocent; not a blind accident of evolution, but a progressive fulfillment of destiny.” Like other culture and race critics, she rejects that race and ethnicity are biological realities. Instead, she conceptualizes whiteness as a discursive construct produced in part by the contradictions immanent to linguistic portrayals of whiteness and blackness in literature. By inscribing the dialectical relationship between “Americanness” and “Africanism” in novels, Morrison demonstrates that representations of Africanism are key to understanding the common themes of individuality, innocence and historylessness that define Americans in literature. Thus, she challenges the assumption that “American means white.”<sup>12</sup>

I build on Morrison’s work in my exploration of whiteness and its relationship to the American past. In remarking on “thematics of innocence” in literature, she asks, “What are Americans always so insistently innocent of?”<sup>13</sup> While I seek to answer this question, the novels I examine also broaden the discussion to include whiteness and its relationship to histories of colonization and immigration in the United States. Written between 1970 and 1997, a time when Etienne Balibar asserts that “*racism is not receding, but progressing*” (emph. in original),<sup>14</sup> they provide a timely challenge to the kind of national identity that Morrison critiques.

Theorists such as Jenny Sharpe, Ruth Frankenberg and Lata Mani debate the proper way to characterize the period. Frankenberg and Mani contend that the term “postcolonial” is inadequate. They argue that while it accounts for the “decolonization” of internally colonized people such as African Americans, Native Americans and Asian Americans, it precludes the obstacles faced by America’s new immigrants and refugees.<sup>15</sup> Frankenberg and Mani argue for the term “Post-Civil Rights,” but Sharpe disagrees. In “Is the United States Postcolonial? Transnationalism, Immigration, and Race,” Sharpe asserts that the term “postnational” better accounts for the intersection of America’s decolonized peoples with the international division of labor introduced by global capitalism.<sup>16</sup>

Theorists of postnationalism must also consider the backlash against Civil Rights legislation that threatens to re-establish the white hegemonic nation. Cultural critics such as Todd Gitlin and George Lipsitz have documented the fact that many Americans are unwilling to accept the Civil Rights Movement. Gitlin describes the dialectical necessity of a backlash when he explains that “a new radicalism aroused a new conservatism,” forming a white male identity politics that “resent[s]” and “exaggerate[s]” its losses.<sup>17</sup> In addition, Lipsitz claims that actions such as the 1954 decision in *Brown vs. Board of Education*, the fair hiring legislation enacted in thirty four states by 1964, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968 are all wrongly credited with ending discrimination and segregation. He shows how the failure to enforce these laws resulted in white “resistance, refusal and renegotiation.”<sup>18</sup> According to Lipsitz, the Chicago Housing Authority resisted fair housing legislation when, in 1968, it ceased construction of *all* new public housing in order to avoid building *any* integrated

housing. Furthermore, he explains how decisions such as the San Antonio Independent School District vs. Rodriguez in 1973 and the Regents of the University of California vs. Bakke in 1978 renegotiated laws regarding school segregation and affirmative action respectively.<sup>19</sup>

The backlash also takes less direct forms. Sharpe points to the “indirect forms” of “state racism” through which immigration laws and the war on drugs act upon decolonized peoples, immigrants and refugees alike.<sup>20</sup> The liberal discourse of “multiculturalism,” moreover, masks both direct and indirect forms of racism. Through multiculturalism, liberals recognize difference while ignoring that histories of oppression mean varied relations to economic, political and/or social power. The result, according to Minoo Moallem and Iain Boal: “liberal racism”—the effects of anti-racist policies that serve racist ends.<sup>21</sup> Contemporary struggles for race and class equity, therefore, confront efforts to reinstitute the white nationalism of pre-Civil Rights America, in addition to the postnationalist oppressions of global capitalism. Thus, my use of the term “postnational” evokes the unstable condition of both decolonized and diasporic populations as they enter the global work force and are subject to its hazards and its promises.

I focus on novels in the postnation because of their association with nation building, especially in Benedict Anderson’s argument regarding “imagined communities.” Anderson identifies the novel (in addition to the newspaper) as an emerging literary form of the eighteenth century that provides the “technical means for ‘re-presenting’ the *kind* of imagined community that is the nation” (emph. in original).<sup>22</sup> In addition, where postmodern literary theory and cultural studies

emphasize the central role that memory and history play in shaping our future, I examine the way discursive representations of childhood innocence interfere with our comprehension of that past. Thus, I have two reasons for focusing on such representations in novels: first, since postcolonial studies has illuminated the critical importance of unraveling American mythology as part of the decolonizing project, childhood innocence in literature provides one avenue through which to reconsider the disavowals that mark American histories of expansion. Second, as the pundits of neo-conservatism and the radical Right attempt to reinstitute American innocence in the post-Civil Rights Era, analysis of texts that subvert that agenda becomes ever urgent.

An analytic method that exploits childhood innocence particularly suits the aim of national demythologization because the ideology developed in tandem with the formation of the United States as a nation. Theorists and historians of childhood agree that childhood is a social construction. Drawing from Philippe Ariès' Centuries of Childhood (1962), Chris Jenks argues that childhood refers to a "social status" that is both created by and formative of "typical modes of conduct" that vary according to time and culture. Jenks concludes that, "Childhood...always relates to a particular cultural setting."<sup>23</sup> Despite childhood's variations, however, common symbolic themes recur in representations of children. In "The Roots of Child Study: Philosophy, History, and Religion," David Kennedy explains that children are often depicted at the limits of other worlds, evoking the contrasting themes of animality, spirituality or both. Beginning with Plato, he explains, Western philosophers defined children as "deficit," associating them with unchecked will and instinct. Later, Aristotle categorized children as qualitatively different from adults, almost as "monsters" who could not grow

naturally into adulthood without intervention. Such children often symbolize evil or danger. In contrast, Kennedy points to traditions in Greek art, Christianity, Taoism and African folktales that all portray children in possession of a higher wisdom or spirituality. Kennedy cites the images of cherubs or “eroti” that appear in 300 B.C., as well as the Renaissance images of the “divine” infant Jesus as early Western examples, noting that secularized versions of these images carry into Western literature.<sup>24</sup>

The ambivalent symbolic tradition surrounding the child coexists with the history of children as they relate to adults. Tracing the development of Western conceptions of childhood from the Middle Ages to the nineteenth century, Ariès argues that the discovery of childhood began as early as the 13<sup>th</sup> Century, but he speculates through representations in medieval art that little more than size initially distinguished child from adult.<sup>25</sup> Although the precise details of childhood’s evolution remain unclear, historians such as Ariès and Kennedy agree that childhood becomes distinct from adulthood during the early modern period, culminating in the eighteenth century. Citing Walter Ong, Kennedy attributes the change, in part, to the invention of moveable print in 1450. People had previously transmitted information orally, in communal spaces that included adults and children. The rise of literacy, however, saw modes of communication shift to exclude children through the silent experiences of reading and writing. The separation, Kennedy observes, coincides with “the shift in the boundaries of self.” The participatory, oral communities of the medieval period break up into distanced individuals who increasingly identified with the “I” instead of the group. By the sixteenth century, a flood of etiquette manuals appeared to dictate modes of internalization. They recommended restraints like modesty and privacy for the modern

subject. As adults “grow up” through their experience as readers, Kennedy argues, the creation of childhood becomes one among many boundaries that define adult subjectivity. The illiterate, “undersocialized” and “instinctually unrestrained” child operates beyond the markers of adulthood as “a marginal other, the not-I in a primal form.”<sup>26</sup>

The understanding of children as marginalized outsiders provides a way of describing inferiority in the early modern and modern ages. In A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792), when Mary Wollstonecraft argues that society educates women to behave as “gentle, domestic brutes!” she defends women against a condition less than human. She also invokes childhood to describe this state, explaining that educators who refuse women their “strength of mind,” and who encourage obedience and dependence, aim to “keep them always in a state of childhood.” Wollstonecraft does not equate women with children, however. In fact, while she teaches children to be unquestioningly obedient, she argues, she also teaches them to anticipate maturity and learn to “*think*.” She implies that, conversely, women are expected to remain in their childlike state indefinitely.<sup>27</sup>

Not surprisingly, the language of childhood also intermingles with the emerging discourse on race in the New World. Critical race theorists trace this discourse back to the Enlightenment and America’s colonization. Like the dualist logic that expelled childhood from adulthood in Kennedy’s estimation, Peter Fitzpatrick argues that the colonists created what he calls an “identity in essential difference” that excluded enslaved and colonized peoples from Enlightenment universals of freedom and equality.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, while Michael Omi and Howard Winant acknowledge that the

recognition of "distinctive human groups" goes back to "prehistory," they add that these distinctions were primarily expressed as religious difference. The "conquest" of North America, however, established the "civilization" of white Europe by opposing it to the "barbarism" of North America's darker indigenous people. The emerging structure of "exploitation, appropriation, domination," they argue, marks the beginning of "modern racial awareness."<sup>29</sup>

The colonists initially also couched racial identities in religious terms, differentiating themselves from primitive "Others," according to Omi and Winant, by asserting themselves as "children of God."<sup>30</sup> Their religious formulation, however, clearly also borrows from the symbols of divine childhood. Like children, they live on a threshold to another world. A chosen and thus, divine people without history, they enact the world's rebirth, accepting hardship as the discipline of a paternalistic God. Significantly, the metaphor ascribes the colonists with power, not helplessness. They assert their divine authority over the New World's other children—the African and indigenous "heathens" who embody the opposing symbol of the child as instinctual and dangerous. Michael Paul Rogin describes the infantilizing rationale: "like children, Indians were not responsible for their violence; they lacked the intelligence and sense of responsibility of more advanced peoples."<sup>31</sup>

The Puritans' rhetoric of conquest and conversion also resembles their ways of talking about childrearing. Kennedy explains that Calvinist and eventually Lockean teachings portrayed the child as both "exemplary of the fundamental depravity that characterizes the whole human race," but also as a "free moral being" full of the promise of conversion. For the child's own good, therefore, disciplinarians advised

what Kennedy calls an “assault on the child’s will” characterized by words like “conquer,” “break” and “subdue.”<sup>32</sup> Through similarly paternalistic language, European settlers transformed colonial violence into parental discipline. Rogin observes the same, explaining that whites saw themselves as parents to Indians who were “at the infant stage of social evolution.” He adds, “their replacement by whites symbolized America’s growing up from childhood to maturity.”<sup>33</sup>

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a number of significant changes marked such “maturation.” The Declaration of Independence in 1776, the conclusion of the Revolutionary War in 1783, and the assertion of the Monroe Doctrine in 1823 all reject the European parent. With the Indian Removal Act that moved the Native Americans West of the Mississippi in 1830, these developments cleared the way for a self-possessed and mature America bent on the project of Manifest Destiny. In addition, with the anti-Calvinism of the Second Great Awakening, Americans dispensed with ideas about predestination that damned some and saved others. They combined these more inclusive religious views with the “common man” philosophy of Jacksonian Democracy to put greater emphasis on the idea that merit, rather than economic or religious predestination, should determine one’s political and economic place.

Concurrently, race debates shift focus from annihilation to enslavement, and religious justifications give way to scientific estimations of Negro “inferiority.” Embedded in classificatory models of race such as polygenetics (the theory of separate origins) and phrenology (the study of skull size and shape) lie the contrasting elements of instinct and reason that continue to distinguish children from adults. In his “Notes

on the State of Virginia” (1782), Thomas Jefferson asserts the common-held assumption that “[the negro’s] existence appears to participate more of sensation than reflection,” and that, “in reason,” he is “much inferior” to whites.<sup>34</sup> Much later, John Bachman, an amateur scientist and Lutheran minister argues that white and black are different enough to justify slavery, yet similar enough to belong to the same species. To illustrate, he compares the slave to, “Our child that we lead by the hand, and who looks to us for protection and support,” who “is still of our own blood notwithstanding his weakness and ignorance.”<sup>35</sup> Teetering on these tenuous justifications for slavery, newly “matured” Americans are also accountable for the genocide they began as “children.” They need to reconcile the pro-democratic ideals of their present with the barbarism of their past.

The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries also saw views regarding child-rearing change. The 1762 publication of Emile, Rousseau rejects the idea that a child’s impulses should be quelled by harsh disciplinary schooling.<sup>36</sup> Kennedy asserts that, distinct from symbols of childlike divinity, Rousseau issues the first official challenge to constructions of children as deficit and danger.<sup>37</sup> Rather than the not-I, or the not-yet-adult, Rousseau offers the child as an entity in itself; he says, “[The wisest men] are always seeking the man in the child without thinking of what he is before being a man.”<sup>38</sup> In his introduction to Emile, Allan Bloom explains that Rousseau believed that the tenets of reason and civilization such as rich/poor and master/slave had alienated man from his unified, instinctual self. Detachment prevents him from seeing himself except through his relation to society; thus, he exploits others to his own

ends. In contrast, Rousseau defined childhood in terms of wholeness—the precivilized, undivided condition of man.<sup>39</sup>

Eighteenth century portraits of children document a similar change. In her study of child portraiture, Anne Higonnet argues that before the late eighteenth century, child-portraits typically depict little adults whose dress and posture carry all the markings of gender and class. Joshua Reynolds “The Age of Innocence” (1788) abandons this practice, she observes, appearing instead to illustrate Rousseau’s *Emile*. Reynolds, and others like him, portray children who are born “innocent of adult faults, social evils, and sexuality.” Together, they invent what Higonnet calls the “Romantic child.”<sup>40</sup> In the nineteenth century, Kennedy argues, romanticized views of childhood satisfy growing nostalgia for the ‘Lost unity of self—a return to one’s instinctual life’ from the life of the isolated, “Enlightened” subject. Similarly, Higonnet explains that the Romantic child became a “sign of a bygone era, of a past which is necessarily the past of adults, yet which, being so distinct, so sheltered, so innocent, is also inevitably a lost past, and therefore understood through the kind of memory we call nostalgia.”<sup>41</sup> Unlike previous depictions of *children*, therefore, the earliest images of the Romantic child record the invention of *childhood* as an experience in and of itself to be lost and recovered. Such images, Higonnet explains, amassed a wide appeal in the nineteenth century and carried easily into the twentieth.<sup>42</sup>

In the emerging discourse on Romantic childhood, nineteenth-century Americans find a new language for remembering a conquest already embroiled in child-metaphors. Rogin explains that conquest became a “symbol of something lost, lost inevitably in the process of growing up.”<sup>43</sup> In addition, critic Lee Clark Mitchell

describes the feelings of “alienation” that overcame nineteenth-century Americans such as James Fenimore Cooper, who were disillusioned with westward expansion. Mitchell acknowledges that Cooper’s Leatherstocking tales fall short of justly portraying Native cultures, but he adds that the later books especially, embrace a “native perspective” intended to “[censor] white society.” Even in The Last of the Mohicans: A Narrative of 1757 (1824-26), he cites Magua (the Huron guide) as an “unlikely” voice of dissent while identifying Uncas (the last Mohican) as the hero. Like Rousseau’s portrayal of Emile, Cooper’s romanticism mixes social critique with nostalgia in what Mitchell regards as an expression of deep anxiety over the price of civilization and its implications for the future.<sup>44</sup>

In The Last of the Mohicans, Cooper articulates these anxieties through the contradictory metaphors of childhood. The Hurons, who have “a childish passion for finery,” savagely kill a baby deer before eating it raw. In contrast, the narrator describes Alice Munroe as “pure,” “white” and “brilliant,” noting her “infantile dependency.” Armed with “pious inclinations,” she sings psalms in “holy excitement,” invoking the moral authority of Christianity.<sup>45</sup> Like the earlier opposition that contrasted Puritan with Native and African, Alice and the Hurons resemble divine and animalistic children respectively. In the end, however, they matter less for the novel’s outcome than Uncas. An “uncorrupted” and “unblemished” Mohican that Hawkeye calls “lad,” Uncas stands “graceful and unrestrained in the attitudes and movements of nature.”<sup>46</sup> He represents innocence, but not holiness, naturalness, but not savagery. Uncas possesses the unity with self and nature that Rousseau values in Emile. According to Bloom, Rousseau believed that civilization had turned “civil society” into

a “combat zone for the pursuit of power”—a characterization not unlike Magua’s assertion that “[God] gave [the white man]...appetites to devour the earth...His gluttony makes him sick. God gave him enough, and yet he wants all.”<sup>47</sup> As the child devoured by such avarice, Uncas embodies the price paid for civilization.

Before the frontier closed in 1893, nostalgic Americans could reclaim their lost innocence through a repeated “rebirth” in the expanding West. To commemorate the lost wilderness, historian Frederick Jackson Turner argues that, “American social development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier.” He explains, “This perennial rebirth...with its...continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society furnish (sic) the forces dominating American character.”<sup>48</sup> Nostalgic for the opportunity to “[win] a wilderness,” Turner laments its loss. What exactly do nostalgic Americans hope to regain? While Higonnet argues that nostalgia “replaces what we have lost, or what we fear to lose,” Henry Jenkins suggests in his introduction to The Children’s Culture Reader, that it takes the place of what we never had, taking us to “never-never land.”<sup>49</sup>

A closer look at the portraits in Higonnet’s study illuminates both the qualities that constitute “never-never land” and their relationship to other factors such as family and capital in the United States. The changing role of the eighteenth-century family contributes, in part, to the heightened appeal of innocent looking portraits like Reynolds.’ By this time, Ariès argues, family life revolved around an “obsessive love” for children who had become a central component of society.<sup>50</sup> Frederick Engels connects the earliest forms of what he calls the “civilized” family, with two parents and their children, to the necessities of capital. He explains that such families first emerged

after the accumulation of private property generated a deeper interest in paternity among men. Subsequently, men sought to determine their rightful heirs through monogamy.<sup>51</sup> After religious reform and a growing appreciation for education charged the eighteenth-century family with the moral and spiritual well being of its children, what Judith Stacey calls the “modern family” takes shape. It includes a working father, a stay-at-home mom, and their biological children.<sup>52</sup> More than the transfer of name and property to younger generations, therefore, society expected families to provide a private space where parents could protect and mold their offspring.<sup>53</sup> In turn, portraits of idealized children testify to the family’s success in fulfilling its new role.

Interestingly, the innocent portraits in Higonnet’s study bear few if any markings of gender, class or race. First, Higonnet observes that the early subjects are nearly androgynous, despite their place in affluent families defined by the Enlightenment’s gendered division of labor.<sup>54</sup> Henry Jenkins explains that while channeling girls into the domestic sphere, these families were particularly interested in educating their sons so they could leave home and inherit the family property.<sup>55</sup> Pictures of innocent children that do distinguish between boys and girls naturalize such gender roles.<sup>56</sup> Likewise, Rousseau’s justifies them in *Emile*, claiming “nature” has charged men and women with different responsibilities and that, it is [the law] of nature” that “woman is made specially to please man.”<sup>57</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft responds, “What nonsense!” She sharply rebukes Rousseau for attributing behaviors such as vanity and passivity to a woman’s nature instead of to her education, accusing that Rousseau and others “have warmly inculcated that the whole tendency of female education ought to be directed to one point:—to render [women] pleasing.”<sup>58</sup> More

than a century after such protest, innocent portraits such as “Making a Doll’s House” continue to represent patriarchal notions of masculinity and femininity as unconscious aspects of the child’s innocent life, not as restrictive impositions from adult society. Whether androgynous or naturally gendered, therefore, portraits of innocent children ignore the plight of girls in the patriarchal family.

Although the Romantic child also exhibits no explicit class markings, Higonnet asserts that clean feet and plump body indicate economic privilege.<sup>59</sup> Working, starving and vagrant children, of course, make unfit subjects for innocent portraits. Moreover, lower class mothers worked to provide necessary economic sustenance rather than morally pristine domestic spaces. Since many families could not afford to keep both their mothers and their children out of the labor force, society could only imagine that rich children were innocent. Finally, the child exemplified by Reynolds’ portrait is almost always a white child.<sup>60</sup> With whiteness, wealth and masculinity as unremarkable norms, the portraits masquerade the affluent white male child as every child. More than a passing artistic trend, the innocent ideal and its association with white middle-class masculinity persists in Western art, surviving the shift to photography in the early twentieth century.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, Henry Jenkins observes that in the contemporary United States, “the most persistent image of the innocent child is that of a white, blond-haired, blue-eyed boy...and the markers of middleclassness, whiteness, and masculinity are read as standing for all children.”<sup>62</sup>

Since the innocence of childhood depends on the family, its standardization obscures differences between households. Among other things, families vary by size, shape, race, class and ethnicity, and they all encounter a variety of formative pressures.

Wallerstein, for example, attributes the size and shape of families largely to their relationship with capital. He explains that capitalist systems encourage isolated households that are big enough to ensure survival while small enough to keep the adults working.<sup>63</sup> Nonwhite families in America, however, have consistently met with the additional difficulties of institutionalized racism. For Native Americans before and after nation formation, displacement and near genocide destroyed tribal and family units alike. In addition, slavery forbade the legal recognition of marriage between slaves and systematically broke familial bonds, scattering black families throughout the South. For Asians, immigration legislation such as the Chinese Exclusion Laws of the late nineteenth century and the Immigration Act of 1924 forced Chinese and other Asian families to straddle the Pacific Ocean. Laws barring miscegenation and naturalization also forced many Asians to form alternative households. Finally, for all of these groups, racist hiring and pay practices reduce the chances that a small (nuclear) family unit can survive alone. Images of innocent children could never recount such family histories. Since they tell almost nothing about adult life, Higonnet explains, they “deny, or enable us to forget, many aspects of adult society.”<sup>64</sup> Like the faith in a white nation full of abstract citizens, therefore, belief in the ideology of childhood innocence perpetuates a universal standard of whiteness for families. Lipsitz agrees that conceptions of the family, while explicitly “unmarked by race,” are white.<sup>65</sup>

While abstract citizen and innocent child resemble one another, the two differ by time. Reynolds’ title “The Age of Innocence” suggests innocence relies on a youthful “age,” a period in one’s life that, according to Rousseau, precedes the politically charged experiences of citizenship. Not only does such childhood precede

oppression, it also avoids accountability for perpetuating it. As a metaphor for abstract citizenship, therefore, innocent childhood becomes its own opposite. Instead of the depoliticized ideal that Rousseau imagined in opposition to societal corruptions, it represents a highly politicized vacuum into which histories of persecution and accountability can disappear. Americans who express their nostalgia for the innocent past through invocations of innocent childhood, therefore, participate in a form of denial. They invoke an ideology of American innocence through a symbol of the desire to forget.

Authors of American literature have long relied on the trope of childhood innocence to wrestle with the nation's moral dilemmas. In An End to Innocence (1948), critic Leslie Fiedler identifies this theme, arguing that the characters of American literature never mature.<sup>66</sup> Indeed, at the moment when his childhood dabbling in slaveholding ends, Mark Twain's Huck Finn turns away from his looming maturity to "light out for the territory" in a symbolic repudiation of adulthood.<sup>67</sup> In The Great Gatsby (1925), F. Scott Fitzgerald likens Gatsby's upwardly mobile aspirations to the infantile desire to "suck on the pap of life, gulp down the incomparable milk of wonder." Likewise, Nick notes that after Tom Buchanan's hit-and-run accident, talking to him is like "talking to a child."<sup>68</sup> Finally, while Colonel Compson, from Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom! (1936) comments that "[Sutpen's] trouble was innocence," Isaac McCaslin, the protagonist of Faulkner's Go Down Moses (1942), reaches old age having finally achieved the "high and selfless innocence" of a "young boy."<sup>69</sup> In contrast, Harper Lee celebrates a childhood summer of discovery in To Kill a Mockingbird (1960), while African American authors such as W. E. B. DuBois and

James Weldon Johnson take pains to describe childhood moments of lost innocence as inevitable and necessary. Similarly, in Gwendolyn Brooks' Maude Martha (1953), Maude hopes to delay the inevitable by silently pleading for her daughter, "Keep her that land of blue!"<sup>70</sup>

Since a complete historical analysis of innocent childhood in American literature is beyond the scope of this study, I focus only on works published after the Civil Rights Era. I do not presume to have exhausted all significant representations of childhood in the late twentieth century, however. Other works, especially Frank Chin's Donald Duk (1991), Dorothy Allison's Bastard Out of Carolina (1992), and Marilynne Robinson's Housekeeping (1980) deal with comparable issues and would produce similarly fruitful analyses. The works I've selected, however, bring childhood's discursive history and the implications of its affiliation with innocence to light across a broad political spectrum. They center the concepts of childhood and family, the ideologies of multiculturalism and liberalism, and the epistemologies of (neo)colonialism and contemporary racism at a time when forgetfulness substantiates the accusations of reverse discrimination that Lipsitz argues are common by the 1990s.<sup>71</sup>

In Part I, "Infant Citizens," I explore representations of adults who are enamored with the historical vacuum they perceive as childhood. Chapter One, "Legacies of the 'Innocent' Frontier: Failed Memory and the Infantilized Filipina Expatriate in Jessica Hagedorn's Dogeaters" explores how themes of infantilization in the 1990 novel expose the hypocrisies of American innocence in the colonial and postcolonial contexts of U.S.-Philippine relations. I focus on Hagedorn's

representations of child-like characters, arguing that she appropriates the infantilizing rhetoric that President McKinley used to justify his Philippine conquest in 1898. In her portrayals, Hagedorn highlights the debilitating effect that innocent ideologies have on both a Filipino ruling class that emulates white American masculinity, and a Filipina expatriate who cannot escape it. She suggests that for these groups, compromised colonial and postcolonial histories are irretrievable. By robbing her narrator of the counterhegemonic power of memory, Hagedorn also stresses the importance of recognizing the inadequacies of repudiation. She shows that the rejection of innocent histories does not equate to an understanding of authentic ones. Thus, Hagedorn's protagonist looks toward the future armed not with a recovered history, but with an understanding of the process of its loss.

In Chapter Two, "Consuming Families, Infant Parents and Fascism in Don DeLillo's White Noise," I examine DeLillo's 1984 satire on the mystifying force of childhood innocence in the white middle-class family. Drawing from Henry Giroux's argument that commodity culture molds children into passive consumers instead of politically active citizens, I show how DeLillo implicates patriarchal families and profiteering universities in the cultivation of "innocent" consumer identities. DeLillo challenges the apparent harmlessness of childhood innocence by portraying nostalgia as regression. He warns, as his child-like protagonist turns violent, that democracies need their histories.

From my discussion of infantilized adults, I turn in Part II, "Raising the Infant Nation," to literary depictions of persecuted children. In Chapter Three: "Children of the Innocent Nation in Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye," I argue that in her 1970 novel,

Morrison portrays the American family as both an object and an instrument of oppression, not as a haven of childhood innocence. Through her depiction of racist education systems and commodities that promote whitewashed ideals of female beauty, Morrison exposes the ideological import of a children's culture that, according to Henry Giroux, parents often dismiss. I contend that these representations challenge America's myth of meritocracy by suggesting that race, class and gender oppressions exist not only in American culture, but in American childhoods. Furthermore, by historicizing and vocalizing the often-times silenced Africanist presence in literature, Morrison challenges the neoconservative impulse to turn backwards, to the myths of innocent family and homogenous nation that continue to characterize the pre-Civil Rights Era.

In my final chapter, "Forging New Futures: Child-Citizens and the Power of Customer Dissatisfaction in Lois Ann Yamanaka's Blu's Hanging," I examine the way Yamanaka's 1997 novel rejects the innocent ideal altogether. In its place, Yamanaka portrays victimized children who embrace historical knowledge. Consequently, I argue, they resist the racist views of imperialist teachers while rejecting consumer identities defined by the nationalist imperatives of "Now." Since Yamanaka's child-protagonist also propagates relationships that reach beyond the bounds of her "protective" nuclear family, I argue that Yamanaka offers an alternative role for children as active social critics and independent citizens of a local instead of a national community. Freed from white patriarchal conceptions of nation and family, her children represent an empowered citizenry that survives by resisting the assimilationist impulse to forget.

Childhood merits further scrutiny in these works and others, amid increasing concerns in the twenty-first century about immigration, national security and American foreign policy. Conservatives who respond to such fears by subscribing to a Trent Lott-style nostalgia for the pre-Civil Rights Era face little opposition, since many liberals have relinquished America's history of race and class struggles to the neutralizing effects of "multiculturalism." Rather than reconcile the contradictions between American ideals and American history, the writers here explicitly expose them. In untidy formulations of childhood and nation that mirror their disjointed narrative styles, they model a form of citizenship deeply engaged in acts of historical recuperation, subverting our nostalgia for an illusory utopian past.

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<sup>1</sup> James Baldwin, Conversations with James Baldwin, ed. Fred L. Standley and Louis H. Pratt (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1989), 192.

<sup>2</sup>For an in-depth study regarding the sociopolitical and ideological debates surrounding nineteenth-century orphans and the famed London Foundling Hospital, see Jenny Bourne Taylor, "'Received, a Blank Child': John Brownlow, Charles Dickens, and the London Foundling Hospital—Archives and Fictions," in Nineteenth-Century Literature 56.3 (2001): 293-363. For histories of childhood as a social construction, see Philippe Ariès Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life, translated by Robert Baldick (1962; reprint, New York: Vintage Books, 1965); Chris Jenks' Childhood (London: Routledge, 1996); and David Kennedy's "The Roots of Child Study: Philosophy, History, and Religion," in Teachers College Record 102.3 (June 2000): 524-538. Finally, the deconstruction of childhood has led to further scholarship on children and children's literature, most notably, focusing on children as readers and resistant thinkers. Exemplary articles on child-agency include: K. McDowell, "'Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry': A Culturally Specific, Subversive Concept of Child Agency," in Children's Literature in Education 33.3 (2002): 213-225; and Joanne S. Frye, "Placing Children at the Fulcrum of Social Change: Antiracist Mothering in Tillie Olsen's 'O Yes,'" in Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature 18.1 (1999): 11-28.

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- <sup>3</sup> Stuart Hall, "Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies," in Cultural Studies, edited by Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, Paula Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992), 283.
- <sup>4</sup> Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula Treichler, "Cultural Studies: An Introduction," in Cultural Studies, edited by Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, Paula Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992), 9.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 11.
- <sup>6</sup> Lauren Berlant, "National Brands/National Body: Imitation of Life," in Comparative American Identities: Race, Sex and Nationality in the Modern Text, edited by Hortense Spillers (New York: Routledge, 1991), 113.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 112-114.
- <sup>8</sup> Norma Alarcón, Caren Kaplan, and Mino Moallem, introduction to Between Woman and Nation: Nationalism, Transnational Feminisms, and the State, edited by Norma Alarcón, Caren Kaplan, and Mino Moallem (Durham: Duke UP, 1999), 1-2; Berlant, 112.
- <sup>9</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein, "The Ideological Tensions of Capitalism: Universalism versus Racism and Sexism," in Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities, by Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, trans. of Etienne Balibar by Chris Turner (London: Verso, 1991); originally published as Race, nation, classe: les identités ambiguës (Paris: Editions La Découverte, 1988), 31-35.
- <sup>10</sup> David Roediger, The Wages of Whiteness (London: Verso, 1991), 12-13, 28-47.
- <sup>11</sup> Toni Morrison, Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1992), 5.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 44, 52, 47.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 44-45.
- <sup>14</sup> Etienne Balibar, preface to Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities, by Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, trans. of Etienne Balibar by Chris Turner (London: Verso, 1991); originally published as Race, nation, classe: les identités ambiguës (Paris: Editions La Découverte, 1988), 9.
- <sup>15</sup> Ruth Frankenberg and Lata Mani, "Crosscurrents, Crosstalk: Race, 'Postcoloniality' and the Politics of Location," Cultural Studies 7, no. 2 (1993): 293.

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- <sup>16</sup> Jenny Sharpe, "Is the United States Postcolonial? Transnationalism, Immigration, and Race," in Postcolonial America (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 105-106.
- <sup>17</sup> Todd Gitlin, The Twilight of Common Dreams: Why America is Wracked by Culture Wars (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1995), 182, 233.
- <sup>18</sup> George Lipsitz, The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 25.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid, 29, 35, 36.
- <sup>20</sup> Sharpe, 106.
- <sup>21</sup> Mino Moallem and Iain Boal, "Multi-Cultural Nationalism and the Poetics of Inauguration," in Between Woman and Nation: Nationalisms, Transnational Feminisms, and the State, edited by Norma Alarcón, Caren Kaplan, and Mino Moallem (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 245, 249.
- <sup>22</sup> Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities (London: Verso, 1983), 25.
- <sup>23</sup> Jenks, 7.
- <sup>24</sup> Kennedy, 518-520, 530, 532, 534.
- <sup>25</sup> Ariès, 33-34, 47, 412-413.
- <sup>26</sup> Kennedy, 522-524.
- <sup>27</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft. A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, 2<sup>d</sup> ed., edited by, Carol H. Poston (1792; reprint, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1988), 19-20, 25.
- <sup>28</sup> Peter Fitzpatrick, "Racism and the Innocence of Law," Anatomy of Racism, edited by David Theo Goldberg (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 248-249.
- <sup>29</sup> Michael Omi and Howard Winant, Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s (New York: Routledge, 1994), 61-62.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>31</sup> Michael Paul Rogin, Ronald Reagan, the Movie and Other Episodes in Political Demonology (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 144.
- <sup>32</sup> Kennedy, 528.
- <sup>33</sup> Rogin, 137.

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- <sup>34</sup> Thomas Jefferson, "Notes on the State of Virginia" (1782), <http://wyllie.lib.virginia.edu> (February 16, 2004).
- <sup>35</sup> Qtd. in Thomas F. Gossett, Race: the History of an Idea in America (New York: Schocken Books, 1963), 63.
- <sup>36</sup> Kennedy, 529.
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid, 519.
- <sup>38</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, preface to Emile: or On Education, translated by Allan Bloom (1762; reprint, New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1979), 34.
- <sup>39</sup> Allan Bloom, introduction to Emile: or On Education, translated by Allan Bloom (1762; reprint, New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1979), 3-5.
- <sup>40</sup> Anne Higonnet, Pictures of Innocence: The History and Crisis of Ideal Childhood (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998), 17, 26, 15. Rather than convey a specific historical period, the term "Romantic child" refers to the romantic qualities of a "naturally innocent" child. Higonnet cites examples ranging from the late eighteenth to the late twentieth centuries.
- <sup>41</sup> Kennedy, 529; Higonnet, 27.
- <sup>42</sup> Higonnet, 31-32,
- <sup>43</sup> Rogin, 138.
- <sup>44</sup> Lee Clark Mitchell, Witnesses to a Vanishing America: The Nineteenth-Century Response Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 258-260.
- <sup>45</sup> James Fenimore Cooper, The Last of the Mohicans: A Narrative of 1757 (1824-26; reprint, New York: Penguin Putnam, 1962), 105, 117, 407, 126, 68.
- <sup>46</sup> Ibid, 61,140.
- <sup>47</sup> Bloom, 5; qtd. in Mitchell, 259.
- <sup>48</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," in The Early Writings of Frederick Jackson Turner, compiled by Everett E. Edwards (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1938), 187.
- <sup>49</sup> Higonnet, 28; Henry Jenkins, introduction to The Children's Culture Reader, edited by Henry Jenkins (New York: New York UP, 1998, 4.

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<sup>50</sup> Ariès, 412-413.

<sup>51</sup> Friederich Engels, The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State (1884; reprint, New York: International Publishers, 1972), 128.

<sup>52</sup> Judith Stacey, In the Name of the Family: Rethinking Family Values in the Postmodern Age (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 6.

<sup>53</sup> Ariès, 412.

<sup>54</sup> Higonnet, 26.

<sup>55</sup> Jenkins, 16.

<sup>56</sup> Higonnet, 27. Higonnet cites Harry Brookner's "Making a Doll's House" (1897). In the painting a young boy saws wood for his sister's dollhouse while she stands passively by with a child's anticipation.

<sup>57</sup> Rousseau, Emile, 361, 358.

<sup>58</sup> Wollstonecraft, 26-27.

<sup>59</sup> Higonnet, 24.

<sup>60</sup> In a rare deviation, William Blake's "Little Black Boy" depicts an innocent black child with his mother. Interestingly, however, the child connects his innocence with whiteness when he explains that "I am black, but O! my soul is white." In Songs of Innocence and of Experience: Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul, in Blake: Complete Writings with Variant Readings, edited by Geoffrey Keynes (1957; reprint, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), line 2. First published in 1789-1794.

<sup>61</sup> Higonnet, 73.

<sup>62</sup> Qtd. in Henry Giroux, Stealing Innocence: Youth, Corporate Power, and the Politics of Culture (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 5.

<sup>63</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein, "Household Structures and Labour-Force Formation in the Capitalist World-Economy," in Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities, by Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, trans. of Etienne Balibar by Chris Turner (London: Verso, 1991); originally published as Race, nation, classe: les identités ambiguës (Paris: Editions La Découverte, 1988), 110.

<sup>64</sup> Higonnet, 23.

<sup>65</sup> Lipsitz, 112.

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<sup>66</sup> Leslie Fiedler, An End to Innocence: Essays on Culture and Politics (Boston: Beacon Press, 1948), 193.

<sup>67</sup> Mark Twain, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1876; reprint, Philadelphia: Running Press, 1986), 230.

<sup>68</sup> F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby (1925; reprint, New York: Scribner Paperback Fiction, 1995), 117, 188..

<sup>69</sup> William Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom! (1936; reprint, New York: Vintage International, 1990), 178. Faulkner, Go Down Moses (1942; reprint, New York: Modern Library, 1995), 104.

<sup>70</sup> Gwendolyn Brooks, "Maud Martha" in Blacks (1953; reprint, Chicago: Third World Press, 1994), 316, 318.

<sup>71</sup> Lipsitz, 45.

CHAPTER ONE  
 Legacies of the “Innocent” Frontier:  
 Failed Memory and the Infantilized Filipina Expatriate  
 in Jessica Hagedorn’s Dogeaters

In her 1990 novel, Dogeaters, Jessica Hagedorn engages the interconnected discourses on race, childhood and nation through her narrator, Rio. By figuring Rio as an innocent child, Hagedorn explores the politics of forgetting in the neocolonial relationship between the United States and the Philippines. The story turns on a grown Rio’s longing for her childhood in a ruling-class Filipino family during the mid-twentieth century. Hagedorn frames the narrative, therefore, in nostalgia for a Philippines where the authorities of neocolonial martial law and Hollywood’s cultural imperialism have supplanted the colonial parent. Rio tells her story in company, however. Mikhail Bakhtin identifies a “living mix of varied and opposing voices” in the novel that allows “novelistic discourse” to “always criticiz[e] itself.”<sup>1</sup> Bakhtin claims that, by virtue of exclusion, the assertion of a national voice in novelistic discourse implicitly evokes the local dialects suppressed by that voice. Thus, the novel that imagines the nation simultaneously un-imagines it. In Dogeaters, Hagedorn exploits the dialectical aspect of the novel—un-imagining the innocent nation—by highlighting rather than suppressing contradiction. To evoke a past virtually untouched by canonical American literature and effectively dismissed by official American histories, she adopts a multiplicity of voices that recast innocent childhood amid the socio-political and economic narratives that it typically obscures.

When the frontier officially closed in 1893, Americans motivated by Manifest Destiny sought new territory beyond continental borders. During the Spanish American War, the United States recolonized Puerto Rico, Cuba and the Philippines

under U.S. rule. For the Philippines, the conquest extended a long history of colonialism that continues to shape the contemporary nation. When the Spanish first subjugated the islands in 1560, they were separate entities, populated by distinct tribal cultures with varied religions and languages. Surprisingly, these local populations remained distinct during more than three centuries of Spanish tenure. They lacked a common language because Spanish missionaries worked in local dialects, retarding the spread of Spanish and discouraging education.<sup>2</sup> Anderson explains that pockets of resistance erupted regularly against the Spaniards, but language barriers prevented natives from orchestrating an organized campaign of insurgence before the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> With economic changes in the mid- to late nineteenth century, conditions ripened for the advancement of a Filipino national consciousness.<sup>4</sup> Rather than draw from local histories alone, local people conceived of the emerging nation through the intersection of those histories with the discourses of colonialism, international capital, Western politics and Enlightenment philosophy. Wealthy and mostly mestizo landowners began to identify themselves as “Filipino” after the growth of export crops between 1820 and 1870 enabled them to find common ground in trade.<sup>5</sup> The rising mestizo class capitalized on newfound economic privileges by sending their children abroad for the Western education discouraged by the Spanish. Armed with economic privilege and enlightenment ideals of freedom and individuality, these new “ilustrados,” or “enlightened ones,” called for reforms in the 1880s, demanding political influence to match their economic status.<sup>6</sup>

In the early 1890s, drought, crop failures and an economic recession aggravated the brewing unrest.<sup>7</sup> While Filipino dissatisfaction culminated with a

revolution against Spain in 1896, the mysterious explosion of the United States warship *Maine* in Cuba's Havana harbor provoked war between Spain and the United States just two years later. In his study of 1898, David Traxel explains how the United States hoped to weaken their Spanish enemy by appropriating the Filipino revolution. Although the United States government made no explicit promises to the Filipinos, they led Filipino leader, Emilio Aguinaldo, to believe that by cooperating with the United States, the Filipinos could achieve independence.<sup>8</sup> Facing sure defeat, a frightened and humiliated Spanish military struck a deal with the United States to both avoid a massacre and save face. They agreed to surrender to the American forces in a mock battle if the Americans would prevent the Filipinos from participating. Thus, the Spanish ceded control of the Philippines to the United States in December 1898, despite the fact that by this time, the Spanish had relinquished nearly all of their Filipino holdings to the revolutionaries.<sup>9</sup>

After defeating the Spanish in Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines, American politicians dismissed Filipino aspirations of autonomy. With little to no regard for the views of Filipino leaders, debate over the islands' fate raged between anti-imperialists such as Andrew Carnegie and expansionists such as Theodore Roosevelt. Both sides made racist arguments that cast the Filipinos as ignorant and childish heathens. With his policy of benevolent assimilation, McKinley exploited racist assumptions to satisfy both sides of the debate.<sup>10</sup> To appease the expansionists he argued, "we could not turn [the Philippines] over to France or Germany—our commercial rivals in the Orient—that would be bad business and discreditable." To pacify the anti-imperialists he argued that the Filipinos needed a benefactor because

“they were unfit for self-government” and “would soon have anarchy and misrule over there.”<sup>11</sup> McKinley made these remarks on December 21, 1898, just eleven days after the Spanish surrendered in Manila. Unmindful of McKinley’s intentions, the Filipinos had also begun to plan for their future. After drafting a constitution and selecting government officials, they inaugurated the first Philippine Republic on January 23, 1899, less than a month after McKinley’s speech. Faced with Filipino resistance, McKinley avoided having to explain why benevolence required force when fighting spontaneously erupted between Filipino and U.S. soldiers. Empowered by the American public’s patriotic response to the “attack,” McKinley authorized military action against the Filipino “insurgents,” despite Aguinaldo’s claim that he had not ordered the fighting.<sup>12</sup>

Through the language of insurrection, U.S. policymakers further obscured Filipino autonomy by suggesting that the Filipinos fought against their protector rather than in defense of their own sovereignty. As a protector, McKinley interpellated Filipinos as children in a familial metaphor that equated maturation with assimilation to a patriarchal and white American ideal. Vicente Rafael points to the patriarchal aspect of benevolent assimilation when he argues that it casts the “annihilation” of past colonial relations as “domestication.” He argues that North American women in the Philippines created domestic spaces where they could enact “the patriotic duty of upholding middle-class morality and respectability amid the barbarism of a colonized people.” Thus, domesticating women in the Philippines created a boundary outside of which Filipinos could be, in Rafael’s words, “infantilized as racial others in need of nurturance and tutelage.” Filipino infantilization differs, however, from the earlier

conquests of Manifest Destiny. Rather than genocide, Rafael argues, assimilationists hoped to establish a self-governing population of Filipinos who would follow the example of their American “parent.”<sup>13</sup> Paradoxically, they expected Filipinos to accept themselves as inherently inferior while eventually assuming the role of “mature” pseudo-parents fit to rule like their oppressors. To become “civilized” under such logic, Filipinos must participate in their own erasure.

Hagedorn includes excerpts from McKinley’s Benevolent Assimilation Proclamation in her novel, showing his economic motivations for interfering in Filipino self-rule while citing the infantilizing rhetoric that shaped United States foreign policy in the islands. Dogeaters elsewhere alludes to both the Spanish occupation that preceded the Philippine-American War and to the Japanese invasion that followed, but I find the reference to McKinley especially important because it specifically marks the inception of Filipino invisibility in United States colonial discourse. E. San Juan Jr. points to the devastating impact of such discourse when he asserts that Filipinos still endured silence and invisibility in 1990s America despite the fact that they numbered more than two million and comprised one of the largest segments of America’s Asian community.<sup>14</sup> Despite their numbers, they suffer a more profound invisibility than other Asian communities because none of these groups endure, as Campomanes argues, in “a truly colonial and neocolonial relation with the United States.”<sup>15</sup> Both Campomanes and San Juan suggest that Filipino invisibility is a symptom of this unique colonial history and its erasure. They explain that large numbers of Filipinos came to the United States in search of work because the conquest that eradicated the First Philippine Republic opened the door for Filipinos to cross

United States borders. Since the United States fails to recognize its colonial past, they conclude, it also ignores the ongoing consequences of United States expansion. Thus, as San Juan remarks of Filipinos in America, “We are here, but somehow it’s still a secret.”<sup>16</sup> Unwilling to keep the secret, Hagedorn demystifies the American-Philippine relation.

Furthermore, as a Filipina expatriate writer in 1990s America, Hagedorn confronts reactionary politics that respond in part to conditions of “flexible citizenship” and “postnationalism,” terms borrowed from Aihwa Ong and Jenny Sharpe respectively. Since they immigrate to America out of economic necessity, Filipino expatriates are flexible citizens—they “freely” cross national and cultural borders as prompted by the demands of capital.<sup>17</sup> They contribute to the confusion where, Sharpe explains, the decolonized people of America’s post-Civil Rights era intersect with the international division of labor introduced by global capitalism.<sup>18</sup> A new discourse of Philippine-U.S. “special relations” reacts to the destabilization with revisionist histories that preserve innocence. San Juan argues that such scholarship blames Filipino nationalists, not the U.S. government, for spoiling the success of America’s conquest.<sup>19</sup>

Ironically, disgruntled American farm organizations and trade unions, not Filipino nationalists, largely influenced the decision to grant the Philippines commonwealth status in 1935. These groups, Anderson explains, argued for Filipino independence because they resented tariff-free competition from Filipino agriculture and labor. Conversely, the Filipino ruling class secretly opposed independence because they had amassed their fortunes by exploiting free access to American

markets. While the Filipino ruling class was getting rich in the early twentieth century, however, the United States engaged in a vicious war against peasant guerillas who continued to resist occupation for a decade after Aguinaldo pledged allegiance to the United States in 1901.<sup>20</sup> Scholarship that focuses on the financial and political cooperation between the Filipino ruling class and the United States, therefore, obscures the physical and epistemic violence of American colonialism (and Filipino neo-colonialism) endured by the Filipino masses. It also dismisses the forced dependence of the Filipino economy on United States governed trade agreements.<sup>21</sup> Scholarly disavowal participates in a larger American resistance to increased immigration and flexible citizenship. Groups that include Americans for Immigration Control (AIC), founded in 1983; legislation such as California's Proposition 187, passed in 1994; as well as the popularity of publications like Patrick Buchanan's Death of the West: How Dying Populations and Immigrant Invasions Imperil Our Country and Civilization (2002), clearly illustrate the growing paranoia that many Americans felt regarding immigration before and after the events of September 11, 2001.<sup>22</sup>

Hagedorn challenges the innocent histories that support such politics by making little authoritative distinction between McKinley's "official" directives and the popular culture, political posturing, journalistic reporting and personal gossip portrayed in the novel. Lisa Lowe contends that, more than a curiosity of literary experimentation, Hagedorn's fragmented melange "disorganizes official history," compromising its integrity.<sup>23</sup> Simultaneously, however, Hagedorn highlights the difficulties such an undertaking presents for a Filipina expatriate in particular. In the face of her narrator's unique condition as the expatriate of a formerly colonized

country, Hagedorn illustrates the infantilizing effects of innocent ideologies and explores how they undermine the counterhegemonic potential of Filipina memory. While critics debate whether Dogeaters is "authentically Filipino" or "authentically American," Hagedorn claims neither.<sup>24</sup> Instead, she rejects the possibility that memory can authoritatively revise the official histories of either country. She tells the story of Rio's inability to remember by casting her story as a nostalgic fantasy about the lost innocence of her childhood. Having exposed Rio's inadequacy, Dogeaters demands to be seen in what Rafael calls "the place of forgetting."<sup>25</sup>

Rio fondly recalls her Filipina adolescence as a time characterized by comfort, wealth, security, and most of all, her American fantasies. She especially recalls her time spent watching and imitating American films. In his account of the colonial process, Homi Bhabha defines what he calls "colonial mimicry," or "the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*" (emph. in original). Bhabha argues that "mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference" to perpetuate colonial domination.<sup>26</sup> Bhabha's theory highlights an important divergence between familial discourses on childrearing and colonial discourses on race. The process of childrearing ends with the creation of the "I" in the civilized adult, but McKinley's paternal benevolence "must continually produce its slippage;" it will never entirely cast off the child in the Filipino Other.

Hagedorn explores how mimicry might operate for *postcolonial* mestizos who, according to Rafael, consistently choose American-made films over Filipino productions. He explains that "mestizo/a" denotes "the generation of mostly mixed-race, Spanish-speaking, university educated nationalists" who presumably have "a

certain proximity to the sources of colonial power.” The movie-theater, Rafael argues, allows mestizo audiences to achieve “proximity” to their former colonizer when he speculates that the privilege of viewing a film in English provides a sense of connectedness to what resides outside the Philippines.<sup>27</sup> As Rio mimics American films, however, Hagedorn questions such “connectedness.” Rio and her family remain distanced from American life because, significantly, what they mimic is a copy—a simulation that, through its own distance from reality, portrays an imaginary and thus, unachievable, American ideal that will forever trap them in the process of attainment.

Rio’s narrative begins with her nostalgia for a day spent watching her favorite film, All That Heaven Allows (1955) with her cousin Pucha. Critics such as Laura Mulvey have recognized the film for its complex explorations of gender, class, race and sexuality. In the opening image, the camera pans a quintessential American main street where the placement of an obtrusive church steeple in the foreground questions the restrictive social mores of the town’s white middle-class inhabitants. Henry Giroux has since condemned comparable images of American main streets, especially Walt Disney World’s “Main Street USA,” for portraying innocent white versions of American life.<sup>28</sup> Douglas Sirk anticipates these condemnations as Jane Wyman’s character, Cary Scott, takes refuge from the constraints of her small-town life in a racially homogenous rural setting where the further whitening of crisp clean snow assures the audience of her uncompromised morality, despite her sexual transgressions.

Rio watches (and thus, remembers) the film outside of its historical context in the United States. Without a broader knowledge of American history, especially of the

Civil Rights movement that was brewing at the time All That Heaven Allows was released, Rio overlooks Sirk's ironies. Instead, she admires the white feminine ideals of beauty disseminated by the film, recounting captivating images of Jane Wyman's "soft putty face" paired with "prim white blouses" and "blue-white pearls." She also recalls her feelings of envy for Pucha's blond hair and mestiza nose after the film.<sup>29</sup> Thoroughly infatuated, Rio takes the images of Jane Wyman and Gloria Talbott further out of context, obscuring the film's politics and plot by ignoring the sexual oppression of Jane Wyman's character, Cary Scott. Hence, Rio sees only whiteness and innocence, characterizing Gloria Talbott's ponytail as "innocent" and her "pastel-pink cashmere cardigan" as "virginal."<sup>30</sup> According to Rachel Lee, the depoliticized images persuade Rio that America offers "the site for women's escape from [the] male authoritative gaze" that scrutinizes women in the Philippines.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, when Pucha makes reference to "ugly servant[s]" while decisively dismissing the authority of Rio's dark chaperone, Lorenza, Hagedorn shows how the association of white feminine beauty with power in America can translate into the equation of darkness, ugliness and powerlessness in the Philippines.<sup>32</sup> Through Rio's seduction and her consequent feelings of inadequacy and envy, Hagedorn suggests that white film starlets operate like colonizing domesticators, inscribing the paradox of Bhabha's mimicry in the absence of a colonizing body. Rio, therefore, ironically equates the imperial imposition of restrictive white middle-class mores of femininity with social and sexual freedom.

In addition, the image of Rio and Pucha sitting in a theater that advertises "Foremost! First-Run! English Movies Only!" shows how profit persuades empire to

linger in what Lee calls “a repetition of imperialist strategies by “native” agents.”<sup>33</sup>

While suggesting that Filipino businesses profit by disseminating products of American culture, Dogeaters speculates that outside the theater, familial and national cultures perpetuate American innocence in the Philippines. In the tradition of benevolent assimilation, Rio’s parents indoctrinate her into their historically sanitized world so that she may progress from a literal and figurative child of American culture to an infantilized adult who serves the interests of white American capital. At a Gonzaga family dinner, Rio’s teenage brother Raul interrupts their parents’ gossip to ask for details about a Manilan prison camp. Distracting responses ensue, including Aunt Flora’s outrage when her husband swears in front of “the children!”<sup>34</sup>

Despite such tense moments, Rio’s family life successfully reinforces her infantilization. Almost all of the events she recounts occur behind the protective walls of theater and home. In these insulated settings, consumer images of film and magazine substitute for political and social awareness. Most notably, Rio passes hours in her mother Dolores’ rooms where boarded up windows block distinctions between noon and midnight while air conditioning “blasts twenty-four hours a day.” Dolores closes off the outside to create a space devoted entirely to the self-commodifying production of American beauty exemplified by Rita Hayworth. Mesmerized by “jars of creams and ointments” and “gleaming tubes of lipstick,” Rio absorbs her mother’s ideals.<sup>35</sup> The family dwelling, like a movie theater, provides an isolated capsule in which Dolores and Rio indulge themselves as infantilized consumers, anticipating the unattainable—a future life where they inhabit the bodies and lives of Hollywood’s

white beauties. Dolores evokes the regressive aspects of the mauve retreat when she says she designed it “to soothe her. ‘Like a womb.’”<sup>36</sup>

The notions of beauty, sexual freedom and innocence that constitute Rio’s perception of white American femininity converge when her coming of age ironically mirrors her mother’s retreat to the “womb.” On the eve of her first menstruation, Rio’s family rents an “imitation Swiss chalet” in the mountains of Baguio. The retreat feels like a Hollywood set—as if the fire were painted onto a fireplace that would ring with the hollow sound of plastic if Rio tapped on it. In Baguio, the Gonzagas behave like Western tourists, exploiting their Filipino ancestors through gift-shop purchases of “carved ashtrays and bookends ornamented by Igorot fertility gods.”<sup>37</sup> Similarly, Rio and Pucha forget the heat of Manila in the cold mountain air where “the sharp scent of evergreen” recalls Jane Wyman’s snowy retreat in All That Heaven Allows. In honor of Gloria Talbott, the girls wear thin strands of white pearls and drape “pastel orlon cardigan sweaters” over their shoulders. The “unbearably romantic” setting allows Rio to live out her fantasy of an American life where she will enjoy increased sexual freedom and fulfillment when she and Pucha “practice tongue-kissing in front of the rustic fireplace.”<sup>38</sup> When Rio remarks that “no one can tell the difference” between her real pearls and Pucha’s fake ones she accepts the copy, allowing inquiries about prison camps to dissolve in the “civilized” bliss of a simulacrum-vacation. Through the paradoxical coincidence of Rio’s first menstruation and her acceptance of Baguio’s one-dimensional world, Hagedorn satirizes the regressive aspects of Filipino culture, equating maturation with infantilization.

Hagedorn reinforces the point with characters that exist outside the scope of Rio's memory. Mr. Gonzaga's employer, Severo Alacran, raises children who, like Rio, suffer even greater amnesia than their parents. By portraying these characters as infantilized, Hagedorn appropriates McKinley's picture of dependent Filipino children, emphasizing how empire "lingers." She uses names like "Girlie," "Boomboom" and "Baby" to emphasize her characters' childlike qualities. Girlie Alacran adds to the connotative implications of naming when she observes that Boomboom, her "pink-faced mestizo" cousin with "light eyes" and "soft, pudgy hands," is a "big baby."<sup>39</sup> Similarly, Boomboom's sister, "Baby" Alacran, spends her childhood in a wheelchair where she endures debilitating anxieties that require servants to feed and bathe her as if she were an infant. Baby continues to infantilize herself in adulthood, turning from the "ominous" things that support her privilege to embrace a "furtive, innocent life," secretly watching Tagalog soap operas in bed.<sup>40</sup> Where McKinley exploited childhood to justify colonialism, Hagedorn's representations highlight the emotional and historical bankruptcy wrought by U.S. imperialism and Filipino neocolonialism on the otherwise wealthy Filipino ruling class.

Hagedorn's first lady, Madame, articulates the oblivion of Rio's Baguio-fantasy and Baby's soap-opera escape as a national desire when she says, "What would life be without the movies? Unendurable, *di ba?* We Filipinos, we know how to endure, and we embrace the movies. With movies, everything is okay *lang.*" Madame suggests that Hollywood's appeal produces a *nation* of infantilized people for whom the decontextualized pleasure of consumption perpetuates benevolent

assimilation. Hagedorn emphasizes the gendered aspect of such desire when the American reporter named Steve remarks that Madame's face looks like a "glamorous powdered sponge, a slice of white angel food cake, a white moon."<sup>41</sup> His one-dimensional description recalls the kind of cinematography that, in the 1950s and '60s, zoomed in on starlets such as Wyman and Talbot, filling theater screens with close-up images of their powdered white faces. With Steve's observations, Hagedorn suggests that the patriarchal imperatives of colonialism pose such a threat to women in the Philippines that they have reduced even the nation's most powerful woman to an Americanized object ready to be consumed by a public hungry for things Western.

In addition, Hagedorn uses Madame as the public body and face of a male dictator who never actually appears in the novel, suggesting that male domination in the Philippines operates through the seductive qualities of female beauty. Rafael explains that during the Marcos dictatorship when Hagedorn's novel is set, the exploitation of Filipina sexuality facilitated Filipino subjugation to the U.S.-backed dictatorship. He compares Filipina first lady Imelda Marcos to the "bomba" stars of popular culture to show how authorities used Filipina sex appeal to encourage political passivity.<sup>42</sup> Rachel Lee agrees, claiming that, "Women...emerged as both a lure and a tool" in a masculinist colonial project that trapped women between patriarchal nationalism and violent imperialism.<sup>43</sup> Alluding to these conditions, Hagedorn's portrayal of Madame again satirizes Filipino culture. She transforms a public oppressed by neocolonial Martial Law into a public seduced by the objectification of its own women, portraying a nation literally and figuratively ruled by movie stars.

Although he overlooks its patriarchal aspects, leftist radical Senator Avila disapproves of Hollywood's broad appeal. Countering Madame's voice he argues, "We are doomed by our need for assimilation into the West." He describes the Philippines as "a nation betrayed and then united only by our hunger for glamour and our Hollywood dreams."<sup>44</sup> His argument recalls the celebration banquet that, according to Constantino, marked the inauguration of the First Republic of the Philippines in 1899. Constantino describes a lavish party that, instead of celebrating things uniquely Filipino, highlighted European food on a menu written entirely in French.<sup>45</sup> Through such choices, the Filipino ruling class entangled nationalist with assimilationist ideals from the nation's founding. With Madame and Senator Avila's observations, Hagedorn suggests that over time, such attitudes are no longer limited to ruling class families like Rio's. Instead, she suggests, they have spread to a nation disempowered by its willingness to substitute a self-infantilizing desire for things American (satisfied by movie theater fantasies, simulacrum-vacations, and ultimately, through immigration) for the collective political action that might otherwise debunk the myth of American innocence.

Some critics worry that Dogeaters overemphasizes the colonized, producing a racist picture of the Philippines. San Juan argues that Hagedorn "neutraliz[es]" narratives of resistance that depict victims of neocolonialism by embedding them in "a rich multi-layered discourse" that makes Hagedorn "exotic" for a Western audience.<sup>46</sup> But characters like Senator Avila and his family refute the assumption that *all* mestizos in the novel adopt imperial value systems. Furthermore, Hagedorn complicates her portrayal of assimilationists with Mr. Gonzaga. According to him,

concerns for economic prosperity and political security force him to live in a one-dimensional world.<sup>47</sup> To align himself with the traders and not the traded, he knowingly subordinates his family's darker Filipino ties to its lighter European and North American ones. His repeated loss of the family genealogy frees Mr. Gonzaga to remember that his great grandfather comes from "Sevilla" (sic) while forgetting that his great grandmother comes from Cebu. Likewise, when his mestiza mother visits from Spain she receives a hero's welcome while his Filipina mother-in-law eats with the servants. Having dismissed the encumbrance of his Filipino heritage, Mr. Gonzaga acts like a flexible citizen in his own nation. He claims to be a "guest" who believes in "dual citizenships," and "dual passports." He credits his family's survival to such rootlessness, pointing to the history of complicity between the Filipino ruling class and its colonial occupiers when he says, "Adaptability is the simple secret of survival."<sup>48</sup>

Rio recounts her father's devotion to Severo Alacran, the most powerful man in the Philippines. Similarly rootless, with the "aquiline nose of a Spanish mestizo" and a wife who "reconstructed her life and past, to suit her taste," Severo embodies the force of international capital that, in Hagedorn's portrayal, has dominated Filipino politics and subordinated Filipino culture since colonization.<sup>49</sup> He owns everything from the dominant Sportex department store to a munitions factory. Furthermore, as "King of Coconuts," a man who "tells the President what to do," Severo "does business with everyone. Japs, GI's, guerillas in the jungle."<sup>50</sup> To create intimacy between himself and the Alacrans, Mr. Gonzaga instructs Rio and her brother Raul to call Severo and his wife Isabel "tito" and "tita" for "uncle" and "aunt." The association moves the Gonzagas closer to the "civilized" ideals of a wealthy

Westernized family and further from the “barbarity” of Filipino “childhood” by implying that blood rather than business connects the Gonzagas to Severo’s money and status.

Through Mr. Gonzaga’s acceptance of indiscriminate “family” ties, Hagedorn shows how survival (civilization) requires self-subordination (self-infantilization). When faced with his own tokenization in the gift shop trade, Mr. Gonzaga “chooses” the innocence of the wealthy colonizer. Like a producer of American movies, he follows the logic of profitability rather than accountability. Rio feels disappointed that she must reconstruct her family’s history out of movie clips. She cannot distinguish between her ancestors’ lives and the imagined lives of Hollywood characters because her father’s denial of the colonial past has flattened her world. She exists only in the present of a one-dimensional childhood, suspended between her future “civilization” in Hollywood’s imaginary America and the “barbarity” of her lost colonial past. Through Rio’s adolescents, therefore, Hagedorn charts the powerful legacy of infantilization that undermines the counterhegemonic potential of Filipina memory in the United States.

Ironically, Rio longs for the American qualities of her childhood *from* America—the Promised Land that should have fulfilled her childhood fantasies. Hagedorn critic Caroline Hau asks of *Dogeaters*, “Why the nostalgia for childhood?”<sup>51</sup> The answer: through nostalgia, Rio extends her childhood fantasies about America to the disillusioned present where, not surprisingly, life in the United States falls short of her expectations. Disillusionment resounds in the silence of letters home that say little about America’s paradise. When Rio does break her silence, she acknowledges a

rupture between the American popular culture she consumed as a child and the American reality she experiences as an expatriate. As a young girl in the Philippines, Rio knew of two American Neds: Cary's son, Ned Scott, from All That Heaven Allows, and Nancy Drew's boyfriend, Ned Nickerson, from the popular Nancy Drew detective stories. In contrast, an adult Rio says, "Now, after all these years in America, I have yet to meet a man named "Ned" or anyone with the surname "Nickerson."<sup>52</sup> The absence of "Neds" suggests a similar absence of Jane Wymans and the attendant freedoms of sexual expression and fulfillment that her whiteness embodied for Rio.

In addition to such shortcomings, Hagedorn lets Rio's silence speak to the shock of watching America's innocence unravel in the face of its racist realities. San Juan explains that Filipinos "identify themselves as 'Americans' before they become citizens because they are "in a world they've lived in before—not just in Hollywood fantasies but in the material culture of everyday life." Experiences of "rejection or discrimination," therefore, leave them "puzzled, wounded," and "feeling culpable."<sup>53</sup> Rio combines fantasy and material reality in the simulacrum at Baguio. In America, however, Rio faces disparities between the realities of her expatriate life and the fantasy of her Baguio life. While Rio fails to explicitly address whether or not America accepts or rejects her, the title of her favorite film significantly points to her fantasy's limitations. It suggests that the Baguio simulacrum offers Rio "all that heaven allows" of her American fantasy. Hagedorn also addresses the issue when she fills Rio's silence about her adulthood in America with nostalgia for her childhood in the Philippines. As Rio longs for the one-dimensional childhood where her fantasies

of America still rang true, Hagedorn illustrates yet another way that empire “lingers,” theorizing that expatriate women who long for their Filipina childhood exercise a self-subordinating desire for their youthful faith in American innocence.

Rio’s nostalgia reaches beyond her fantasies of what *America* should have been like. San Juan explains that because of the unique colonial relationship between the United States and the Philippines, the “impossible desire of returning to the homeland, whether in reality or fantasy” plagues Filipinos more than any other Asian-American community. He attributes the impossibility of return to that fact that, after colonialism, “the authentic homeland doesn’t exist.”<sup>54</sup> Hagedorn addresses such concerns for Filipinas in particular through Rio’s memories of her “small brown skinned” grandmother, *Lola* Narcisa. Unlike her paternal grandmother, *abuelita* Socorro, whose presence in the novel represents the family’s Spanish connections, and whose status in the family represents the nation’s proclivity for celebrating things Western, Rio remembers *Lola* Narcisa as someone who resides outside the Gonzaga family circle. She embarrasses Rio’s brother and, by mutual agreement with Rio’s parents, eats with the servants. She also allows Rio to listen to Love Letters—a popular Filipino-produced radio-show that Mr. Gonzaga prohibits because he feels it caters to the supposedly less discriminate “bakya” crowd.<sup>55</sup> Finally, Rio fondly remembers skipping an extravagant meal in honor of *abuelita* Socorro to enjoy “a secret midnight feast” where she and *Lola* Narcisa reject Western foods and utensils to eat “rice, *lechon*, *kangkong adobo*, and more *leche flan*” with their hands.<sup>56</sup> Since *Lola* Narcisa lives a peripheral life, Rio believes that her time with her *lola* represents a more authentic native experience. Through Rio’s memories of her grandmother,

therefore, Hagedorn identifies nostalgia as a coping mechanism for the “impossible desire” to return home.

Rio, however, transforms her *lola* into a caricature that fits neatly into America’s ideas about life on its innocent frontiers. Her memory excludes the colonial violence that dismantled native cultures such as *Lola Narcisa*’s. Thus, when Rio sees her *lola*’s brown-skinned painting of the Madonna as a comforting sign of native authenticity, she fails to connect the presence of the Madonna at all (in any color) with past Spanish-imposed Catholicism. Furthermore, Rio expresses no concern that her memories of *Lola Narcisa* all occur within the comfort of a home that Mr. Gonzaga affords through his complicity with Madame’s dictatorship. She unworriedly explains that her father “makes sure *Lola Narcisa*’s basic needs are met” by paying doctor’s bills and providing room and board.<sup>57</sup> Like the time she spends with her mother, Rio’s time with her grandmother occurs in isolation. Thus, Rio only remembers *Lola Narcisa* as quiet, content and withdrawn to her room. She fails to register her *lola*’s perspective on life as the wife and widow of an American military man. Nor does she understand *Lola Narcisa*’s present compromise as Mr. Gonzaga’s less- than-welcome dependent. Instead, Rio depicts an “authentic” Filipina heritage that bears little more depth than a Hollywood caricature of a dark, sweet, silent and dependant Filipina native. While Rio misunderstands her grandmother’s life the same way she misunderstood Cary Scott’s, Hagedorn shows how her investments in ideologies of innocence limit her ability to clearly comprehend the plight suffered by Filipina women during centuries of colonialism. Consequently, she ironically longs for the condition she seeks to escape. In addition, through Rio’s oversimplified memories,

Hagedorn suggests that expatriate efforts to combat the oppressions of the present with the authenticity of the past both rely on and perpetuate America's innocent view of its conquered frontiers.

Hagedorn further complicates Rio's search for authenticity when she suggests that American imperialism has also infiltrated the Filipino-produced popular culture of the "bakyas." For example, Steve says that Romeo Rosales has a "pathetic Elvis pompadour—out-of-sync and dated." In addition, a talent show announcer introduces one young contestant as "THE BARBARA STREISAND OF THE PHILIPPINES!" while the narrator characterizes the host of the hottest Filipino talk show, "*Girl Talk*," as "the Barbara Walters of the Philippines."<sup>58</sup> In the tradition of Bhabha's mimicry, Hagedorn represents each Filipino case as "almost the same" as its American predecessor, but less mature, less seductive, less white. Although Rio's fond memories of watching Love Letters with *Lola Narcisa* seem to contradict her longing for the movie theaters of her youth, Hagedorn suggests that Filipino-produced culture behaves like All That Heaven Allows. It encourages Rio to overlook the colonial violence that clearly shaped *Lola Narcisa*'s past and, under Mr. Gonzaga's neocolonial watch, continues to shape her present. In Dogeaters, nostalgic expatriates perpetuate American ideals, even when they appear to reject them.

Rio's backward-looking narrative aligns Dogeaters with a literary tradition that, according to Campomanes, differs from other ethnic writings. Campomanes argues that Filipino expatriates do not see the United States as the "promised-land." Instead, he says "the Filipino case represents a reverse telos, an opposite movement" that substitutes exile for immigration in a literature where "Motifs of departure,

nostalgia, incompleteness, rootlessness, leave taking, and dispossession recur with force.”<sup>59</sup> Hagedorn qualifies Campomanes’ tradition of “nostalgia” and “dispossession,” however, when she suggests that nostalgic feelings unwittingly reinscribe American discourses of white patriarchal innocence. In fact, Dogeaters itself has not escaped criticism that it reiterates American ideals—especially through its representation of American popular culture like All That Heaven Allows. Lee defends the novel against such criticism, explaining that it derives its strength from what others call a “weakness” because the enticing quality of Hagedorn’s Hollywood asks the reader to “sympathize with the journey toward political “awakening”” that faces a character like Rio.<sup>60</sup>

While Hagedorn lets Rio reproduce the seductive aspects of American culture, however, she critiques its professed innocence on other fronts. In particular, she attacks the Walt Disney Corporation—a company that Giroux claims has equated innocence and nostalgia with American patriotism.<sup>61</sup> For example, the chapter entitled “Sleeping Beauty” clearly appropriates Walt Disney’s 1959 film of the same name. In Disney’s telling, a beautiful white maiden lies dormant until a handsome young prince frees her by waking and marrying her. Conversely, Hagedorn’s chapter recounts the story of a young Filipina beauty queen, Daisy, whose ultimate wakefulness frees her from the patriarchal exploitations of a “government-endorsed” beauty pageant.<sup>62</sup> Similarly, when Joey Sands, a child-prostitute, remembers seeing a show entitled “Seven Little Dwarves Direct from Zamboanga,” Hagedorn alludes to another Disney classic, Snow White and the Seven Dwarves (1937). Joey says the dwarves were “asleep in matching cribs, unfortunate infants with the wrinkled faces of old men,

dressed in red jester's caps and matching red booties."<sup>63</sup> His uncomfortable description of adult bodies in infant clothes transforms American innocence into the ridiculous distortion of a Manilan freak show. Through the contrast between Hagedorn's monstrous Disney and Rio's seductive Hollywood, the novel emphasizes how a nostalgic view can reproduce rather than subvert ideologies of innocence.

Hagedorn also undermines Rio's nostalgia through parallel voices that reside outside her privileged class. These voices portray both a Philippines and a Hollywood that differ wildly from Rio's fantasy. While the murders of Romeo and his girlfriend Trinidad represent the futility faced by workers who toil in dead-end jobs, Joey Sands embodies the degradation wrought by the entertainment industry they idolize. The illegitimate son of a black American military man and a Filipina prostitute, Joey is a literal product of the imperialist sexualization of Filipina women. When he takes the name of the Sands Hotel in Las Vegas as his surname, Hagedorn represents him as the symbolic progeny of the American entertainment industry. Not surprisingly, Joey adheres to his legacy by working in the same sex-industry that ruined his mother. With a secret drug addiction for his only pleasure, Joey believes he can escape by prostituting himself to foreign dignitaries and American military personnel. Like Romeo's futile dreams of stardom, Joey imagines that he will meet a wealthy Westerner who will prize him enough to take him home. With these and other voices, Hagedorn adds depth and contrast to Rio's one-dimensional memory. She perverts Rio's nostalgia, showing that Rio longs for the conditions of neocolonial martial law that murder Romeo and Trinidad, prostitute Joey, and through her father's complicity with Madame's dictatorship, benefit her.

While Rio relinquishes the colonial past for an imaginary American future, multiple narratives show that she also detaches herself from her political present. Lee speculates on how or why Hagedorn confused the dates of the Marcos dictatorship,<sup>64</sup> but it is *Rio*, not *Hagedorn*, who is confused. Imelda and Ferdinand Marcos ruled the Philippines from 1965 to 1986. Although Hagedorn unmistakably models Madame, the “Steel Butterfly,” after Imelda Marcos, the “Iron Butterfly,” Rio insists that her story begins in 1956. Thus, she contextualizes her childhood in the year after All That Heaven Allows was released rather than in the years when Madame would have ruled. In the new context, Rio substitutes the film’s images for the conditions of martial law that dominate the novel’s other narratives. Significantly, Rio’s commodity fetishism detaches her from the political realities of the U.S. as well. Her insistence on 1956 allows her to imagine a United States that predates the Civil Rights Movement. More importantly, Rio’s obsession with the film’s version of 1950s America distracts her from the imperialist conflicts between the United States and Asia that occurred after a brief United States alliance with the Philippines during World War II.<sup>65</sup> Such conflicts, begun in Korea in 1950 and expanded to Vietnam in the 1960s and 70s, continue up to and beyond the time of Dogeaters’ publication with the inclusion of North Korea in President Bush’s “Axis of Evil.” The distinction between Rio and Hagedorn’s confusion makes the difference between a story that occurs before the political turmoil of the late twentieth century and a narrator too inadequate to account for it.

Ultimately, Hagedorn completely dismantles Rio’s authority by giving voice to Pucha’s claim that Rio “got it all wrong.” Pucha tells Rio what the reader already

knows: “1956 makes no sense.” While the voices of other characters corroborate Pucha’s criticism, they fail to install a new authority. Pucha argues that “It must have started around 1959,” while references to Barbara Walters, Clint Eastwood and Barbara Streisand place the narrative loosely in the 1960s, and mention of the song “Feelings” and the popular American nightclub, Studio 54, decisively points to the 1970s.<sup>66</sup> The confusion suggests that none of the novel’s narrators hold the key to an “authentic” history of the Philippines. Rio’s account stands out, however, because it presents the only irresolvable conflict in dates. Significantly, only her story emerges from an innocent childhood afforded by the economic and political privileges of a neocolonial mestizo class. It also frames the novel, providing the dominant account into which the other voices interject. As Rio’s privilege enables her to immigrate and eventually tell her story, Hagedorn makes a correlation between the person with the means to speak and the person who has the least authority to remember.

Through Rio’s inadequacy, Hagedorn undermines her own narrative authority. Instead of claiming an authentic Filipina history, Dogeaters illustrates its loss to American innocence. Rio understands and laments the loss of nation when she says, “I am anxious and restless, at home only in airports. I travel whenever I can.”<sup>67</sup> Despite her understanding, however, she remains trapped in her desire for a home. Hagedorn portrays the futility of invisibility when Rio dreams that, “my brother and I inhabit the translucent bodies of nocturnal moths” who “flap and beat our wings in our futile attempts to reach what surely must be heaven.” In her dream, heaven resides in a “mysterious light glowing from the window of a deserted, ramshackle house” that evokes the disappointing remains of her childhood home in the Philippines.<sup>68</sup>

Since Dogeaters refuses to save Rio from her futile pursuit of home, Hagedorn trades the innocence of happy endings for the flexible citizen's homelessness. Accordingly, Lee argues that Hagedorn avoids a “positivist counterhegemonic representational strategy” by adopting a “negative critical practice” that makes way for alternatives.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, through the use of multiple narratives that offer an array of unfinished possibilities rather than one complete truth, Hagedorn avoids the pitfalls of nostalgic yearning and racist caricature that accompany Rio’s positivism. She implements a “negative critical practice” by forsaking *what* Americans subsume in the ideology of innocence for the story of its irrecoverability. Thus, she juxtaposes McKinley’s benevolent posturing with a story of amputated history, thwarted assimilation, infantilized silence, and invisibility. The juxtaposition stands out as a reminder rather than a foil for the physical and epistemic violence that innocent histories have obscured from the nation-building frontiers of America’s colonial past to the defensive imperialism of its postnational present.

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<sup>1</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, “From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse,” in The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays, edited by Michael Holquist, translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 49.

<sup>2</sup> Renato Constantino, The Philippines: A Past Revisited (Quezon City: Tala Publishing Services, 1975), 163.

<sup>3</sup> Benedict Anderson, “Cacique Democracy in the Philippines: Origins and Dreams,” in Discrepant Histories: Translocal Essays on Filipino Cultures, edited by Vicente L. Rafael (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 5.

<sup>4</sup> To avoid the syntactical awkwardness of “Filipino/a,” I use the term “Filipino,” but I acknowledge the problems inherent in using the masculine form, especially given Hagedorn’s emphasis on the ways that

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masculinist constructions of nation exploit femininity. I treat the descriptor “mestizo” similarly. See note 11 below for a definition of mestizo.

<sup>5</sup> Mestizo refers to the descendants of Spanish or Chinese fathers and native mothers. Spanish mestizos first claim the term “Filipino,” but Chinese mestizos, as well as natives who had “hispanicized” themselves, also appropriated the term, Constantino, 117, 147.

<sup>6</sup> Anderson, “Cacique Democracy,” 8-9; Constantino, 146-147.

<sup>7</sup> Constantino, 161-163.

<sup>8</sup> David Traxel, 1898: The Birth of the American Century (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 217, 223-224; Constantino, 208-210.

<sup>9</sup> Traxel, 224-225; Constantino, 208-209.

<sup>10</sup> With benevolent assimilation McKinley also responded to the wishes of an American public that had come to equate colonization with liberation. Traxel points to this phenomenon when he quotes from a national chain letter that beseeched McKinley to “do all in [his] power to keep the Philippine Islands and make them free,” 266.

<sup>11</sup> William McKinley’s address to a delegation of Methodist churchmen. Quoted in Traxel, 284.

<sup>12</sup> Against the will of the Filipino people, Aguinaldo and his elite peers set up the New Philippine Republic as a dictatorship, seizing church-owned properties instead of redistributing them to the masses as expected. In lieu of full political autonomy, they sought an American protectorate that would preserve their privileges. While Filipino commoners had no intention of accepting United States rule, therefore, Aguinaldo would not have sanctioned fighting without provocation. Constantino, 202-203, 215.

<sup>13</sup> Vicente L. Rafael, White Love and Other Events in Filipino History (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 54-55.

<sup>14</sup> E. San Juan, Jr. Racial Formations/Critical Transformations: Articulations of Power in Ethnic and Racial Studies in the United States (New Jersey: Humanity Press, 1992), 117.

<sup>15</sup> Campomanes, 52.

<sup>16</sup> San Juan, Racial Formations, 117; Campomanes, 52.

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<sup>17</sup> Aihwa Ong, Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 6.

<sup>18</sup> Jenny Sharpe, "Is the United States Postcolonial? Transnationalism, Immigration, and Race," in Postcolonial America (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 105-106.

<sup>19</sup> San Juan specifically points to Peter Stanley's revisionist work, Reappraising an Empire: New Perspectives on Philippine-American History (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), as an example of U.S. scholarship that fails to hold the United States responsible for its colonial past in Reading the West/Writing the East: Studies in Comparative Literature and Culture (New York: Peter Lang, 1992), 3.

<sup>20</sup> Anderson, "Cacique Democracy," 10.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 13; San Juan, Reading the West, 4.

<sup>22</sup> Groups such as AIC dedicate themselves to curtailing future immigration and denying federal benefits such as education and healthcare to illegal immigrants. Proposition 187, or the Illegal Aliens Law, denies healthcare, social services and education to undocumented immigrants in California. In The Death of the West: How Dying Populations and Immigrant Invasions Imperil Our Country and Civilization (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2002), Patrick J. Buchanan argues that immigration threatens America's national identity.

<sup>23</sup> Lisa Lowe, Immigrant Acts (Durham: Duke UP, 1996), 113.

<sup>24</sup> N.V.M. Gonzalez speculates as to whether Dog eaters should be labeled a Filipino or an American text in his Book Review, Amerasia Journal 17, no. 1 (1991): 191. Caroline S. Hau notes similar contradictions, explaining that the book jacket credits the work to *American* literature while the publishers capitalize on the authenticity gained in advertising Dog eaters' Philippine-born author in her essay, "Dog eaters, Postmodernism and the "Worlding of the Philippines,"" in Philippine Post-Colonial Studies: Essays on Language and Literature, edited by Christina Pantoja Hidalgo and Priscelina Patajo-Legasto (Diliman, Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1993), 114.

<sup>25</sup> Rafael, 1.

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<sup>26</sup> Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The ambivalence of colonial discourse," in The Location of Culture (New York: Routledge, 1994), 86.

<sup>27</sup> Rafael, 165, 182.

<sup>28</sup> For a discussion of innocence in Walt Disney attractions such as "Main Street USA," see Henry Giroux, The Mouse That Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1999), 89.

<sup>29</sup> Jessica Hagedorn, Dogeaters (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 3.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Rachel Lee, The Americas of Asian American Literature: Gendered Fictions of Nation and Transnation (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 99.

<sup>32</sup> Hagedorn, 4.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 3; Lee, 83.

<sup>34</sup> Hagedorn, 65.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 84.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 86.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 236. Igorot means "mountain people" in Tagalog. Its derogatory connotation suggests social inferiority.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 183.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 157.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 224.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 123, 134. Rafael defines "bomba" in three related ways. He explains that it refers to a literal bomb, to a piece of scandalous political gossip, and to the women's bodies that are exposed in pornographic movies. Rafael compares the beautiful Imelda Marcos to a bomba, explaining that she often sang at her husband's campaign rallies, transforming political participation into passive spectatorship, 132. In "Desiring Images: Representation and Spectacle in Dogeaters," in Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction 43.3 (2002): 289-304, Myra Mendible argues that Imelda Marcos'

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body served as “the locus of conflicting signs, both vulnerable and powerful; as the national text through which subjects reflect their own desires and authorize their own subjugation,” 290.

<sup>43</sup> Lee, 82.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 101.

<sup>45</sup> Constantino, 215.

<sup>46</sup> San Juan, Articulations, 125.

<sup>47</sup> For other characters who wield less economic power, such as Trinidad Gamboa and Romeo Rosales (a retail clerk and a bus boy respectively), such choices prove fatal. Lost in their fantasies of Hollywood glamour, both fall prey to the political machine they ignore when the police frame Romeo for the assassination of Senator Avila. Although Hagedorn likens Romeo to an infant when Steve, the reporter, calls him a “chubby-faced waiter” who is “certainly innocent,” Hagedorn makes clear that neither Romeo nor Trinidad actually believed that Romeo could save them by winning a talent show competition. Rather, like Mr. Gonzaga, they clung to it for lack of an alternative, 222.

<sup>48</sup> Hagedorn, 7. In “Cacique Democracy,” Anderson provides a historical summary of the collusion between the Filipino ruling class and the colonial power at hand. He traces their cooperation with the American military during the Spanish-American War, the American government that allowed for open trade in the early twentieth century, the Japanese military during World War II, and finally, with the military contracts made with the American government during the post-World War II era.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 18, 20.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Hau, 122.

<sup>52</sup> Hagedorn, 6.

<sup>53</sup> San Juan, Racial Formations, 117.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 123.

<sup>55</sup> “Bakya” refers to those with less education and income. Rafael explains that the “bakya” class would be more likely to attend Filipino films, 172.

<sup>56</sup> Hagedorn, 91.

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 222, 76, 21.

<sup>59</sup> Campomanes, 51.

<sup>60</sup> Lee, 74. Similarly, Hau explains that Hagedorn's "complicitous critique" operates as it must, from within its object of criticism, 116.

<sup>61</sup> Henry Giroux, Mouse, 30.

<sup>62</sup> Hagedorn, 101.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 35.

<sup>64</sup> Lee, 85.

<sup>65</sup> During World War II, the United States fought to defend the Philippines from Japanese invasion. Outnumbered and stranded on the Bataan Peninsula, the United States and Filipino troops surrendered to the Japanese in April 1942. What followed became known as the "Bataan Death March" as the Japanese marched their already weakened prisoners over one hundred miles to Camp O'Donnel. Soldiers who could not keep up were brutally murdered.

<sup>66</sup> Hagedorn, 248; Morris Albert made "Feelings" famous in the United States in 1975. Studio 54 opened in New York in 1977.

<sup>67</sup> Hagedorn, 247.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Lee, 103.

CHAPTER TWO  
Consuming Families, Infant Parents and Fascism  
in Don DeLillo's White Noise

People who shut their eyes to reality simply invite their own  
destruction, and anyone who insists on remaining in a state of  
innocence long after that innocence is dead turns himself into a  
monster.

—James Baldwin<sup>1</sup>

While Jessica Hagedorn's Dogeaters (1990) appropriates the infantilizing rhetoric of U.S.- Philippine colonial relations, Don DeLillo's White Noise (1984) satirizes innocent childhood as a white middle-class ideal in late twentieth-century America. Like Hagedorn's disillusioned expatriate narrator, Jack and Babette Gladney, the main characters in White Noise, seek refuge from their adulthood in nostalgia for the whiteness, privilege and oblivion of innocent childhood. DeLillo critics point out that thematic concerns regarding white identity appear often in American literature. Tim Engles explains that writers like Ernest Hemingway and Mark Twain have let meritocracy validate white privilege by depicting the self-made man as a white man. In addition, Frank Lentricchia observes that the first person narrators in works by Herman Melville, Mark Twain, and F. Scott Fitzgerald resemble DeLillo's because they share a belief in the purity of their whiteness.<sup>2</sup> I contend, however, that Jack and Babette share anxiety rather than security with their white literary forebears.

DeLillo connects the Gladneys' nostalgia for childhood to the uncertainties of the rapidly changing world in which he published White Noise. While Melville grappled with the moral quandaries of Pacific imperialism and continental slavery, Twain confronted resistance to black citizenship in the post-Civil War South. Fitzgerald faced American anxieties over increased immigration post-World War I. In

the wake of a fading World War II triumph, DeLillo depicts America that has encountered international crises such as the Bay of Pigs fiasco in 1961, the dramatic escalation of the Cold War with the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, a defeat in Vietnam in 1973 and the Iran hostage crisis begun in 1979. While the sum of these events intimate national vulnerability, the combined effects of multinational capital and the Civil Rights Movement challenge the equation of America with whiteness. DeLillo portrays white middle-class anxiety about more fluid national boundaries in Jack's obsession with the national and ethnic origins of everyone around him.<sup>3</sup> In addition, Jack and Babette enfigure the backlash against Civil Rights legislation that began in the 1970s, prompting race critics like Etienne Balibar to complain that racism is worsening in the 1980s.<sup>4</sup> Americans who ignore histories of oppression view privilege as merit; thus, they make accusations of reverse discrimination from the infantilized immediacy of Now. Through Jack and Babette's infatuation with the present, DeLillo models advantaged whites who view racial integration as a personal assault.

DeLillo invokes the trope of innocent childhood as an expression of social and political denial on the historical heels of the Civil Rights Movement. During the 1960s, young people represented anything but conformance and oblivion. Instead, youthful "politicos" joined the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) or otherwise aligned themselves with the New Left to protest race and sex discrimination, poverty, the growing power of large corporations and the Vietnam War. Concurrently, youth ranging from young adolescence to twenty-something participated in a growing counterculture that celebrated antiestablishment values such as sexual promiscuity, drug use and anti-materialism.<sup>5</sup> Calling themselves "flower children," members of the

counterculture conjured childhood's symbolic power to express their discontent. Flower children received, and continue to receive, far more mainstream attention than their more politicized counterparts, despite the fact that many of them were "antipolitical purists."<sup>6</sup> On one hand, as self-described children of nature who celebrated libidinal desire, they embodied the unrestrained, instinctual child. On the other, as spiritually wise psychedelic drug users, they represented childhood as closer to a divine or otherwise greater truth. In the former they evoked danger and fear as exemplified by the term "freaks." In the latter they inspired fascination and admiration as evidenced by the tour busses that roamed the Haight-Ashbury district. Finally, while they might inspire a postmodern-style nostalgia for their fashion and free will in the twenty-first century, they did not fill their disconcerted parents with a desire for the innocence of childhood.

After the political fervor of the 1960s winds to a close, the counterculture also fades, with its "children" either receding to a variety of largely unsuccessful communes, or simply blending back into the mainstream as grown-ups. In White Noise, innocent childhood supplants rebellious youth. While Jack and Babette appear to believe deeply in childhood's inherent innocence, however, DeLillo explicitly documents both its construction and their part in it. To foster innocence, Jack and Babette rely on the same familial and consumer cultures that rebellious 1960s youth rejected. Together, these factors insulate and distract the children from the world around them in White Noise. Furthermore, since Jack and Babette create the oblivion that they in turn desire, DeLillo suggests that the ideology of childhood innocence

serves adults before it serves children. Ultimately, DeLillo speculates that “innocent” citizens are dangerous citizens when Jack regresses to violence.

The feelings of infringement that worry Jack and Babette appear metaphorically in White Noise when a toxic cloud invades the Gladneys’ town of Blacksmith. It darkens and colors the sky, symbolically blurring the finer distinctions of race, nation and family. When the cloud forces the Gladneys to evacuate their home and take shelter next to “a black family of Jehovah’s Witnesses,” the immediate proximity of a nonwhite family gives literal shape to the symbolic muddle of the sky. The narrator describes the unnamed father of the black family in almost animalistic terms: “He was a rangy man with sparse hair and a gap between his two front teeth. He squatted easily, seemed loose-jointed and comfortable.”<sup>7</sup> In addition, as Jack speaks with the man, he notes they assume an “aboriginal crouch” —as if this dark-skinned person diminishes Jack’s civilized status.

Even more telling, the man’s apocalyptic predictions prophesize an impending end to Jack’s white world. In an age of decolonization, the man points to the receding strength of white empires such as the United States and Britain. He says, “What is coming is definitely coming. No government in the world is big enough to stop it.” He forces Jack to acknowledge the growing military strength of Asia when he asks, “Does a man like yourself know the size of India’s standing army?” and “Do you know who’s got the biggest standing army in the world?” Jack responds, “China or Russia,” and then, perhaps remembering the United States debacle in Vietnam he adds, “although the Vietnamese ought to be mentioned.”<sup>8</sup> By situating a discussion of Asia’s emergent military in a room full of displaced white people, DeLillo creates an image of white

vulnerability. Jack's discomfort enhances the effect, portraying a humorously exaggerated, but defensive and fearful white male middle class.

DeLillo combines concern over shrinking empires with the anxiety over the dissolving boundaries that overwhelm his domestic scene. In "Globalization in America: The Case of Don DeLillo's White Noise," Thomas Peyser observes the globalizing effects that surround the Gladneys, pointing to the international foods they find in their grocery store and the proliferation of languages they hear at the mall.<sup>9</sup> In addition, Engles notes that Jack feels discomfort because his Iranian newspaper carrier drives a Japanese car.<sup>10</sup> The elusive national and ethnic origins of Heinrich's friend Orest also threaten Jack. He wonders "what kind of name is Orest?" and considers a laundry list of potential nationalities, ethnicities and races that range from "dark-skinned Eastern European" to "light-skinned black."<sup>11</sup> Since Jack defines his own whiteness by categorizing darkness in others, DeLillo dismisses essentialist notions of race, showing how definitions of white identity rely on an identifiable nonwhite Other. Such relativism explains why Jack feels racial anxiety rather than racial security amid demographic change.

Jack and Babette's unease regarding race and nation manifests itself as a fear of death. Engles argues that Jack struggles primarily with the white "fantasy of autonomous selfhood," where white Americans think of themselves as individuals, not as members of a race.<sup>12</sup> With America's changing demography, it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain the unmarked normality of whiteness. Without it, Engles asserts, the white individual would "die"—membership in a racial or ethnic group would inevitably evoke the histories of oppression that quietly constitute white

collective identity.<sup>13</sup> Jack recognizes the danger when he speculates with horror that death could be “uniform, white.”<sup>14</sup> The discovery of white privilege would also jeopardize the construction of self/other by constituting others as equals instead of as inferiors. Thus, Jack and Babette endure the contradictory position of having to defend against two different deaths. In the more obvious case, they must protect the white collective from the invading people of color who blur racial and ethnic categories. At the same time, to remain entitled to their “singularly earned” privileges, Jack and Babette must deny that a white collective exists in the first place. Avoiding the former death protects the category of whiteness; avoiding the latter makes that category invisible.

Jack disguises his membership in a white collective by refraining from openly racist comments. When he cannot categorize Orest, Jack complains that it is “getting hard to know what you couldn’t say to people.”<sup>15</sup> With Jack’s complaint, DeLillo suggests that white Americans feel obligated to appear respectful of all difference while they privately harbor resentment. Jack performs the masquerade so well that he hides his racism from himself. Engles points out that Jack transfers his discomfort regarding the newspaper carrier from the ethnicity of the driver to the national origin of the car because he has “adopted the polite middle-class reluctance to consider an overtly racialized individual in overtly racist terms.”<sup>16</sup> Having buried both his racism and his membership in a white collective, Jack can view himself as a victim of immigration rather than as a privileged oppressor of immigrants.

DeLillo expands such denials to Jack’s community in the opening scene of the novel where Jack lays out the socioeconomic landscape of an imagined nation. When

he describes the line of station wagons that returns students to the college where he teaches, he only alludes to the group's whiteness by mentioning their "conscientious suntans." More prominently, Jack identifies class as their common denominator by observing bicycles, skis, saddles, stereos, personal computers and, of course, the station wagons themselves. Jack explains that the ritual of returning their children to school serves as "renewal" for these parents because it reassures them to "[see] images of themselves in every direction." To Jack, the ritualistic gathering of the "like-minded" and "spiritually akin" helps the parents locate themselves as members of "a people, a nation." Since he appears to ignore their common race, Jack excludes himself from the crowd by virtue of class, noting that his station wagon is "small, it's metallic gray, it has one whole rusted door."<sup>17</sup> In their "politically correct" times, the families draw comfort from their shared race without admitting it—leaving, as Jack does, their homogeneity unstated. Jack's denial exemplifies what really unites the "nation." No one in the line, including Jack, questions the connection between common race and common class. Instead, they share the belief that they deserve their privilege. Jack tells Babette that "They've grown comfortable with their money" and that "They genuinely believe they're entitled to it."<sup>18</sup> Emulating the innocent child, they feign historical ignorance, escaping responsibility for histories of institutionalized racial oppression that continue to benefit them.<sup>19</sup>

When the toxic cloud forces Jack's family to evacuate their home, his feelings of entitlement come to the fore. In his outrage, he reveals his race and class prejudices to Heinrich. He says, "These things happen to poor people in exposed areas. Society is set up in such a way that it's the poor and the uneducated who suffer the main impact

of natural and man-made disaster...did you ever see a college professor rowing a boat down his own street in one of those TV floods?" Under threat, Jack emphasizes his personal accomplishments, saying, "I'm not just a college professor. I'm the head of a department. I don't see myself fleeing an airborne toxic event. That's for people who live in mobile homes out in the scrubby parts of the county, where the fish hatcheries are."<sup>20</sup> Although Jack still fails to explicitly acknowledge his whiteness, his comments carry racial innuendo. Histories of discrimination have successfully segregated a predominantly white middle and upper class from America's darker lower classes. While many people manage to cross the lines, their racial categories often change with their class. The term "white trash," for example, suggests that poor whites are less white while upwardly mobile black Americans are often accused of being less black. Since the mobile home is not "white" enough to line up with a station wagon, Jack insinuates that white people should not have to evacuate their homes. Full of entitlement, Jack accepts that "society is set up in such a way" to ensure his safety. With this admission, he concedes his place in a privileged collective. Thus, DeLillo ridicules white entitlement by giving voice to the unspeakable. With outrageous and comedic effect, he allows Jack to articulate what a polite middle-class white person might think, but would never openly say.

When not asserting his entitlement, Jack preoccupies himself with forgetting it by emulating Babette's toddler son, Wilder. Without a history in the eyes of his parents, Wilder embodies their innocent ideal. Jack says "[Wilder] took what he could, then immediately forgot it in the rush of a subsequent pleasure. It was this forgetfulness I envied and admired." Both parents admit that being near Wilder makes

them feel better, and Jack marvels that Wilder's selfish ability to drop one thing and move to another is "the spirit of genius at work." Jack longs for this ability; he wants to be the child who has no past. Similarly, Babette lives almost entirely in the present. According to her, she forgets "names, faces, phone numbers, addresses, appointments, instructions, directions." When Jack consoles Babette, saying, "Forgetfulness has gotten into the air and water. It's entered the food chain," he identifies forgetfulness as a cultural phenomenon.<sup>21</sup> In Jack's acceptance, DeLillo points to the ease with which American amnesia reproduces itself.

When Jack describes Wilder's selfishness as "unbounded and natural," he uses vocabulary that dates to Jean-Jacque Rousseau's invention of innocent childhood in Emile: or On Education (1762).<sup>22</sup> Jack distinguishes between civilized selfishness and instinctual selfishness, however, when he admits that his older children annoy him when they act similarly. They remind Jack that he and his kids do not live in a pre-civilized, pre-historical world. To avoid this revelation, Jack and Babette help their children avoid history and its liabilities by enfolding them in their family, a complicated web of step members that critics align with both modern and postmodern family standards.<sup>23</sup>

The social upheavals of the Civil Rights Movement shook the modern family, creating families that Judith Stacey argues are "contested," "ambivalent," "fluid" a "pastiche" –what she calls a "postmodern family."<sup>24</sup> DeLillo exemplifies the confusion with the Gladneys' numerous ex-spouses and step-children. Anticipating Stacey, critic Mark Osteen calls the Gladneys' ever-changing family "postmodern."<sup>25</sup> The label, however, only applies to white families since the patchwork Osteen describes has

always characterized nonwhite families in America. Indeed, in a 1981 interview, James Baldwin dismisses the nuclear family as an institution in African American life, claiming instead that communities raise black children.<sup>26</sup> Similarities between the postmodern white family and the traditional nonwhite family suggest that postmodern conditions compromise the whiteness of the former.<sup>27</sup> The compromise takes on national resonance when considering the connections Lipsitz makes between the whiteness of the family and the whiteness of the nation. He shows how the national patriotism of D.W. Griffith's Birth of a Nation (1915) calls for white patriarchs to unite against all other differences to protect the purity of the white family against the threat of nonwhite enemies.<sup>28</sup> Thus, Griffith equates the protection of family with the protection of whiteness and nation. In this light, DeLillo's portrayal of white middle-class familial instability exacerbates the confused borders of race and nation that present themselves elsewhere in the novel.

After the divorce rate peaked in the 1970s, efforts to restabilize the modern family emerged. Stacey points out that since that time, amid a backlash against the postmodern family, Americans look nostalgically to the modern family as a symbol of better times.<sup>29</sup> While DeLillo's critics have often pointed to the postmodern qualities of the Gladney family, Thomas Ferraro claims that the Gladneys reconfigured their ex- and step family members into a postmodern reconstruction of a prototypical 1950s family.<sup>30</sup> Through the Gladneys' nostalgic reconstruction, DeLillo alludes to a larger desire: their nostalgia for a time when multiculturalism and transnationalism did not jeopardize the security of their white nation. Jack and Babette long for a time when

white middle-class boys on bicycles delivered newspapers, not Iranian men in Japanese cars.

Through their nostalgia for the modern family, Jack and Babette look to a time that subordinated women in the household. DeLillo published White Noise during the Reagan years, when the rhetoric of New Patriotism assigned family patriarchs the symbolic responsibility of protecting the white nation. Lipsitz argues that Reagan used the World War II era as a way of evoking nostalgia for the patriotism of an unintegrated America while also connecting a soldier's public (national) service to his private (familial) role as the patriarchal protector. Such connections existed long before the 1980s, of course. From the colonial rhetoric of Manifest Destiny, to segregationist justifications of Jim Crow, to the domesticating imperatives of the Cold War, "patriotism has often been constructed in the United States as a matter of a gendered and racialized obligation to paternal protection of the white family."<sup>31</sup>

Given the connection between patriotism and paternalism in the United States, DeLillo's account of Jack as a patriarchal protector reads as a patriotic desire to protect the white nation. Thus, Jack fulfills a public (national) service to the white nation through his private (familial) role as a patriarchal father who produces and protects white innocence. Rejecting his previous wives, whose worldliness more represents the heyday of late 1960s and 1970s feminism, he settles instead with Babette. When he relishes the way she "gathers and tends the children," Jack celebrates the containment of women in the domestic sphere.<sup>32</sup> With Babette in tow, Jack "protects" his children with empty assurances that deny the threat of the toxic cloud. While his fourteen-year-old son, Heinrich, watches the cloud from the attic, Jack repeatedly tells him, "It won't

come this way.” He also reassures nine-year-old Steffie that they will not have to evacuate their home. When asked “How do you know?” Jack can only counter, “I just know,” or “It just won’t,” or “Why should it?” He does not know, of course, but he wondered earlier, “Would I promote ignorance, prejudice and superstition to protect my family from the world?”<sup>33</sup> The answer turns out to be “yes” as he lies to Steffie and tells Heinrich that only people in mobile homes evacuate in times of disaster.

Babette follows suit. She relies on Jack to set the tone, asking if they should take the cloud more seriously and following his advice to ignore it. She even distracts the kids and turns the radio down so they will not hear the news. Murray, Jack’s friend and colleague, articulates the importance of such familial protection. He says, “We are fragile creatures surrounded by a world of hostile facts. Facts threaten our happiness and security...The family process works toward sealing off the world.” The Gladneys illustrate this when they sit down to dinner and “[avoid] each other’s eyes as a way of denying that something unusual [is] going on.”<sup>34</sup>

DeLillo metaphorically illustrates the protective function of family in the image of an evacuating family wrapped entirely in plastic. Just as the plastic-wrapped parents seal themselves off to protect their kids, Babette diminishes her own awareness when she turns the radio down. Likewise, Jack’s illogical insistence that the cloud “just won’t” approach them suggests that his assurances are meant to appease his own fears. Protecting the family’s innocence, in fact, delays their evacuation and ultimately threatens their lives. If Jack valued his children’s safety over his own oblivion, he would take no chances and evacuate immediately. Since Jack puts his children at risk, DeLillo suggests that patriarchal protection extends first to the security of whiteness

and its innocence, then to the security of the children. In Jack's selfishness, DeLillo treats innocence as an appropriated construct—an adult form of denial that comprises an essential component of privileged white identity rather than an inherent condition of childhood.

As a toddler, Wilder remains oblivious to the specific threat of the toxic cloud, but the older children experience frustration, and sometimes fear, because their parents refuse to be honest with them. Unable to get a straight answer at home—in what Jack calls the “cradle of the world's misinformation”—the children seek information from other sources.<sup>35</sup> They rely on friends, school and overwhelmingly, on the media. DeLillo portrays families and consumerism as complicit, however. Ferraro agrees, arguing that money defines kinship in White Noise.<sup>36</sup> DeLillo emphasizes the point when Jack and his family eat a fast food dinner. The portable meal allows them to eat in their car where fixed seating diminishes visual contact by forcing everyone to eat facing forward. DeLillo adds metaphoric layers to their separateness when the narrator explains that everyone “ate fully dressed, in hats and heavy coats, without speaking.”<sup>37</sup> Thus, the chicken-dinner-in-a-car illustrates how consumerism fundamentally divides the family members then superficially knits them back together as a (literally) consuming unit.

In another instance, Jack takes the family shopping after a colleague insults him. Jack says, “the encounter put me in the mood to shop.”<sup>38</sup> As justification for shopping, Jack declares an early Christmas, buying gifts for all. Ferraro claims that the shopping trip helps Jack to rebuild his esteem by reestablishing his authority as family patriarch. Consequently, the event substitutes for more direct familial support that could

otherwise restore Jack's authority. The scene, according to Ferraro, depicts patriarchal authority as an economic position, afforded because Jack earns the money and hence, acquires the means to give gifts. Ferraro adds that activities like shopping and going to Disneyland define the family in American culture.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, Jack and Babette expect that stepsisters Bee and Denise know each other well enough to share a bedroom simply because they met once at Disneyland.

References to Disney, by both Ferraro and DeLillo, allude to more than a simple shopping experience. The Gladneys' idea that a Disney excursion solidifies familial bonds resonates because, in America, the family that goes to Disney together participates in a distinctly national experience. As a symbol of American innocence, Disney organizes its amusements around forgetting. Rather than remember a national history that jeopardizes white privilege, Disney imagines a national innocence that substantiates the status quo. In The Mouse That Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence (1999), Henry Giroux claims that the racism, sexism and selective memory of Disney culture creates "a narrow view of family values," "a nostalgic and conservative view of history," and "a monolithic notion of national identity that treats subordinate groups as either exotic or irrelevant to American history."<sup>40</sup> Likewise, in their childlike oblivion, Jack and Babette let their uncomfortable family histories go the way of similarly unpleasant national histories. Thus, their divorces dissolve in the present moment of the Disney purchase. Without their respective pasts, Jack and Babette imagine that Bee and Denise share a family bond. For the Gladneys, the trip to Disneyland binds their innocent, childlike and American family together. In DeLillo's

portrayal, therefore, white nuclear families that subscribe to the ideology of innocence bear little more depth than a mall, an amusement park, or a bucket of chicken.

In White Noise, however, consuming families need not set out for malls or theme parks to go shopping. The television brings potential products and services right into the home. Several of DeLillo's critics point to the central role television plays in family life, arguing that while it introduces families to consumer goods, it also generates a self-reflexive desire for itself by creating needs or fears that it in turn satisfies.<sup>41</sup> Accordingly, media-induced fear preoccupies the Gladney children as the television bombards them with data that offers little use outside of capitalist exchange. The litanies of worthless information even dumbfound Babette, who asks, "Is this what they teach in school today?"<sup>42</sup> DeLillo emphasizes the point by exaggerating the children's fears to humorous ends. Nine-year-old Steffie checks regularly for breast lumps; Denise and Steffie together warn Babette about the health risks of chewing gum, and Heinrich expostulates about the risks of magnetic and radioactive waves within the household, insisting that the waves pose a more serious problem than does the toxic spill. When Heinrich suggests that the latter should be dismissed in order to "come to grips with the real issue," DeLillo offers a comedic critique of the media from within the system he targets, ridiculing the television messages he reproduces by exaggerating their effect.

Furthermore, the underlying seriousness of the children's inability to winnow out valid information warns about the political detachment encouraged by consumer messages. When Babette asks, "What happened to civics, how a bill becomes a law?" she points to the difference between the finer details of dangerous waves that may or

may not exist and the practical knowledge that would help the children to understand the legal and political systems that govern them.<sup>43</sup> Giroux discusses the difference, explaining that the rise of corporate advertising in “kid-specific media” in the 1990s “calls for young people to surrender their capacity to become citizens in the fullest sense—possessed of the widest range of citizen skills and rights—for a market-based notion of identity, one that suggests relinquishing their roles as critical subjects for the passive role of consuming subjects.”<sup>44</sup> DeLillo anticipates Giroux as commodity knowledge surpasses all other for the Gladney children. For example, in a conversation with her siblings about space, Steffie admits that she thought a corolla was a car. For her, the consumer allusion precedes both the scientific reference to a star and the natural reference to the flower. Thus, in DeLillo’s world, families are complicit with the corporate exploitation of children. Both hope to create a perpetual Disneyland experience for youngsters by luring them into a condition of depoliticized escape.

When Murray argues that maturing children “[spin] out from the core, becoming less recognizable as a group, less targetable by advertisers and mass-producers of culture,” DeLillo suggests that individuals armed only with consumer knowledge are fated to look nostalgically back to their childhoods. They will, according to Murray, “experience the vast loneliness and dissatisfaction of consumers who have lost their group identity.”<sup>45</sup> Murray argues, as Giroux does, that American identity grows out of consumer identity, and that children, as “a true universal,” fall easily into one category of consumer. In the familial relationships of White Noise, nostalgia restores the universal identity that maturity dismantles. In addition, while the Gladney children easily draw Jack and Babette into the distractions of their television

indulgences, the novel shows how the familial proximity of parents and children allows parents to consume like their offspring. Critic Tom LeClair agrees, arguing that children channel the electronic media into the family.<sup>46</sup> On one particular night, the children scramble to watch footage of airplane crashes. Jack follows suit, and in the style of J.G. Ballard's Crash (1973), a novel which explores the thrilling and erotic elements of violent car accidents, the television disasters discovered by the children enthrall everyone.

The Gladneys' interest in watching natural and man-made disasters comes at the expense of their interest in the television sitcom. When Babette tries to change the channel to a sitcom about racially mixed children who have built a communication satellite, "She [is] startled by the force of [their] objection."<sup>47</sup> Darrell Hamamoto explains that because "realism and contemporaneity" ground the television sitcom, it "has remarked upon almost every major development of postwar American history."<sup>48</sup> Consequently, he claims that post-World War II, cultural critics can read the sitcom like a textbook "to help lay bare the mores, images, ideals, prejudices, and ideologies shared...by the majority of the American public."<sup>49</sup> In the Gladneys' case, the sitcom they reject points to the changing racial and economic landscape that threatens their family. The idea that society considers racially mixed children "normal" enough to have their own sitcom provokes anxiety for a family that nostalgically emulates the sitcom-families of years past. The idea that such children have access to the education and material needed to build a communications satellite adds another level of concern. Finally, the prospect of satellites in general evokes the increasingly globalized world outside the Gladney home. DeLillo ironically intimates that the sitcom, more than the

“reality” of disaster television, might bring the family in touch with what exists outside their domestic sphere. In addition, he suggests that the Gladneys’ nostalgia for sitcom-families past diverges from “the majority of the American public” that the sitcom, according to Hamamoto, has historically represented.<sup>50</sup>

While anticipating the decline of the sitcom in American popular culture, DeLillo’s image of the Gladneys watching “documentary clips” of natural and man-made disasters points to the self-affirming effect of disaster television. When watching, the Gladneys feel validated by the “calamity and death” of others. One of Jack’s colleagues describes the foreign nature of the disasters when he explains that Japan and India usually provide good matter for disaster footage, but that if you must go domestic, you can always count on California. In addition, he explains that California appeals because you can watch Californians be “punished for their relaxed life-style and progressive social ideas.” Diverse demographics also increase the likelihood that, despite their domesticity, California disasters will not feature white Americans. Hence, when Jack says, “Every disaster made us wish for more, for something bigger, grander, more sweeping,” we see that the greater the disaster for those outside the family, the more justified the Gladneys can feel in the privilege of their small white town of Blacksmith. The reassurance anticipates the Gladneys’ response to a car accident they witness during their evacuation. Desensitized to violence, the Gladneys only feel “curiously reverent, even uplifted by the sight of heaped cars and fallen people.”<sup>51</sup>

Seemingly aware of the darker implications of his actions, however, Jack expresses concern about his interest in disaster television. Murray consoles him by explaining that he has “forgotten how to listen and look as a [child].” As a remedy,

Murray encourages Jack to decontextualize what he watches, promising that if Jack can ignore the violence and pay more attention to short spots such as advertisements, he will find a “wonderful brimming spirit of innocence and fun.”<sup>52</sup> The advice reminds Jack to watch the television as a consumer who measures entertainment value, not as a person who might feel compassion for others. Thus, as Jack watches disaster television with a child’s short attention span, DeLillo equates the reclamation of childhood innocence with the adoption of a depoliticized consumer identity made ominous by its insensitivity to violence.

White Noise contrasts the Gladneys’ pleasurable response to distant disasters with their feelings of panic when the unthinkable happens and catastrophe displaces members of their own race and class. The contrast brings the complicit work of families and consumerism into sharp relief as the Glandneys try to maintain faith in their innocence and entitlement. They reassure themselves by turning to the media and commodities that unite them. Drawing on Stewart and Elizabeth Ewen’s Channels of Desire: Mass Images and the Shaping of American Consciousness (1992), Osteen explains that the media creates “channels of desire” that deflect our interest from political and social issues to commodities.<sup>53</sup> Accordingly, Steffie sifts through the mail, happily distracted by “coupons, lotteries and contests,” while Babette “gather[s] tins and jars with familiar life-enhancing labels” as they prepare to evacuate.<sup>54</sup> Conversely, Heinrich supplements news reports with the contradictory information he gathers from his place at the attic window. He observes, “The radio calls it a feathery plume...But it’s not a plume.” Instead, he explains that it looks “Like a shapeless growing thing. A dark black breathing thing of smoke.”<sup>55</sup> In Heinrich, DeLillo locates the possibility for

youthful resistance. At the shelter, however, Heinrich lapses into highly technical, yet empty, television talk. In the temporary absence of another news source, Heinrich becomes the voice of the media in a form of self-distraction. The children find security in commodity consumption because it provides the illusion of action. Meanwhile, as shoppers they remain innocent and passive—secure in their oblivious entitlement. Nostalgic for this condition, Jack and Babette follow their children to the television.

Since parents value innocence more than their children do in White Noise, Jack and Babette's nostalgic denials appear comical, and thus, self-critical when contrasted with the curiosity of their sometimes more knowledgeable offspring. In some instances, the children take on parental roles. Jack notices that his oldest daughter, Bee, looks at him with condescension. In addition, Denise agonizes over her mother's possible drug addiction, searching for and confiscating the experimental drug, Dylar, that Babette secretly takes. Heinrich, meanwhile, watches the toxic cloud with rapt attention while Babette remains oblivious. Despite the efforts of ridiculous parents who resist their kids' curious and responsible tendencies, the children move ever closer to the awareness and accountability of adulthood and thus, to nostalgia for their own lost innocence. When confronted with the reality of evacuation, Steffie can only cry softly while reading a coupon for "Baby Lux."<sup>56</sup> In her maturing childhood, Steffie has grown old enough to look nostalgically backward—to a pre-linguistic-time when her infancy protected her entirely. DeLillo marks the infantilizing operation of consumer distraction through the baby commodity that mediates her desire.

Like Steffie, Jack covets infantile oblivion. His children, of course, have grown beyond infancy. Hence, he seeks them out when they sleep and cannot contradict

the presumption of their innocence. He comments that watching sleeping children makes him feel “devout, part of a spiritual system” and that “It is the closest I can come to God.” Later, when a dreaming Steffie mutters “*Toyota Celica*” (emph. in original), the unconscious utterance of commodity nonsense words humorously strikes Jack “with the impact of a moment of splendid transcendence.” With the help of sleep and age, consumer culture produces in Steffie the total state of unknowing that Jack desires. Familial proximity transfers the feeling to Jack. He says, “I depend on my children for that.”<sup>57</sup>

DeLillo highlights Jack’s nostalgia for the simplicity of the past in another more ominous way: Hitler Studies. Peyser explains that Jack’s interest in Hitler results from a desire for “coherent precedents” that “[call] up images of an innocent, “prewar” America to which Gladney occasionally refers with an unsettling mixture of nostalgia and irony.”<sup>58</sup> Many Americans remember the nation’s prewar period as a time when racial lines appeared to be clearly drawn and when the international lines of good and bad appeared to be self-evident. Similarly, Jack longs for the heightened patriotism of an America that knew its boundaries, knew its enemies and knew that it was fighting a “just war.” Ironically, DeLillo couples Jack’s nostalgia for the moral clarity of a war against Nazi Germany with his nostalgia for the definitive racial boundaries that Hitler drew. Through the ironic confusion of Jack’s nostalgia, DeLillo questions the innocence of America’s past while pointing to nostalgia’s romanticizing effects.

Hitler appeals to Jack because his unique role in America’s history is empowering. Rogin’s discussion of the “countersubversive tradition” in American politics helps to clarify how. According to Rogin, American politicians have

repeatedly justified their aggressive actions by “inflat[ing], stigmatiz[ing], and dehumaniz[ing]” their adversaries. Exaggerating the opposition, Rogin explains, permits a politician “to indulge his forbidden desires” by creating a scenario in which he can countersubvert (or imitate) his enemy in the name of self-defense.<sup>59</sup> Rogin identifies three major moments of countersubversion in American history: the dehumanization of Native Americans and African slaves that provided land and labor for an evolving nation; the vilification of immigrant and working classes that criminalized the progressive politics of the early twentieth century; and the exaggeration of the Soviet Union’s communist threat that justified the creation of a national-security state during the Cold War. Notably, Rogin omits Hitler. In fact, Rogin points out that Ronald Reagan used Hitler’s totalitarianism as a comparison through which to exaggerate the threat of Asian Communism during his presidency.<sup>60</sup> Rogin excludes the urgency of World War II from his countersubversive tradition because Hitler’s menace continues to justify the violence enacted against him. Through Jack’s desire, DeLillo highlights a period that appeals to Americans because it represents a time when the threat still justifies the defense.

After the atrocities at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as well as the controversies of the Korean and Vietnam Wars, America loses the unambiguous moral authority it enjoyed during World War II. In “Adolf, We Hardly Knew You,” Paul Cantor recognizes Jack’s vulnerability, pointing out that when people lose their bearings, they become susceptible to fascism. He explains that Hitler restores meaning to the fluidity of Jack’s postmodern existence.<sup>61</sup> Jack, in his nostalgia for the urgency of World War II, allows Hitler to define both the seriousness of the danger his world faces and the

model by which he should defend himself. In the latter case, he acts as the child of a patriarch more powerful than himself—one that assures the supremacy of whiteness without concern for the inhibitions of middle-class morality.

By emulating Hitler, Jack reconciles his desire for power with his infantilizing nostalgia for childhood. Murray argues that Jack uses Hitler to resolve the contradiction when he says, “You wanted to be helped and sheltered...on one level you wanted to conceal yourself in Hitler and his works. On another level you wanted to use him to grow in significance and strength.”<sup>62</sup> While Jack appropriates Hitler’s authority, DeLillo suggests that patriarchal families transfer such power from fathers to sons when Jack names his infant son “Heinrich.” He explains that he “thought it was a forceful name, a strong name. It has a kind of authority . . . I wanted to shield him, make him unafraid . . . There’s something about German names . . . In the middle of it all is Hitler, of course.”<sup>63</sup>

Further darkening his ominous infatuation, Jack discusses Hitler without acknowledging genocide. Jack’s “Advanced Nazism” course promises to study “the continuing mass appeal of fascist tyranny, with special emphasis on parades, rallies and uniforms.”<sup>64</sup> From the description, his course addresses little more than a simulacrum of Hitler. It lacks any historical referents, taking the lasting entertainment value of Hitler’s fascism out of the context of its larger social and political implications. Cantor explains that Jack dehistoricizes Hitler for exploitation as an academic commodity.<sup>65</sup> Although Jack longs for the sense of moral authority that mobilized World War II America, his course ignores the fascist war crimes that justified it. Freed from his

crimes, Hitler-as-simulacrum rises to a celebrity status for Jack that Murray likens to Elvis Presley's.

Academics not only accept Jack's superficial study of Hitler in White Noise, they reward it. Through such acceptance, DeLillo suggest that universities disseminate self-referential information as knowledge. Bill Readings' discussion of what he calls the "posthistorical" university in The University in Ruins (1996) provides some insight into DeLillo's critique. Readings explains that the American university has traditionally concerned itself with the "*historical* development, affirmation, and inculcations of national culture" (emph. in original). Consequently, he argues, it has "outlived itself" because the nation-state and its accompanying national culture "[cease] to be essential to an increasingly transnational global economy."<sup>66</sup> In the absence of a nation-building agenda, the university's emphasis turns commercial, allowing "excellence" to replace "culture" in the university's value system. Readings argues, however, that detachment from political power and national ideology empties the category of "excellence." Thus, concern with *how excellently* professors teach their courses replaces concern over *what* they teach in the first place. The "posthistorical" university would approve of Jack's Hitler scholarship because, according to Readings, students are consumers, not future "citizen-subjects."<sup>67</sup> In Jack's case, the high enrollment of his classes testifies to their "excellence." DeLillo ridicules "excellence," however, by following its logic. He expands Jack's profitable class into an entire department where the necessary attention to detail would rival the minutiae Jack's children absorb. According to DeLillo, therefore, absurdity does not deter from increased enrollment, profit and thus, "excellence."

Secure in his family and his study of Hitler, Jack strikes a tenuous balance between the roles of fascist and innocent patriarch. Babette disrupts the balance when she admits that she has been taking an experimental drug named Dylar to cure her overwhelming fear of death. Since Jack thought that Babette was secure in mundane tasks like the ironing of his academic robes, her admission shocks him. He laments that the “deep and simple pleasures” of watching her do domestic chores “are lost to [him] now.”<sup>68</sup> For Jack, Babette’s fear signals his failure to protect the family, and thus, himself, from what resides outside their domestic circle.

Furthermore, Babette jeopardizes the purity of their white family by trading sexual favors with Mr. Gray—a man whose name metaphorically miscegenates his body—in exchange for Dylar. Overwhelmed, Jack imagines a “Gray-bodied” man—a “gray seducer”—and suffers at the thought of “the dominance of [Mr. Gray’s] position” when his “bleak hands” enfold the “rose-white breast” of Babette. Jack would later wonder, upon meeting the “peanut colored” Mr. Gray, “Was he Melanesian, Polynesian, Indonesian, Nepalese, Surinamese, Dutch-Chinese? Was he a composite?” Enraged, Jack longs for childhood. With the precision of a Greek chorus, Murray explains, “Nostalgia is a product of dissatisfaction and rage. It’s a settling of grievances between the present and the past. The more powerful the nostalgia, the closer you come to violence.” Thus, while Jack seeks what Murray calls childhood’s “cloud of unknowing,” a condition that will make him “an omnipotent little person,” DeLillo suggests that the desire for innocence masks a dangerous quest for power.<sup>69</sup>

When Jack toys with his authority, giving lectures with a “Zumwalt automatic” concealed in his pocket, DeLillo mocks the intellectual and cultural power of university

professors. The image recalls an earlier moment in the novel where DeLillo eerily anticipates the actions of school shooters like Andy Williams of Santee, California. We learn that Babette “is afraid [Heinrich] will end up in a barricaded room, spraying hundreds of rounds of automatic fire across an empty mall before the SWAT teams come for him with their heavy-barreled weapons, their bullhorns and body armor.”<sup>70</sup> The novel begins with a parent’s fear that her angst-ridden child might randomly fire an automatic weapon in a public place. By novel’s end, the infantilized parent, not his teenage son, considers such behavior. Ironically, debates currently rage over the legal fate of minors who have supposedly committed “adult crimes” in American society. The logic suggests that children who commit violent crimes possess *more* maturity than their less violent peers. DeLillo’s novel preempts such thinking in the contradiction of Jack’s imagined maturity. Jack says that the gun and ammunition “were like childhood things you might come across after forty years, seeing their genius for the first time.”<sup>71</sup> He imagines that his adult perspective brings new understanding to the weapons. Meanwhile, DeLillo ridicules the idea that Jack has grown wiser with time through the reader’s recognition that Jack has, in fact, regressed.

DeLillo takes Jack’s egotism to an even more ridiculous extreme in Jack’s murderous encounter with Willie Mink (alias Mr. Gray). As the quintessentially divided subject, Jack knows himself through his identification with Mink, the not-I. He says, “I loomed in the doorway, conscious of looming, seeing myself from Mink’s viewpoint, magnified, threatening.” He adds, “I knew who I was.” In the seconds before he fires the gun, however, Jack observes, “Water fell to earth in drops, causing surfaces to gleam. I saw things new.”<sup>72</sup> At the moment when his mini-conquest

occurs, Jack invokes the innocence of childhood, letting the depth of history and its liabilities disappear in the omnipotence of the gleaming present. Freed from the past, Jack repeats it. While he constructs a powerful white self by attempting to eliminate the darker man who threatens his family and nation, DeLillo implicitly evokes the repressed histories of exterminated Native Americans, enslaved Africans, excluded Chinese and interned Japanese. Through self-infantilization, Jack gets the best of both worlds. He rids himself of the problem of Mink while forgetting the self-alienating effects of his actions. After he pulls the trigger, the narrative finds him “charmingly engaged in a childlike dialogue” that, significantly, occurs in German.<sup>73</sup> In the ridiculous image of Jack practicing German words for numbers, colors and items of clothing with the hospital’s German nuns, DeLillo makes a correlation between the childlike innocence of a white middle-class American man and the brutality of Hitler’s fascism.

In the final scenes of White Noise, DeLillo expands the problem of innocence from isolated individuals or families to the entire community of Blacksmith. Jack describes how Blacksmith families make a nightly pilgrimage to see brilliant, toxic-cloud induced sunsets, reducing the omnipresent reminder of their town’s vulnerability to entertainment. Ultimately, the novel culminates in a grocery store where, instead of worrying about what happened to the dark-skinned man of unspecified origins who was shot the night before, shoppers preoccupy themselves with the latest reordering of the grocery shelves. As surfaces “gleam” with meanings that obliterate history, DeLillo suggests that a loss of historical referents permits fascist-like protectors to safeguard the white family, race and nation without accountability. Like America’s long history of

racial atrocities, therefore, Willie Mink slips below the surface, forgotten by an infantilized culture that lives only in the present of an imagined childhood.

Jack's failure to acknowledge and avoid the mistakes of the past advances a fitting warning since DeLillo's treatment of Hitler anticipates and exaggerates what has grown into a national obsession with the World War II era. Hence, we see the opening of Washington D.C.'s Holocaust Museum in 1993, the proliferation of Hollywood films such as "Schindler's List" (1993), "Saving Private Ryan" (1998), and most recently, "Pearl Harbor" (2001), as well as the recent controversy over a World War II memorial on the mall in the nation's capitol. Through Jack, DeLillo insinuates that the period has acquired a mythically innocent quality. In White Noise, Jack's nostalgia for the period marks a regression to childhood that takes on ominous overtones. While DeLillo implicates the family, consumer goods, the media and the university in the late twentieth-century production of innocence, he portrays the ideal of innocent childhood as a dangerous mode of denial. In a world where white middle-class adults make family treks to Disneyland, collect vintage Barbies, and trade limited edition Beanie Babies, White Noise warns against the depoliticized and dehistoricized identity of childlike-consumers. For Jack, the child's license to forget makes white privilege legitimate, stalling the efforts of anti-racism, and opening the door for violence.

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<sup>1</sup> James Baldwin, Notes of a Native Son (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), 175.

<sup>2</sup> See Tim Engles, "'Who are you Literally?': Fantasies of the White Self in White Noise," Modern Fiction Studies 45, no. 3 (1999): 758. Engles explains how writers like Ernest Hemingway and Mark Twain have let meritocracy validate white privilege by depicting the self-made man as a white man. Also see Frank Lentricchia, "Tales of the Electronic Tribe" in New Essays on White Noise, edited by Frank Lentricchia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 93. Lentricchia observes that

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Herman Melville, Mark Twain, and F. Scott Fitzgerald's first-person narrators resemble DeLillo's because they share a belief in the purity of their whiteness.

<sup>3</sup> For further discussion of these conditions see my introduction, 7-9; Chapter One, 31-32; or see Jenny Sharpe, "Is the United States Postcolonial? Transnationalism, Immigration, and Race," in Postcolonial America (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), and Aihwa Ong, Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> Etienne Balibar. Preface to Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities, by Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, trans. of Etienne Balibar by Chris Turner (London: Verso, 1991); originally published as Race, nation, classe: les identités ambiguës (Paris: Editions La Découverte, 1988), 9. For social and legislative details of the backlash see my Introduction, 7-9; Todd Gitlin, The Twilight of Common Dreams: Why America is Wracked by Culture Wars (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1995); and George Lipsitz, The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998).

<sup>5</sup> John C. McWilliams argues that many hippies were "'teeny-boppers' in early adolescence," in The 1960s Cultural Revolution (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2000), 70.

<sup>6</sup> Todd Gitlin, The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage (1987; reprint, New York: Bantam Books, 1993), 208-212. Williams also suggests that hippie counterculture was probably more threatening because it challenged ideals of family, religion and work rather than policies of the government, 22.

<sup>7</sup> Don DeLillo, White Noise (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), 132, 135.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 135.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Peyser, "Globalization in America: The Case of Don DeLillo's White Noise," Clio 25, no. 3 (1996): 255.

<sup>10</sup> Engles, 763.

<sup>11</sup> DeLillo, 208.

<sup>12</sup> Engles, 781.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 771, 759.

<sup>14</sup> DeLillo, 198.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 208.

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<sup>16</sup> Engles, 776.

<sup>17</sup> DeLillo, 3, 4, 6.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>19</sup> For more information on the institutionalization of white privilege in law, see Cheryl Harris, "Whiteness as Property," Harvard Law Review 106, no. 8 (1993): 1707. For a comprehensive study of institutionalized white privilege, see George Lipsitz, The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998).

<sup>20</sup> DeLillo, 114, 117.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 170, 209, 52.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 209. Historians of childhood such as David Kennedy and Anne Higonett agree that the publication of Rousseau's Emile (1762) marks the first representation of childhood as a natural condition, free from the constraints of civilization and distinct from the corruptions of adulthood. For further discussion of Emile and the invention of innocent childhood see my Introduction, 14-15; or David Kennedy's "The Roots of Child Study: Philosophy, History, and Religion," in Teachers College Record 102.3 (June 2000): 524-538; Anne Higonnet, Pictures of Innocence: The History and Crisis of Ideal Childhood (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998), 17, 26.

<sup>23</sup> By "modern family" I refer to a primarily white-identified unit that includes a working father, a domestic mother and their financially dependent children. See Judith Stacey's In the Name of the Family: Rethinking Family Values in the Postmodern Age (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996).

<sup>24</sup> Stacey, 6.

<sup>25</sup> Mark Osteen, Introduction to White Noise, by Don DeLillo (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), viii.

<sup>26</sup> James Baldwin in Conversations with James Baldwin, edited by Fred L. Stanley and Louis H. Pratt (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1989), 220.

<sup>27</sup> Genocide, displacement, slavery and exclusion have historically fractured nonwhite families, forcing the creation of more flexible kinship ties. The notorious Moynihan Report of 1965 identified the alternative family forms of African American culture as pathological because they differed from the modern families associated with the white middle class. The recognition that postmodern white families have deviated from their past "normality" would suggest a similar pathology according to this logic.

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- <sup>28</sup> Lipsitz, 74.
- <sup>29</sup> Stacey, 3, 2.
- <sup>30</sup> Thomas Ferraro, "Whole Families Shopping at Night," in New Essays on White Noise, edited by Frank Lentricchia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 19.
- <sup>31</sup> Lipsitz, 75.
- <sup>32</sup> DeLillo, 5.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid, 111, 110, 94.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid, 81, 118.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid, 81.
- <sup>36</sup> Ferraro, 24, 20.
- <sup>37</sup> DeLillo, 232.
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid, 83.
- <sup>39</sup> Ferraro, 22, 36.
- <sup>40</sup> Henry Giroux, The Mouse that Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1999), 108.
- <sup>41</sup> John Frow, "The Last Things Before the Last: Notes on White Noise," in Introducing Don DeLillo, edited by Frank Lentricchia (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 190; Douglas Keesey, Don DeLillo (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993), 135, 144; Mark Osteen, American Magic and Dread: Don DeLillo's Dialogue with Culture (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 166.
- <sup>42</sup> DeLillo, 174, 176.
- <sup>43</sup> Ibid, 176.
- <sup>44</sup> Giroux, 23.
- <sup>45</sup> DeLillo, 50.
- <sup>46</sup> Tom LeClair, In the Loop: Don DeLillo and the Systems Novel (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 217.
- <sup>47</sup> DeLillo, 64.
- <sup>48</sup> Darrell Y. Hamamoto, Nervous Laughter: Television Situation Comedy and Liberal Democratic Ideology (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1989), 2.

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- <sup>49</sup> Ibid, 10.
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid, 1.
- <sup>51</sup> DeLillo, 64, 66, 64, 122.
- <sup>52</sup> Ibid, 67, 219.
- <sup>53</sup> Osteen, American Magic and Dread, 166.
- <sup>54</sup> Ibid, 110, 119.
- <sup>55</sup> Ibid, 111.
- <sup>56</sup> DeLillo, 119.
- <sup>57</sup> Ibid, 147, 155.
- <sup>58</sup> Peyser, 269.
- <sup>59</sup> Rogin, xiii.
- <sup>60</sup> Ibid, 29.
- <sup>61</sup> Paul A. Cantor, "Adolf, We Hardly Knew You," in New Essays on White Noise, edited by Frank Lentricchia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 47.
- <sup>62</sup> DeLillo, 287.
- <sup>63</sup> Ibid, 63.
- <sup>64</sup> Ibid, 25.
- <sup>65</sup> Cantor, 44.
- <sup>66</sup> Bill Readings, The University in Ruins (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 6, 12.
- <sup>67</sup> Ibid, 13, 14.
- <sup>68</sup> DeLillo, 199.
- <sup>69</sup> Ibid, 258, 290.
- <sup>70</sup> Ibid, 297, 22.
- <sup>71</sup> Ibid, 297.
- <sup>72</sup> Ibid, 311, 312.
- <sup>73</sup> Ibid, 317.

CHAPTER THREE  
Children of the Innocent Nation:  
Education, Popular Culture and Family  
in Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye

Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye (1970) portrays children who complement the images of infantilized adults I discuss in Part One. They experience the race and class oppressions that Jessica Hagedorn and Don DeLillo's child-like characters hope to avoid. Through representations of persecuted children, Morrison challenges America's complacent belief in its benevolent self-image. She is not the first African American author to use images of childhood to undermine cherished conceptions of national identity, however. While portraits of the Romantic child flooded U.S. markets in the nineteenth century, Frederick Douglass introduced an antithetical image.<sup>1</sup> In his 1845 slave narrative, he condemns American democracy and Christianity through detailed accounts of childhood as property. Hopkins carried similar themes into the Jim Crow Era. In Contending Forces (1900) she emphasizes that the children of black women in a segregated society, like the offspring of enslaved women before them, inherit their mothers' inferior status.<sup>2</sup> Hopkins, however, also offered a very different corrective to innocent childhood when she published a photograph of a romanticized black child on the front of her October 1900 issue of The Colored American Magazine. Plump, happy, wearing nothing but a diaper, the child evokes a young and vibrant black American childhood that inherits the rights of citizenship rather than the condition of the subjugated mother. Thus, while childhood has long been a site of ideological mystification in America, agitators have likewise appropriated it as a site of protest.

Hopkins responds to the political erasures enacted by the Southern backlash against Reconstruction during the 1890s. Almost a century later, Morrison confronts

another tense political climate, publishing The Bluest Eye during the transition between a waning Civil Rights Movement and the backlash that emerged against it. Morrison faced the repercussions of Civil Rights legislation in their infancy, but they would evolve into the neo-conservative paranoia regarding “reverse discrimination” and immigration that marked the twentieth century from the 1970s forward.<sup>3</sup> By the 1990s, the growth of such conservatism ushers in what Henry Giroux calls “organized forgetting,” a phenomenon where Americans look nostalgically back to a “mythic” pre-Civil Rights Era.<sup>4</sup> Morrison situates her narrator, Claudia, and her protagonist, Pecola on the cusp of this mythic past where domestic unrest evaporates and post-war prosperity thrives.

The novel begins in 1940, a time when Americans had begun to look beyond the domestic worries of the Depression Era to define America’s role in a growing international conflict. According to Michael Paul Rogin, domestic concerns about ethnicity and class dominated American politics from 1870 to the New Deal. World War II, however, “provided the occasion for the emergence of the national-security apparatus.” Rogin locates the residue of emerging national fears in film, explaining that Hollywood immediately tuned in to the anxieties that came with war. As early as 1940, therefore, films such as Murder in the Air (1940) had traded in their mobsters for the spies and fake identities that encompass the fresher material of international intrigue.<sup>5</sup>

Conversely, in a wartime setting that barely acknowledges the looming threat of military conflict, The Bluest Eye clearly subordinates national and international matters to local interests. In the small towns of Morrison’s mid-Western United States, concerns about how to keep children warm, fed and healthy supercede questions about the

nation's role in an escalating conflict abroad. Furthermore, while 1940 marks the eve of both war and economic recovery in American history books, it also marks the year Richard Wright's Native Son (1940) kicked off an angry protest movement against racism. In addition to the economic hardships of the Great Depression, African Americans in the 1940s continued to endure the Jim Crow apartheid made legal by Plessy vs. Ferguson in 1896. From the confines of low-paying jobs and second-class schools, they also suffered the century-long lynching campaign that took hold with the formation of the Ku Klux Klan in 1867. In 1935, Franklin D. Roosevelt disappointed anti-lynching activists such as Mary McLeod Bethune when he refused to support the Costian-Wagner anti-lynching bill. The proposed law would have punished sheriffs for their complicity in mob executions. Twenty years later, lynching continued unfettered, with the most notorious case being the brutal murder of fourteen-year-old Emmett Till in 1955.<sup>6</sup> While rural blacks persisted under mob rule, urban blacks watched as white families bought their first homes with mortgages subsidized by the Federal Housing Act of 1934.<sup>7</sup>

The condition of civil rights looks bleak in 1940, but in retrospect, the national attention bestowed on Wright's Native Son suggests a changing tide. After 1940, black writers experienced a windfall in critical acclaim, including the award of the Pulitzer Prize to Gwendolyn Brooks for Annie Allen (1950) and the National Book Award to Ralph Ellison for Invisible Man (1952). Alongside literary recognition, the NAACP won a major victory when, in 1954, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of desegregating public schools in Brown vs. The Topeka Board of Education. Soon after, the Montgomery Alabama Bus Boycott began. Rosa Parks sparked the controversy in

December of 1955 when she refused to relinquish her bus seat to a pair of white men. After more than a year of walking, the boycotters won a legal end to segregation on busses. Signaling widespread discontent, an overwhelming ninety percent of black bus riders participated in the boycott, and their determination instigated the movement of nonviolent protest that the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. would lead into the 1960s. Americans who, in the 1970s, had already begun to assemble nostalgic myths about white suburban life ignored this segregated aspect of American history. Morrison intervenes by capturing it. Her wrenching narrative of childhood evokes forgotten domestic tensions that simmered in the 1940s and boiled over in the 1950s.<sup>8</sup>

In the years since Morrison published The Bluest Eye, the urgency of her intervention has grown proportionally with the escalation of national anxieties over race, class and gender equity. Concomitantly, perceptions of childhood have changed. Most notably, popular culture has portrayed children in an increasingly unfavorable light.<sup>9</sup> Giroux claims that children have typically served as a “signpost” for America’s self-image, adding that depictions of troubled youth in today’s mass media reflect an ongoing crisis in American society and democracy. The Hollywood images that Giroux describes blame children for the kinds of adversity that their Romantic counterparts have always denied. He explains that by silencing children, Hollywood ignores the socioeconomic contexts that produce childhood suffering.<sup>10</sup> In contrast, Morrison lets her child-characters speak, critically invoking such contexts. In her portrayal of state-sanctioned education, she centralizes the problem of racism in public and private schools. In addition, through her depiction of children’s commodities, especially those that target white middle-class youth, she rejects de-politicized fantasies that smack of

falsely sweet sugarplum fairies. While Morrison connects American pedagogy and popular culture to an oppressive apparatus of white patriarchal nationalism, she represents parents in conflict with such pressures, transforming the nuclear family from a childhood haven to a place where parents behave as both objects and instruments of oppression. By re-visioning the Romantic child, Morrison indicts the benevolent nation for sacrificing its children on the altars of racial homogeneity and liberal individualism.

The Bluest Eye explores the tension between oppressed local culture and oppressive national ideal through the friction between Pecola's life and 1940s ideals of childhood. Morrison first locates such ideals in the pedagogical narratives of William Elson and William Gray's Dick and Jane stories.<sup>11</sup> Like Paulo Freire, who published his influential Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970) in the same year that Morrison published The Bluest Eye, Morrison presents narrative as a key element in an oppressive educational system that pits teaching subject against listening object. Freire describes this insistently unidirectional narrative as a part of a "banking" approach to education. It works well for the oppressor, he explains, because it encourages oppressed students to accept rather than change their condition. Freire claims that teachers who "bank," either fill their students with "hollow" and "alienating" narratives that are entirely removed from students' lives, or promote a version of reality that is "static...and predictable." Freire's sample of a banal recitation: "Four times four is sixteen; the capital of Pará is Belém," resonates in Morrison's repetition of the Dick and Jane mantra that begins: "Here is the house. It is green and white. It has a red door."<sup>12</sup> By repeating the passage, Morrison emphasizes the fixity of a narrative that changed little while dominating America's reading curriculum for more than thirty years. Focusing on the

textbook, Morrison explores the way Elson and Gray's readers operate like an oppressive white teacher who designates black students as passive and pathological outsiders.

Many of Morrison's critics have addressed her subversive appropriation of the readers. Mark Ledbetter explains their importance in literary terms, arguing that they establish a victimless "masterplot" for the novel.<sup>13</sup> Nancy Backes points out that the primers offer an ideal that does not exist for anyone (even white middle-class children), while Andrea O'Reilly argues that the books instruct pupils in the ideology of the family.<sup>14</sup> According to Gurleen Grewal, primers prime, or make ready, and Morrison shows how they prime black subjects.<sup>15</sup> The thread that connects these observations is the idea of a national ideology that defines Americanness within the parameters of white middle-class childhood. In The Bluest Eye, the stories not only posit the literary "masterplot" that Ledbetter points to, but as textbooks in America's public schools, Morrison shows how they also posit a *national* masterplot.

Dick and Jane's popularity grew immensely in the 1940s, but the characters originate in 1930. Like Pauline Hopkins, who used the image of a healthy and happy black baby to convey optimism at a time of dire economic and political crisis, the Elson-Gray primers offered Americans a hopeful vision of national prosperity during the Depression years. In books such as the pre-primer, Dick and Jane (1930), the authors characterize Dick and Jane in the tradition of the Romantic child. Oblivious to the adult worries of their time, they thrive under the care of economically and socially stable families. After World War II, Cold War politicians assigned such families both a practical and a symbolic role in combating the threat of communist takeover in the

United States. Elaine Tyler May argues that creating and caring for healthy families became the patriotic responsibility of women who were expected to leave their wartime jobs to raise children and bolster the world's capitalist population. In the uncertainty of the nuclear age, she adds, women were expected to make domestic spaces into safe havens, figurative (and sometimes literal) bomb shelters for frightened Americans. The era's popular culture reflects such expectations. As early as 1941, according to May, Hollywood films such as Penny Serenade emphasized motherhood, associating beauty with maternity and positioning children as "moralizing" and "harmonizing" agents in families.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Rogin argues that Hollywood films of the 1940s, '50s and '60s associated Communism with public and private instability, portraying seductive women as Communist spies and family patriarchs as loyal patriots. Through such associations, he argues, the films equate the loving family with the nation.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, as the cornerstone of postwar prosperity and security, nuclear families like Dick and Jane's signaled the triumphant superiority of American democracy and capitalism.<sup>18</sup>

The Elson-Gray curriculum surrounding Dick and Jane also reflects these attitudes, placing responsibility for the nation's future prosperity and security squarely on the shoulders of middle-class children. The books consistently reward the cleanliness, affluence, happiness, morality and hard work of American children with the future empowerment of national citizenship. From the outset, the Basic Readers (1930) invite young students to "come with me, your book-comrade, I can carry you into the homes of some brave and true American boys and girls. They will tell you how you, too, may become a helpful American citizen."<sup>19</sup> In the stories of units such as "Little American Citizens," young white children serve their country through self-sufficiency,

self-sacrifice and bravery. Similarly, the unit “Busy Workers and their Work” underscores the inherent morality and practical necessity of hard work while connecting it to the technological and territorial expansion of the deserving nation.<sup>20</sup>

Proponents of Cold War politics, however, only burdened white children and their families with such patriotic sentiments. Since the government housing subsidies that prompted whites to flee crowded cities excluded African Americans, few black families occupied the suburbs that demonstrated America’s successes to the world.<sup>21</sup> Thus, by associating white suburban families with prosperity, morality and patriotism, Americans painted black urban working-class families un-American. Eventually, the Moynihan Report of 1965 outwardly dissociated black families, and especially black women, from the national ideal by characterizing black family life and its matriarchal aspects as “a tangle of pathology” that deviated sharply from the American standard.<sup>22</sup>

Likewise, despite their emphasis on historical figures and events, the primers never allude to events such as conquest, slavery, immigration or exclusion. In fact, before 1965 when they finally introduce the African American characters Penny, Pam and Mike, the authors limit their representation of nonwhite Americans to the occasional appearance of a “savage” Indian. In addition, the primers explicitly deport African and Chinese characters, as well as economic hardship to “other lands,” implicitly defining such variations as culturally un-American and politically irrelevant. Finally, as a Romantic child whose gender roles are “natural” and not imposed, Jane never complains about her forced domesticity or her repeated subordination to Dick.<sup>23</sup> Combining their suppression of race, class and gender differences with the emphasis on citizenship and Americanness, Dick and Jane prefigure what Lauren Berlant would call the national

bodies of “abstract citizenship.”<sup>24</sup> The abstraction lets Dick’s white middle-class male privilege stand for *all* American childhoods.

Significantly, by alluding to actual pedagogical texts, Morrison artistically engages the real, concretely marking the centrality of such disavowal in the lives of America’s children. Some public schools still used the Elson-Gray readers in 1970, despite growing concerns over their treatment of race and gender. While Morrison participated in the controversy three decades ago, her appropriation remains urgent today. The primers, long out of use, have acquired new appeal in a nostalgia-driven collectors’ market that demonstrates how many Americans still yearn for the fantasy of a mythically homogenous pre-Civil Rights era. First, the book Growing Up with Dick and Jane: Learning and Living the American Dream (1996) encourages and capitalizes on collector desires. In a book that simply recaps both plot lines and character profiles, the jacket announces: “They’re back!” and entreats readers to “step back into the innocent watercolor world of Dick and Jane, where...the fun never stops” for the “all-American brother and sister team.”<sup>25</sup> Collector websites also exploit nostalgia. In a common reference to the simplistic past, one collector remarks:

To many Americans, the simple phrase, “*See Spot Run*” brings a warm and nostalgic smile...Check out the books and reflect on your childhood and feel warm and cozy with the memories. Ahhh, when life was simple... (sic)<sup>26</sup>

Another collector, Dave Schultz, makes unapologetic references to the changes of the Civil Rights Movement, nostalgically registering irritation over the way many Americans now think about race, class, sexuality, gender and family. Schultz says:

It was an innocent time...Cars had style, and toys such as wagons, trikes, and pedal cars were made out of metal. Father worked and Mother (with a freshly pressed dress on

and dinner on the table) waited at the door for him to come home.

There were no microwaves...bus drivers were nice, schoolteachers cared, and the corner store had penny candy...It was a different era where second graders could read Dick's use of the word queer and third graders could read a story called "Tar Baby."<sup>27</sup>

The Bluest Eye unravels profiteering reveries at every turn. First, Morrison offers a version of 1940s family and childhood that deviates sharply from the Dick and Jane version that the nation mourns. Morrison suggests, however, that familial “pathologies” do not simply spring from individual shortcomings. Mirroring the connection that Dick and Jane books make between the white family’s affluence, morality and Americanness, Morrison presents the poverty and suffering of the Breedlove family as a symbol of America’s brutal history of racial persecution. The Breedloves emerge, therefore, from a history of what Grewal calls a “race-based class structure of American society that generates its own pathologies.”<sup>28</sup>

Through an innovative literary form that both fragments and compresses her primer-imitation, Morrison emphasizes the historical gloss by which Elson and Gray sanitize American family life. First, Pin-chia Feng argues that in the fragments, the narrator acts out Claudia’s rage, dismembering the white narrative like Claudia dismembers her white baby dolls.<sup>29</sup> Similar to Claudia’s pile of plastic body parts, Morrison creates a jumble of words that together symbolize the messy incoherence behind America’s myths of homogeneity and meritocracy. While compressing words and sentences, however, she also dissects the stories, separating their standardized elements into isolated and unintelligible phrases such as “SEEFATHERHEISBIGANDSTRONG” and “SEEMOTHERISVERYNICE.”<sup>30</sup> While

highlighting the meaninglessness of the Dick and Jane formula, Morrison uses the string of letters as chapter headings that in part determine the shape of her narrative. In the contrast between such unnaturally elongated phrases and the depth and density of the lengthy paragraphs that follow on the page, Morrison literally (visually) illustrates the shallow and ahistorical quality of the white text. In addition, she complements form with content, filling the “SEEFATHER” and “SEEMOTHER” chapters with complex histories that articulate Cholly’s sense of powerlessness, and Pauline’s sense of worthlessness. By including narratives that would not otherwise fit into the simplified space of a Dick and Jane primer, Morrison shows how national narratives of the white middle-class family obscure the way unjust histories can shape a family’s struggling present.

In “SEEFATHER,” Cholly endures a life marked by powerlessness from conception. First, his mentally ill mother leaves him for dead on the local junk heap. His Aunt Jimmy, not his father, saves him because, in the tradition of the transient black men who wandered the countryside after emancipation, Cholly’s father abandoned him before he was born. Later, when two white hunters humiliate Cholly during his first sexual encounter with a woman, Morrison transforms the typical symbol of a boy’s passage to manhood into an emasculating scene that foreshadows social and economic impotence in adulthood. The experience leaves him feeling “small, black, helpless.”<sup>31</sup> Vanessa Dickerson argues that the exposure “creates and destroys” Cholly, transforming him into a “naked father”—an emasculated figure rendered incapable of accumulating wealth or playing the powerful patriarch.<sup>32</sup> Years later, when Cholly orders a new couch that arrives in two broken pieces, he again encounters such powerlessness. Forced to

accept the damaged merchandise, he relinquishes his roles as both individual consumer and family provider. Ultimately, Morrison seals Cholly's fate in a scathing critique of American meritocracy when he literally dies "in the workhouse," forever trapped in a cycle of poverty that hard work does little to appease.<sup>33</sup>

The "SEEMOTHER" section complements Cholly's powerlessness with Pauline's feelings of worthlessness. The ninth of eleven children, Pauline grows up in a "cocoon" where she develops a "general feeling of separateness and unworthiness." Although Pauline begins her life with Cholly on a hopeful note, the intra-racial prejudice of Lorraine, Ohio's Northern black women erodes her already fragile sense of esteem. Ultimately, when she loses her tooth while emulating Jean Harlowe at the movie theater, Pauline "settled down to just being ugly."<sup>34</sup> At a time when Americans associate fatherhood with upward mobility and motherhood with beauty, Cholly, with his inability to accumulate wealth and Pauline, with her failed makeover, fall short of America's patriotic ideal for parents.

Through Cholly and Pauline, Morrison suggests that parents who emerge from histories of oppression might reproduce that degradation within the family unit. Instead of providing for and protecting his family, Cholly burns down the insular domestic space that should have symbolized not only his family's, but the nation's affluence and security. Similarly, Pauline feels no patriotic obligation to nurture the offspring that, to her, reflect her own ugliness. Having learned that a white family's servant wields far more power than a black family's mother, she spends all of her time working as a domestic for the Fishers, where "Power, praise, and luxury were hers."<sup>35</sup> Pauline serves the Fishers for her own selfish reasons, but because she cares for the Fisher girl at

Pecola and her brother Sammy's expense, Pauline inadvertently tips the already unbalanced scale of privilege further away from black childhood. Through the pairing of Pecola and Sammy, Morrison offers gendered responses to the deficit. In the tradition of his father and grandfather before him, Sammy exercises the freedom of movement more available to men. He escapes by running away at least twenty-seven times by the age of fourteen. Conversely, "Restricted by youth and sex," Pecola stays home and "experiment[s] with methods of endurance."<sup>36</sup> Trapped under the care of what Grewal calls, an "extended black family caught in degrees of self-hatred," Pecola faces a grim future.<sup>37</sup>

Sammy's eventual escape leaves Pecola alone to emulate the Dick and Jane standard to which Deborah Cadman attributes the Breedloves' feelings of worthlessness.<sup>38</sup> When Cholly recognizes his own failures in Pecola's unhappiness, he feels an "accusation" that fills him with guilt. He elicits the Dick-and-Jane ideal when he looks at Pecola as "a child, unburdened," and wonders, "why wasn't she happy?"<sup>39</sup> He also becomes confused, remembering the paternal feelings he had when his first sight of Pauline filled him "with a wondering softness. Not the usual lust to part tight legs with his own, but a tenderness, a protectiveness." He responds to Pauline's neediness by "nibbl[ing]" an itch away from her leg—beginning their courtship. He responds to Pecola's neediness in the exact same way, but this time his actions end in assault.<sup>40</sup> Instead of serving as a "moralizing" force, therefore, Pecola's abject presence provokes Cholly to rape her in what Lothar Bredella argues is "the pain of a love which can only be expressed destructively."<sup>41</sup> Through Cholly's inability to express love constructively, Morrison paints a picture of black fatherhood so incapacitated that it sacrifices its

children to save itself. Likewise, when the sight of Pecola's abused body on the kitchen floor incites Pauline to beat instead of comfort her daughter, Morrison portrays a similarly affected motherhood, suggesting that histories of suffering not only debilitate parents, but turn them from nurturers into oppressors. By juxtaposing the Breedloves with Dick and Jane, Morrison attributes their "pathologies" to the pathology of a nation that insists upon its own virtue despite its less savory histories.

Morrison's distortion of her primer look-a-like accentuates her ideological critique of Dick and Jane, but she also infuses the muddle with a more literal meaning. Elson and Gray produced the Basic Readers to promote literacy, not specifically to propagate destructive ideologies. Through the ideological content, however, Elson and Gray point to *who* they expected to educate—who they envisioned as the nation's future citizens. While Morrison's critique of their content suggests that the primers alienate students who do not fit the white middle-class standard, her garbled imitation makes the very tools designed to teach literacy into a symbol of forced illiteracy—as if the alienated reader could never decipher them. Diminishing the books' racism, Kismaric and Heiferman celebrate the Dick and Jane stories for teaching eighty-five million children to read.<sup>42</sup> In contrast, Morrison suggests that, from their inception, Elson-Gray primers participated in a national *illiteracy* campaign that systematically disenfranchised young black Americans, especially young black girls. Significantly, Elson and Gray published Dick and Jane amid intense national resistance to the idea that the nation was obligated to educate black youths. Institutionalized efforts to sabotage black literacy began during Reconstruction and extend through the Jim Crow era, disenfranchising black parents and their children throughout most of the twentieth century.<sup>43</sup> Since

illiterate parents must rely on schools to educate their offspring, Morrison's critique suggests yet another way that histories of discrimination might interfere with a family's ability to help its own children.<sup>44</sup>

Morrison's attention to literacy follows a tradition of similarly concerned African American writers that ranges from ex-slaves such as Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs to twentieth-century intellectuals such as Malcolm X, bell hooks, Patricia Hill Collins and Angela Davis. While writers such as Douglass argue that literacy in particular embodies "the pathway from slavery to freedom," writers like Collins cite education in general as an essential component of African American self-empowerment.<sup>45</sup> Like many of her contemporaries, Morrison looks beyond the reading curriculum; she represents teachers who explicitly thwart the education of their black students. Stanley Aronowitz explains that, in elementary schools, teachers serve as "surrogate parents," figures who regularly remind students of how the school system perceives them. He adds that teachers' evaluations of students often reflect the expectations of the students' economic class rather than the quality of their intellect.<sup>46</sup> Although he omits racial factors from his discussion, race is an implicit consideration in the 1940s, when Jim Crow laws confined many black Americans to the unskilled labor pool that Aronowitz studies. Morrison highlights the racial aspect of his argument with representations of teachers who reinforce existing hierarchies by consistently favoring lighter students. In Lorainne, Ohio, schoolteachers favor Maureen Peal, "a high-yellow dream child" who "enchanted the entire school."<sup>47</sup> Stewing over how teachers "smiled encouragingly" when they called on Maureen, Claudia complains that such favoritism

makes her and Frieda feel “lesser.” Similarly, Pecola notes that her teachers “tried to never glance at her, and called on her only when everyone was required to respond.”<sup>48</sup>

While Claudia wonders what made Maureen different, what was the “*Thing* that made *her* beautiful and not us?” she and Frieda try to resist their feelings of inadequacy by dubbing Maureen “six-finger-dog-tooth-meringue-pie.”<sup>49</sup> Significantly, Morrison attributes Maureen’s power not just to lightness, but to its beauty. Likewise, Kismaric and Heiferman point to this power when they claim that, despite settling for “second banana in a famous brother-sister act,” readers can find “a lot to envy about Jane” because “Every time she walks onto the page, she’s wearing something new.” In addition, the authors admire Jane because “Her perky dresses never wrinkle or get dirty...Her blond, wavy hair is not too curly...not too frizzy,” and she is “not too fat or too thin.”<sup>50</sup> Although Kismaric and Heiferman implicitly refer to race when they celebrate blond hair that waves without frizzing, they demonstrate an unwillingness to explicitly connect Jane’s enviable qualities to her whiteness. The teachers in *The Bluest Eye*, also avoid the question, leaving Claudia to desperately wonder, “What was the secret? What did we lack? Why was it important? And so what?”<sup>51</sup> Through Claudia’s anxiety, Morrison points to the particular predicament of black *girls* in a white nation. For power they need beauty, for beauty they need whiteness. Without the familial support that strengthens Claudia and Frieda, and unlike her brother who transform his “ugliness” into “a weapon to cause others pain,” Pecola succumbs to the “*Thing*.” She accepts that it “made her ignored or despised at school, by teachers and classmates alike.”<sup>52</sup> At school, therefore, Pecola learns her place outside an abstracted standard of citizenship.

In The Bluest Eye, multiple narratives encompass a broad spectrum of school systems and families that cooperate to perpetuate racial hierarchies. In addition to Pecola's family and school, Morrison presents Geraldine, an upper-class light-skinned girl who learns from both her wealthy family and her private education to value lightness over darkness. "Land-grant colleges and normal schools" teach her "the lesson begun in those soft houses with porch swings and pots of bleeding heart: how to behave...how to get rid of the funkiness."<sup>53</sup> Geraldine passes the knowledge on to her son Junior, teaching him to guard the line that distinguishes "colored" boys from "niggers" and forbidding him from playing with the latter on the playground.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, in Soaphead Church, a "cinnamon-eyed West Indian" whose family's white supremacy earns them consistent recommendations for study abroad, Morrison evokes a colonial geography that posits global implications for racist education systems. To match social with intellectual status, Soaphead explains that his relatives consistently "married 'up,'" to lighten their family.<sup>55</sup> Such families and schools produce innocent ideologies, not innocent children in The Bluest Eye. Surrounded by them, Pecola learns the paradoxical necessity of erasing herself if she hopes to mature into a politically visible subject.

Morrison buttresses the ideological work of compulsory school with images of popular culture. Just as Morrison's depiction of school diverges from Schultz's idea that teachers-past simply "cared," her portrayal of children's commodities sharply contrasts nostalgic yearnings for "stylish" cars, metal pedal toys and corner stores with penny-candy. For one, Pecola, Claudia and Frieda never see the inside of a car, stylish or not. Claudia and Frieda only get close enough to hear their arrogant neighbor, Rosemary

Villanucci, tell them from inside her father's 1939 Buick that they "can't come in."<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, in the absence of quaint metal pedal toys, Claudia only remembers the white, blue-eyed baby dolls that enraged her every Christmas. Finally, after buying Mary Jane taffy at the corner store, Pecola succumbs to a self-effacing fantasy, longing for the beautiful blue eyes that peer at her from the sticky Mary Jane wrapper. Morrison stresses the ideological power of such commodities as well as the debilitating effects of consumerism when Pecola both purchases and eats the candy while simultaneously embracing the hurtful ideals disseminated in its packaging.

While Giroux emphasizes the explosion of kid-specific media and advertising that erupted in the 1990s, asking, "what non-commodified public sphere exists to safeguard children?" Morrison, suggests that the media already bombarded black communities and their children with commercial messages in the 1940s.<sup>57</sup> Susan Willis adds that Morrison shows how mass media in the 1930s and '40s had already equated American culture with white culture for black Americans.<sup>58</sup> Pauline only encounters the image of Greta Garbo when she discovers cinema as an adult. When Henry moves into the McTeer house, however, he flatters Claudia and Frieda with the already familiar reference to "Garbo and Rogers." In addition, Maureen admits that she learned from her mother to emulate the troubled mulatta character, Peola, who repeatedly insists, "I am white!" in John M. Stahl's film Imitation of Life (1934). Maureen pines over Peola's beauty, explaining, "She was so pretty," while dismissing Peola's "black and ugly" mother, Delilah.<sup>59</sup> Maureen translates the racial hierarchy she identifies in the film into an understanding of her own social superiority over Pecola, Claudia and Frieda at school.

Like Maureen, Pecola looks to Hollywood for standards of female beauty and thus, power. Having never seen Imitation of Life, Pecola instead idolizes Shirley Temple, a depression-era icon whose childhood frivolity conveyed hope to the struggling nation. Despite the common theme of orphanhood in Temple's films, titles such as Curly Top (1935) and Little Miss Broadway (1938) thematize childhood innocence. They reduce adversity to a plot device that presents Temple's characters, Elizabeth and Betsy respectively, with the opportunity to pull themselves up by their bootstraps in true American style. Presaging the moralizing and harmonizing role that children supposedly played for their families during the Cold War, Elizabeth and Betsy take control of their lives by creating their own adoptive families. Through charm they unite wayward (and wealthy) bachelors with financially bereft single women to form a happy couple that eventually adopts their orphaned matchmaker.

Elizabeth and Betsy understand that their power resides not in superior intellect or a strong moral fiber, but in the childish sex appeal of their blonde hair and blue eyes. Higdon argues that childhood innocence, as the opposite of adult sexual knowledge, implicitly evokes that knowledge. While some images explicitly suppress the sexual overtones of innocence, others toy with them.<sup>60</sup> Temple's producers entrench her firmly within the innocent tradition. They emphasize her physical smallness next to her male co-stars; they celebrate her cuteness instead of her beauty, and they bestow her with a naively optimistic perspective on serious issues. From the safety of her innocence, however, they also allow her to perform the rituals of feminine sexuality. Her characters woo the wealthy white men who save them. Curly Top especially, portrays Elizabeth's relationship with her eventual benefactor, Mr. Morgan, as a long flirtation, beginning

with what Elizabeth calls their “first date” and culminating with his marriage to Mary, Elizabeth’s adopted older sister.

Aided by her association with innocence, Temple’s films attribute her powers of seduction to willful determination, not white beauty. In the song “Be Optimistic” from Little Miss Broadway, Temple advises her fellow orphans to “just smile” despite their hardships, warning that otherwise, nobody will love them. By glossing the fact that wealthy white men notice and help Temple’s characters because they are alluring, the films operate like schoolteachers who only acknowledge their lighter students. Both leave the power of white beauty unstated, implicitly blaming darker victims who, like Pecola, must endure rather than transcend their own suffering. Morrison highlights the power of such blame when Pecola begins to menstruate shortly after drinking three quarts of milk from a Shirley Temple cup. In the scene, Morrison points to the way consumer goods and Hollywood images nourish growing girls, especially in the absence of a nurturing parent. When Pecola nurses herself to maturity on Temple’s white standard of female beauty, she cultivates a self-loathing that prompts her to ask Claudia and Frieda, “how do you get somebody to love you?”<sup>61</sup> Since Temple’s edict “just smile” occludes the oppressive histories that might otherwise explain Pecola’s loveless family, she can find no one to blame but herself.

As a national icon, Temple reinforces the connection between innocent white childhood and national identity. Kimberly B. Hébert argues that images such as Temple’s organize Western culture around whiteness, creating “destructive images of African-descended and other black peoples who share the same space of neighborhood and nation.”<sup>62</sup> Hébert argues, however, that Temple’s style originates not in whiteness

at all, but in the white appropriations of blackness seen in minstrelsy. Using Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852) to make the analogy, she claims that Temple combines Eva's white adorability with Topsy's funny coquettishness. Consequently, Hébert claims, Temple performs a "white-faced performance of blackness."<sup>63</sup> While an outraged Claudia views the performance as a trespass into black culture, a captivated Pecola embraces the example of how her own blackness should look in the abstract.

Pecola outwardly emulates Temple in the novel, but Morrison directly connects her to Stahl's Peola by signifying on her name. By inserting the letter "c" into "Pecola," Morrison creates a name that is the same, yet different from "Peola." She highlights the difference when Maureen asks, "Pecola? Wasn't that the name of the girl in Imitation of Life?"<sup>64</sup> With the allusion, Morrison suggests that each narrative complements the other. Interestingly, Berlant bases her theory of abstract citizenship on the same story, addressing its varied forms in Fannie Hurst's 1933 novel, Stahl's 1934 film, and Douglas Sirk's 1959 remake. In her discussion of Stahl's Peola, Berlant explains the difference between having a visible body and being a visible subject in a capitalist public sphere. Berlant asserts that Peola relinquishes her black body and passes for white because she understands that to "choose to be visible in a culture of abstraction...would be to choose a form of slavery."<sup>65</sup> Faced with such political and economic dispossession, Peola rejects her black mother, Delilah, so she can adopt the invisible, but juridically defined, politically and economically empowered white subject position that she associates with the abstracted qualities of white beauty.

Pecola shares Peola's desires, but she occupies a different body, a variation Morrison captures through their similar, but different names. When Claudia compares Maureen's long beautiful braids to lynch ropes, Morrison offers a chilling metaphor that portends of the stakes raised by the corporeal differences between Peola and Pecola. With both a white and a black body to choose from, and with no "c" in her name, Peola chooses a body that the nation cannot "see." Conversely, Pecola inhabits just one, unabstracted body. Berlant calls the body's visible qualities, the parts that resist abstraction, "surplus corporeality."<sup>66</sup> Burdened with such "surplus," society can "see" and thus, reject Pecola. Morrison articulates Pecola's struggle between visible body and visible subject when the blue-eyed immigrant grocer, Mr. Yacobowski, looks at her and registers a "total absence of human recognition." The scene also emphasizes the connection between American consumerism and subjectivity by showing how Pecola's corporeality, like her father's, interferes with her role as a consumer. Finding nothing "desirable or necessary" about trying to "*see*" Pecola, Yacobowski intimidates her into silence, asking, "Christ. Kantcha talk?" (emph. in original).<sup>67</sup> As Yacobowski proves his own whiteness through exclusion, Morrison suggests that Americans stir the nation's melting pot over flames fed by silenced black bodies.

Pecola rejects her place as a non-consumer, praying every night to rid herself of her surplus corporeality. When she lies in the darkness of her parents' store-front home and whispers, "Please God...Please make me disappear," she tries to force her body into the Dick and Jane abstraction. Although "Little parts of her body faded away," she ultimately fails because her eyes remain. Pecola says, "They were everything. Everything was there, in them."<sup>68</sup> More than the physical evidence of her surpluses,

Pecola's eyes represent her consciousness, her ability to see the "ugliness" she associates with blackness. Without the ability to "see"—or without the "c"—Pecola believes she can be Peola. She hopes to enact her own blue-eyed, white faced version of blackness. Paradoxically, for successful abstraction, Pecola must endure self-erasure *and* blindness, a self-lynching that Furman calls, the "awful safety of oblivion."<sup>69</sup>

Contrary to Pecola's self-annihilating fantasies, Peola's dark mother, Delilah, outwardly accepts her lot as an invisible subject in a visible body as she labors for Bea's pancake business. Berlant reads Delilah as an allusion to Aunt Jemima. While Jemima's black-faced trademark represents a site of collective American identity rooted in historical amnesia, however, Berlant argues that Delilah's character is more complex.<sup>70</sup> Revealing a suppressed subjectivity in brief asides to the film's audience, she tells her employer, Bea, "Yesm. We all starts out [intelligent]. We don't gets dumb till later on." Berlant asks, "What is 'dumbness' here, if not Delilah's name for the mental blockages to rage and pain---what I earlier called 'the-will-to-not-know'—that distinguishes the colonized subject?"<sup>71</sup> While Berlant refers to Peola's willful denial, Delilah's use of "dumb" also alludes to the silence of muted black bodies like Aunt Jemima's. In contrast to these "dumb" bodies, Stahl lets Delilah's body speak in life and in death. Berlant argues that, in her funeral scene, Delilah emerges as a site of collective identity in a black public sphere that demythologizes the homogenous nation. Instead of representing amnesia (like Jemima), Delilah's corpse represents "pain, memory, history, and ritual."<sup>72</sup>

Through the intertextuality between The Bluest Eye and Imitation of Life, Morrison illuminates Pecola's relationship to Shirley Temple. In Imitation of Life, Bea

puts a white face on Delilah's labor and body, exploiting them for her own benefit. Similarly, in The Bluest Eye, Shirley Temple and her creators profit by putting her white childish face on the black music and culture embodied by Bojangles. Delilah advises Peola to "submit," and suppress her rage over such injustices, but Peola refuses. Similarly, Pecola cannot endure invisibility and "dumbness." Instead, she wants to embody the Shirley Temple trademark—to consume and be consumed like the quintessential American child. While Pecola behaves like Peola, however, she operates like Delilah in Claudia's narrative. When Claudia invokes Pecola's pregnant body, she inscribes it like Delilah's with the "pain, memory, history, and ritual" of their community. Claudia, therefore, substitutes Pecola's body for the Temple trademark that would otherwise offer little more than nostalgic banalities about childhood innocence in the 1940s. Explaining her unwillingness to let Temple represent their childhood, Claudia argues that no good can come from innocence or nostalgia. She aligns the former with the devastation of rape when she says, "*Our innocence and faith were no more productive than [Cholly's] lust or despair*" (emph. in original).<sup>73</sup> She criminalizes the latter when she shows that it longs not for wartime patriotism or postwar bliss, but for a time when community and nation refused to "see" the destruction of little black girls like Pecola.

In The Bluest Eye, Pecola's pregnancy and psychosis represent extreme consequences of racism. By weaving Pecola's story into a web of very different but interconnected narratives, however, Morrison suggests that the erasures of abstraction occur in layers, rather than as an absolute. Claudia, who despises Shirley Temple, minimally resists self-effacing impetuses by calling Maureen names and by

dismembering her white baby dolls. In contrast, with lighter skin, greater economic stability, and long familial and pedagogical histories that promote assimilation, Maureen, Geraldine, and Soaphead all suppress their “surpluses.” To complicate matters, however, Morrison dissociates their abstraction from the hoped-for empowerment of citizenship. First, when Maureen boasts that her family profits by suing companies such as Isaley’s Ice Cream Parlor, she inadvertently paints a picture of dependence. She adds that, in Isaley’s case, her family only won because a policeman friend bore witness on their behalf. In addition, through the image of Mobile girls like Geraldine reading “Uplifting Thoughts” in The Liberty Magazine, Morrison points to the leisure of economic privilege as well as the political “liberty” that permits Americans to “uplift” themselves. In contrast, Morrison depicts Geraldine in a clean but loveless household that illustrates what Claudia would call, “adjustment without improvement.”<sup>74</sup> The house looks like Dick and Jane’s but it lacks the familial bliss that spells American patriotism and power. Finally, Soaphead’s family achieves little power through their high levels of education. Instead, they often accept the “powerless government offices available to the native population.” Soaphead, a misanthropic loner, finds himself similarly limited in America, where he can find only a few low-paying white-collar jobs such as “desk clerk at a colored hotel in Chicago” or “salesman for a cosmetics firm catering to blacks.”<sup>75</sup>

Through isolation and powerlessness, these adult characters also suffer a devastating lack of intimacy that, like the Breedloves, they pass on to their children. Geraldine imposes it on Junior, limiting his circle of friends while offering little affection for him at home. Furthermore, although Maureen appears to have everything,

when describing her character, Morrison rarely delves below the veneer of high-quality clothes that Claudia says “threaten to derange Frieda and me.” In the few details she conveys, Morrison associates Maureen with isolation, especially in her willingness to befriend Pecola, her inability to secure the alliance, and her somewhat desperate claim: “I *am* cute!”<sup>76</sup> Morrison suggests, through the social and political bankruptcy of the characters who attempt assimilation, that self-abstraction offers nothing more than a false promise to black Americans.

Since Morrison arranges her peripheral characters in separate but inextricable stories that defy linear narration, she simultaneously culminates multiple and contemporaneous histories in the specter of Pecola’s demise. The protagonist of each subplot participates in Pecola’s persecution. To defend herself against Claudia and Frieda, Maureen crushes Pecola, calling all three of them “Black and ugly black e mos.” Similarly, recognizing that his mother loves her cat more than she loves him, Junior torments Pecola by killing the cat Pecola admires. Augmenting the shock of Junior’s cruelty, Geraldine orders the “nasty little black bitch” out of her house, suppressing the eruption of surplus corporeality Pecola symbolizes.<sup>77</sup> Finally, to preserve what little power he has amassed, Soaphead delivers the final blow by persuading Pecola that he has given her the blue eyes she desires. As these characters use Pecola for their own benefit, Morrison suggests they mirror the work of a nation that invests in the ideology of innocence at the expense of its children.

With these overlapping narrative circles, Morrison constructs a literary form that mirrors the movement of history. She shows how seemingly isolated experiences of oppression can interconnect and compound each other to corrupt individuals as well as

their families, communities and nations over time. Furman argues that Frieda and Claudia blame their community for accepting the white standards that exclude Pecola.<sup>78</sup> Indeed, Claudia recognizes her town's role in Pecola's tragedy, saying, "All of us—all who knew her—felt so wholesome after we cleaned ourselves on her. We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness." Since love, according to Claudia, "is never any better than the lover," even those who loved Pecola, especially Cholly and his legacy of powerlessness, could not save her. While Morrison clearly indicts African American communities for perpetuating oppressive ideologies, Claudia goes further, implicating the nation in Pecola's demise. She explains, "I even think now that the land of the entire country was hostile to marigolds that year. This soil is bad for certain kinds of flowers."<sup>79</sup>

In the early 1970s, when Giroux suggests nostalgia for wartime America first emerges, Morrison critic Sara Blackburn defensively complains, "Toni Morrison is far too talented to remain only a marvelous recorder of the black side of provincial American life." She advises Morrison to "address a riskier contemporary American reality...and take her place among the most serious, important, and talented American novelists."<sup>80</sup> In Blackburn's narrow view, Morrison should write about white people and their prosperous nation, not black people and their struggling town. When Claudia tells Pecola's story instead of burying it, Morrison connects local and national, leaving Temple's ideologies of innocent child and benevolent nation standing with Pecola at the local garbage heap.

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<sup>1</sup> See my introduction, 14-15 for further discussion of Higonnet's "Romantic child" as the artistic articulation of childhood as innocent. Also see Anne Higonnet, Pictures of Innocence: The History and Crisis of Ideal Childhood (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> Hazel Carby, Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 24-25, 144.

<sup>3</sup> For further discussion of neo-conservatism and the post-Civil Rights period, see my introduction, 7-9.

<sup>4</sup> Henry Giroux, Channel Surfing: Racism, The Media, and the Destruction of Today's Youth (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 77.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Paul Rogin, Ronald Reagan, the Movie and Other Episodes in Political Demonology (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 237, 246, 2.

<sup>6</sup> Emmett Till was lynched for saying "Bye baby" to a white store -owner's wife while he was visiting relatives in Money, Mississippi. Emmett's mother insisted on an open casket so that the world could see what had happened to her son. In their own startling comment on the innocence of American childhood, Jet magazine published pictures of the corpse, attracting national attention and outrage. Despite public outcry, however, a segregated Mississippi court acquitted Till's murderers that same year.

<sup>7</sup> In The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Benefit from Identity Politics (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), George Lipsitz argues that "overtly racist categories" in the Federal Housing Agency's manuals siphoned "almost all" of the program's money into white communities, 5.

<sup>8</sup> Giroux notes that nostalgia for the 1950s begins as early as the 1970s, when Hollywood first "resurrected white, suburban, middle-class youth in the nostalgic image of Andy Hardy and Frankie Avalon," in Channel Surfing, 42.

<sup>9</sup> Giroux, Channel Surfing, 42-44.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 35, 44, 86.

<sup>11</sup> William Elson and William Gray first published the Basic Readers that include Dick and Jane in 1930. The readers became "fixtures" in the nation's reading curriculum from the 1930s to the 1960s. Fun with Dick and Jane: A Commemorative Collection of Stories (New York : CollinsPublishers, 1996), 2.

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<sup>12</sup> Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, trans. By Myra Bergman Ramos (1970; reprint New York: Continuum, 1997), 52, 55. Toni Morrison, The Bluest Eye (New York: Washington Square Press, 1970), 7.

<sup>13</sup> Mark Ledbetter, Victims and the Postmodern Narrative or Doing Violence to the Body: An Ethic of Reading and Writing (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 28.

<sup>14</sup> Nancy Backes, "Growing Up Desperately: The Adolescent 'Other' in the Novels of Paule Marshall, Toni Morrison, and Michelle Cliff," in Women of Color: Defining the Issues, Hearing the Voices, edited by Diane Long Hoeveler and Janet K. Boles (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2001), 47; Andrea O'Reilly, "Maternal Conceptions in Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye and Tar Baby: 'A Woman has to be a Daughter Before She Can Be Any Kind of Woman,'" in This Giving Birth: Pregnancy and Childbirth in American Women's Writing, edited by Julie Tharp and Susan MacCollum-Whitcomb (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 2000), 87.

<sup>15</sup> Gurleen Grewal, "Laundering the Head of Whitewash": Mimicry and Resistance in The Bluest Eye, in Approaches to Teaching the Novels of Toni Morrison, edited by Nellie McKay and Kathryn Earle (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1997), 125.

<sup>16</sup> Elaine Tyler May, Homeward Bound: American Families in the cold War Era (1988, reprint, New York: Basic Books, 1999), 125, 126.

<sup>17</sup> Rogin specifically mentions the films I Was a Communist (1951), My Son John (1952) and Manchurian Candidate (1962), 247-251.

<sup>18</sup> May, xviii, 121.

<sup>19</sup> Elson, William H. and William S. Gray, The Elson Basic Readers: Book Four (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1930), 9.

<sup>20</sup> Elson, William H. and William S. Gray, "Busy Workers and Their Work" in The Elson Basic Readers: Book Four (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1930), 2, 5.

<sup>21</sup> May, xx. For further discussion of the white family and its connection to patriotism, see chapter 2, 65-66.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted in Judith Stacey, In the Name of the Family: Rethinking Family Values in the Postmodern Age (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 5.

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- <sup>23</sup> See my introduction, 18-19 for further discussion of the way images of Romantic children naturalize gender roles.
- <sup>24</sup> Lauren Berlant, "National Brands/National Body: Imitation of Life," in Comparative American Identities: Race, Sex and Nationality in the Modern Text, ed. Hortense Spillers (New York: Routledge, 1991), 113. For further discussion of "abstract citizenship," see my introduction, 3-4.
- <sup>25</sup> Carole Kismaric and Marvin Heiferman, Growing up with Dick and Jane: Learning and Living the American Dream (New York: Collins Publishers, 1996).
- <sup>26</sup> <http://www.pan-tex.net/usr/j/julie/ju25000.htm> (December 6, 2002).
- <sup>27</sup> Dave Schultz, <http://www.daveschultz.com/dickandjane/> (December 6, 2002).
- <sup>28</sup> Grewal, 118.
- <sup>29</sup> Pin-chia Feng, The Female Bildungsroman by Toni Morrison and Maxine Hong Kingston: A Postmodern Reading (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 1998), 53.
- <sup>30</sup> Morrison, 105, 88.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid, 119.
- <sup>32</sup> Vanessa Dickerson, "The Naked Father in Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye," in Refiguring the Father: New Feminist Readings of Patriarchy, edited by Patricia Yaeger and Beth Kowaleski-Wallace (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989), 111, 116-117.
- <sup>33</sup> Morrison, 159.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid, 88, 98.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid, 101.
- <sup>36</sup> Ibid, 38.
- <sup>37</sup> Grewal, 121.
- <sup>38</sup> Deborah Cadman, "When the Back Door is Closed and the Front Yard is Dangerous: The Space of Girlhood in Toni Morrison's Fiction," in The Girl: Constructions of the Girl in Contemporary Fiction by Women, edited by Roth O. Saxton (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 76.
- <sup>39</sup> Morrison, 127.

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<sup>40</sup> Morrison, 127, 128. Morrison suggests that the infantilization of women causes confusion between a man's protective feelings for his wife or lover, and those for his daughter, creating misplaced sexual desire.

<sup>41</sup> Lothar Bredella, "Decolonizing the Mind: Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and *Tar Baby*," in Intercultural Encounters—Studies in English Literatures, edited by Heinz Antor and Kevin L. Cope (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1999), 372.

<sup>42</sup> Kismaric and Heiferman, 1.

<sup>43</sup> James Anderson argues that resistance to the education of African-Americans began as early as 1880, continuing, and even worsening, in the early part of the twentieth-century. At their worst, resistant politicians and educators promoted "discriminatory funding" in the South, diverting funds collected from black taxpayers to white schools, forcing black schools that could not secure private funding to collapse. In addition, Anderson points to the success of such tactics, explaining that at the outset of World War II, 77% of high-school aged African Americans were not enrolled in public secondary schools and that enrollment in the South decreased an additional 32.5% from 1940 to 1946. James Anderson, "Literacy and Education in the African-American Experience," in Literacy Among African-American Youth: Issues in Learning, Teaching, and Schooling (Hampton Press, Inc.: Cresskill, 1995), 33-35.

<sup>44</sup> Anderson cites high rates of illiteracy among adults as the reason that, historically, African American's have been forced to rely on an inadequate public school system to acquire their reading skills, 35.

<sup>45</sup> Frederick Douglass, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave: Written by Himself (1845, reprint, New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 78.

<sup>46</sup> Stanley Aronowitz. False Promises: The Shaping of American Working Class Consciousness (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), 81, 76-79.

<sup>47</sup> Morrison, 52-53.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, 40.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, 61, 62, 53.

<sup>50</sup> Kismaric and Heiferman, 23.

<sup>51</sup> Morrison 61.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 35, 39.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 68.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 71.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 133.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>57</sup> Henry Giroux, The Mouse that Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1999), 20.

<sup>58</sup> Susan Willis, "I Shop Therefore I am": Is There a Place for Afro-American Culture in Commodity Culture," in Changing Our Own Words: Essays on Criticism, Theory, and Writing by Black Women, edited by Cheryl A. Wall (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 173.

<sup>59</sup> Morrison 57.

<sup>60</sup> Higonet, 37-38. Higonet cites "Making a Train" (1867) and "Girl with Kittens" (1850-1860) as examples of such "dubious" portrayals.

<sup>61</sup> Morrison, 29.

<sup>62</sup> Kimberly B. Hébert, "Acting the Nigger: Topsy, Shirley Temple, and Toni Morrison's Pecola," in Approaches to Teaching Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin, edited by Elizabeth Ammons and Susan Belasco (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2000), 193.

<sup>63</sup> Hébert, 190, 193, 190.

<sup>64</sup> Morrison 57.

<sup>65</sup> Berlant, 127.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 112-114. For further discussion of surplus corporeality, see my introduction, 3-4.

<sup>67</sup> Morrison, 42.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 39.

<sup>69</sup> Furman, 19.

<sup>70</sup> Berlant, 125, 122, 123.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 126.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 124-125.

<sup>73</sup> Morrison, 9.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 70, 22.

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 133, 135.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 52, 61

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 61, 75.

<sup>78</sup> Furman, 15, 21.

<sup>79</sup> Morrison, 159, 160.

<sup>80</sup> Sara Blackburn, Review of Sula, New York Times Book Review (30 December 1973): 3, quoted in Nellie McKay, Introduction to Critical Essays on Toni Morrison, edited by Nellie McKay (Boston: G.K. Hall & Company, 1988), 5.

CHAPTER FOUR  
Forging New Futures:  
Child-Citizens and the Power of Customer Dissatisfaction  
in Lois Ann Yamanaka's Blu's Hanging

While Toni Morrison questions America's investment in a mythic time, Lois Ann Yamanaka challenges its embrace of a mythic place: Hawaii's island paradise. In Blu's Hanging (1997), Yamanaka tells the story of the Ogatas, a young Japanese American family that struggles against illness, poverty and discrimination in Hawaii. Through representations of the Ogata children as alternately oppressed and empowered, the narrative complicates Western conceptions of innocence both in childhood and on the island frontier. When explorers Captain James Cook and Louis Antoine Bougainville first mapped the Pacific in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, expanding Western nations conceived of the region as an orientalised paradise—one that would serve the imperial interests of France, England, Spain and the United States. They saw not only an escapist retreat, but a trade route to China, a profitable sugar industry and a source of cheap labor. For Native Hawaiians, “discovery” meant conquest. By 1820 when missionaries first arrived on the islands, they found Hawaii's religious order in disarray, devastated by the transformation of islands into bustling ports of call. Furthermore, while ambitious colonizers used warring Hawaiian chiefs against one another, they divided communal lands into private plantations in “The Great Mahele” of 1848.<sup>1</sup> Most damaging, Europeans introduced diseases such as influenza and small pox to Hawaiians, reducing the estimated one million Native people who thrived in 1778 to forty thousand by the time the United States military overthrew the Hawaiian monarchy in 1893.<sup>2</sup>

Nineteenth-century American writers like Herman Melville and Mark Twain wrestled with the moral implications of such atrocity. Postcolonial critic Rob Wilson concludes that these “authors of national culture” simply viewed the islands as “innocent” entities—components of “their own democratic-commercial empire.”<sup>3</sup> While extending the ideologies of innocence that had driven nation building across the continent into the new island frontier, however, Melville and Twain also satirized the high ideals of conversion and colonization. In Moby Dick (1851) for example, Melville arguably critiques American imperialism. Long before discussions of global economies had captured our imagination, Ishmael accepts an international division of labor with satirical equanimity. He explains that two kinds of laborers comprise the “fishery”: American-born workers supply the brains while the rest of the world provides the muscle.<sup>4</sup> Literary critic Myra Jehlen contends, however, that the novel’s ending compromises its own critique. She contrasts Ishmael’s conformance with Ahab’s free will, suggesting that conformance wins out when Ahab and the ship go down with the whale, leaving Ishmael as survivor and example.<sup>5</sup>

Similarly complex, Mark Twain’s Roughing It (1871) juxtaposes satire with stereotype. On one hand, he offers a Swiftian account of how the inevitability of genocide will resolve concerns regarding Native women’s promiscuity. On the other hand, he portrays Natives as playful “children of the sun” who splash in the surf and comically dress up in Western clothing.<sup>6</sup> Critics explain the contradiction by suggesting that emotional and financial hardships motivated Twain to write Roughing It. To produce a best-seller and to satisfy his own escapist fantasies, they argue, he willfully

capitalized on popular myths about the American West.<sup>7</sup> Like Melville, therefore, he acts both as critic and exploiter, but from the ironic distance of New York.

With demographic changes that solidified by the turn-of-the-century, Americans revisited the Hawaiian fantasies appropriated by Twain. The 1875 Reciprocity Agreement between the islands and the United States eliminated tariffs on sugar, dramatically increasing Hawaiian production. Consequently, more than 300,000 Asians came from China, Korea, the Philippines, and Japan to work on Hawaii's plantations between 1850 and 1920.<sup>8</sup> Together with the remaining Natives, the Puerto Rican, Portuguese and Black American immigrants who also came to work, and the white capitalists who arrived from North America, they created what Wilson calls, a "local multicultural," a place where no one national culture dominated daily life.<sup>9</sup> In due course, America switched myths, replacing racially homogenous Eden with egalitarian melting pot. According to Jeff Chang, social scientists have perpetuated such perceptions by turning repeatedly to Hawaii for "the answer" to problems of racial unrest.<sup>10</sup> He and Wilson also blame popular culture, especially the work of James A. Michener, for contributing to the fiction of paradise. Wilson claims that Michener's novel, Tales of the South Pacific (1946), and Joshua Logan's subsequent film, South Pacific (1949), portray the islands as "a settler's paradise of enchantment," a "multiracial heaven" where local people willingly melt into the superior pot of American whiteness.<sup>11</sup>

Although Michener's work remains popular today, conceptions of Hawaii changed yet again with Hawaii's Democratic "Revolution" in 1954. After the Japanese-dominated Democratic Party toppled the Republican elite that had controlled Hawaiian

politics since annexation in 1898, mythic melting pot turned to multicultural salad bowl. The adjustment, according to Chang, followed easily because the peaceful nature of the political displacement signaled a “uniquely American moment, a progression past racial oligarchy into democratic pluralism.”<sup>12</sup> Since the Democrats successfully lobbied for statehood and not independence in 1959, they ceded Hawaii to national ideals of liberal multiculturalism and abstract citizenship. Hence, the birth of a new paradise—one that unites diverse people under the rubric of *e pluribus unum* and camouflages the uneven terrain that dispossesses marginal groups such as Native Hawaiians and the descendants of Filipino immigrants.<sup>13</sup>

Ironically, Hawaii gained admission to the United States just as people, capital and information were beginning to move across national borders with increasing alacrity. Diverse peoples consolidate in triangular economic zones marked by corporate logos instead of national flags, creating what Wilson calls a new “transnational imaginary.”<sup>14</sup> Hawaii finds itself, therefore, at the intersection of national and postnational powers. With statehood, white Americans flock to the islands first as tourists, then as residents. Shortly after, the Immigration Act of 1965 opens the door for Asian workers to bring their families to Hawaii. Thus, while Westerners filled hotels and bought and sold real estate, incoming Asians filled the low paying service jobs that followed. The changes signal an economic shift away from both military spending and the old plantation economy. In their place, tourism emerges as Hawaii’s number one source of state income.<sup>15</sup> Hawaiian statehood, therefore, contributes to the development of a new service economy that sweeps Hawaii into the deindustrialized age of globalized and digital trade.<sup>16</sup>

From their seat in a major hub of the new global economy, the local elite face what Chang calls the “Dislocating cycles of late capitalism wreaking havoc from above,” as well as the rise of “pan-ethnic identity fragmenting from below.”<sup>17</sup> Taking advantage, local activists gain visibility with the Filipino struggle over affirmative action in the 1960s and 70s; the creation of the Bamboo Ridge Press in 1978; and the Hawaiian Sovereignty Movement that grew in the 1980s and 90s. The ruling class, comprised primarily of the descendents of Chinese and Japanese immigrants, responds by more closely aligning itself with Western nationalism.<sup>18</sup> In light of such complexity, Wilson, Dissanayake and Chang urge critics to reject binary analyses that contrast universal with particular. Wilson and Dissanayake insist on a multifarious approach that recognizes what they call the “global/local” in Hawaii’s “settler/indigenous” society. Similarly, Chang argues for analyses that account for the way local struggles “both mimic and resist colonial narratives” and are thus, “marked internally by difference.”<sup>19</sup>

Blu’s Hanging embodies such conflict. Yamanaka warns that behind myths of racial egalitarianism, global and national forces vie for power at the expense of local children. In a literal interpretation, Yamanaka represents children at risk. Figuratively, however, these children evoke the struggles of a people infantilized by assimilationism in mid- to late twentieth-century Hawaii. The novel begins in medias res, placing Ivah Ogata, and her siblings, Blu and Maisie, at the center of a narrative that oscillates between past and present. As the children’s relationship with the past moves from denial and nostalgia to acceptance, Yamanaka explores the possibilities for change that lie dormant in childhood. She also envisions a pathway to the future for Hawaiian citizens paved less by assimilation than by a combination of individual autonomy and

inter-ethnic cooperation. Although Blu's Hanging challenges liberal ideologies of white nationalism and global capital, the novel has endured harsh criticism for its treatment of Filipinos and Native Hawaiians. In my focus on the Japanese-descended Ogatas, therefore, I keep an eye on the ways Blu's Hanging sometimes also serves the forces it resists.

The novel begins after one of the plot's most significant events—the death of Eleanor Bertram—has already occurred. In the first scene, Yamanaka establishes that Ivah, Blu and Maisie Ogata suffer an antagonistic relationship with the history that culminates with their mother's passing. First, their Poppy, Bertram Ogata, plays “Moon River” repeatedly on the piano. He sings “Old Dreammaker, you heartbreaker, wherever you're going, I'm going your way” with such despair that the children fear their father will voluntarily join Eleanor in death. Yamanaka fills the household with competing noises, however, when Ivah turns up the television to drown out the sound of their father's grief. While Poppy loses himself in nostalgia, the television channels in an imaginary world dominated by the present. Ivah watches in amazement as the castaways of Gilligan's Island pull “Ten whole coconut pies” out of thin air—an extravagant meal compared to her daily ration of “mayonnaise bread.”<sup>20</sup> With the examples of nostalgia and distraction, Yamanaka portrays the Ogatas in denial of a history that they cannot otherwise escape.

Ironically, Ivah, Blu and Maisie know little of the past that permeates the novel's first scene. Yamanaka, however, explicitly connects their adverse situation to histories of imperialism, transnational migration and exploitative wage labor. Born in Hawaii, Eleanor and Bertram belong to the *nisei*, the generation of children born to the *isei*, or

Japanese immigrants. Although the law conferred citizenship to the *nisei* at birth, Eleanor and Bertram lost those rights at the ages of five and eight respectively. After contracting leprosy, an illness that first arrived in Hawaii with the missionaries of the early nineteenth century, officials denied their freedom of movement and communication by forcing them into a prison-like quarantine without their families. Poppy explains that leprosy was such a stigma that family members eventually faded away. He bitterly recalls that not one of Eleanor's ten siblings dared to claim her upon her release in 1958. Ashamed of the illness that criminalized them, Bertram and Eleanor buried their past, moving away from Kalaupapa to avoid the blood relatives who rejected them anyway.<sup>21</sup> Reasoning that healthy children would reverse the stigma and restore their right to live as respected citizens in the newly admitted fiftieth state, the pair set out to "prove to the world, everybody, that [they] could make perfect children, perfect."<sup>22</sup>

When Bertram and Eleanor imagine the perfect child, of course, they imagine the Romantic child—a child without a history or knowledge of abandonment, stigma and isolation.<sup>23</sup> The desire for perfect children, therefore, symbolizes the Ogatas' desire to forget and assimilate. To align themselves with the mainstream, what Poppy calls "topside," Bertram and Eleanor construct a "veil" between the children and the past. Yamanaka reinforces the symbolic significance of perfect children by juxtaposing their family against similarly one-dimensional images in popular culture. Although the 1970s saw the nuclear family begin to give way to divorce, gay rights, women's liberation and greater racial equity, Yamanaka highlights the images of white patriarchal middle-class families that persist in 1970s popular media. In particular, Blu loves the American icon

of teen culture, Archie. According to Bradford W. Wright's Comic Book Nation (2001), Archie stories hardly acknowledge the dramatic changes that occurred in teen culture between 1950 and 1990. Instead, they consistently offer narratives about oblivious but do-gooder teens.<sup>24</sup> While Blu follows the escapades of teenagers who model an infantilized form of citizenship, Ivah watches Bewitched, a popular sitcom of the 1970s that transforms feminist empowerment into trivialized witchcraft. At the behest of her husband, Samantha tries to give up her “unnatural” powers. She breaks the rule often, but in the context of Darren's patriarchal household, her transgressions amount to childish disobedience rather than outright defiance—as if the women's movement never occurred.

Yamanaka connects the historical oblivion of enchanted television families to the myths of Hawaii's paradise when the Ogata children watch the film Gidget Goes Hawaiian (1961). The film presents a dichotomized Hawaii where settler and Native societies alike blend into the picturesque landscape. Darrell Y. Hamamoto suggests that similar oversimplifications occur often on television. He argues that the networks frequently romanticize Asian Americans while appropriating their “lush ancestral lands...as a favorite backdrop.”<sup>25</sup> Gidget briefly alludes to a broader landscape, but only by incorporating it into the tourism machine when Abby, Gidget's rival in love, mockingly suggests that everyone visit a pineapple factory. The group dismisses the idea with laughter, preferring instead to remain in a contrived world where exotic women perform hula dances for gawking tourists while primitive men beat drums by firelight.

In Hawaii, Gidget's white family encounters a sexually pleasurable but treacherous world. Caught up in the eroticism, Gidget behaves in a flirtatious way that, according to her friends, arouses the "Native boys." In song, her friends tease that "Native boys are sighen...because when Gidget goes Hawaiian, she goes Hawaiian all the way." The vacation turns sour after Abby spreads rumors of Gidget's promiscuity, but Gidget upholds the moral fiber of her family by proving the rumor a misunderstanding. Rejuvenated by the knowledge that the sexual innocence of the white middle-class child has triumphed over primitive temptation, all of the characters strengthen their bonds of friendship, love, and especially family. Since no one ever bothers to visit a pineapple factory, they leave the empty landscape and the goodness of whiteness intact. Indicating that little has changed regarding popular conceptions of Hawaii, the television and film industries continue such affirmation with an entire genre of "goes Hawaiian" family productions, from the 1970s-Brady Bunch to the 1990s-Olsen twins.

Bertram plays a similarly affirming role for his sister, Betty (who significantly shares her name with Archie's blond haired sidekick). Yamanaka portrays Betty as a member of a Japanese ruling class that has assimilated to white American ideals. Like the self-righteous white tourists in Gidget, Betty defines her family's moral and economic superiority by contrasting it to the perceived inferiority of others (i.e. her brother). She exaggerates the comparison by degrading Bertram's family, taking isolated incidents out of the larger contexts that explain them. After Eleanor's death, for example, Betty expresses disgust over the dirt in the Ogatas' house while ignoring the illness that prevented Eleanor from performing housework. She also claims that, unlike

Eleanor's family, she could be counted on to "always do wass right" because she stood by her brother during his incarceration.<sup>26</sup> When Betty forgets that she refused to even say goodbye to Bertram before he was taken away, Yamanaka suggests that Hawaii's assimilated ruling class also suffers from historical amnesia.

Bertram and Eleanor mistakenly imagine that their "perfect" children will distinguish them from the underachieving monolith that affirms Gidget and uplifts Betty. Instead, the children embody the history they are supposed to obscure. First, when Ivah rubs lotion over her mother's mysterious scars without knowing their cause, Yamanaka physically connects her to Eleanor's past. Next, although Yamanaka initially withholds the details of Eleanor and Bertram's experiences from the reader, she metaphorically connects the children to their parents' suffering by using Mrs. Ikeda's kennel as a parallel image for their imprisonment. When the satirically named "Friendly Market" refuses the Ogatas' credit and forces Ivah and Blu to perform odd jobs for money, the children accept work with Mrs. Ikeda. In the kennel, a suffocating basement hole that breeds disease among neglected animals, Yamanaka alludes to Mama and Poppy's suffering by graphically describing the rotting flesh of canine skin infections. She secures the connection between the dogs' present and the Ogatas' past by choosing Mrs. Ikeda to remind the children of their family's shame. Mrs. Ikeda calls them "goddam filthy kids" and tells them, "you got leprosy in your veins." The kennel scenes culminate when Blu's favorite, Chloe, dies. In the end, she endures a "urine- and shit-caked cage," suffers from ears that are swollen entirely shut, and urinates in a "golden yellow and thick" stream that passes through a blood-encrusted opening.<sup>27</sup> By placing

Ivah, Blu and Maisie amid such putrid conditions, Yamanaka creates an image where history hovers forebodingly around them, despite their ignorance.

When Mrs. Ikeda's animals begin to die despite the children's efforts to save them, the kennel scenes also mirror the hopeless conditions that Ivah, Blu and Maisie face at home. Paranoid that the leprosy would return and break up her family for the second time, Eleanor continues to take the sulfone drugs that cured her long after her symptoms subside. Ironically, she creates the situation she fears most when she dies from the repeated drug use. Through Eleanor's ironic death, Yamanaka suggests that buried pasts not only hover, but repeat. She portends that the cycle will continue when Blu offers a dying Chloe heaven. He tells her that death will grant her freedom from the cages, "No more sores," and access to his nurturing mother.<sup>28</sup> While he expresses a self-defeating faith in death's relief, Yamanaka aligns motherless child, ailing dog and incarcerated leper, suggesting that, like Eleanor and Chloe, only death can save the children from their suffering.

Making matters worse, Eleanor's death forces Poppy to abandon the children for a second job. After Delmonte eliminates his position as a "summer picker" on the graveyard shift, he seeks employment as a custodian for both the public school and the Bank of Hawaii. While Poppy flounders in a world where inadequate wages and unstable employment mean that round the clock labor will not feed his children, Yamanaka elicits the hardships of Hawaii's complex labor history. Poppy's experiences range from the feudal oppressions of a dying plantation economy to the low paying jobs of a rising service economy. In addition, by choosing the school and the bank to employ Bertram, Yamanaka connects his hardship to the interests of both national ideology and

multinational capital. Bertram cleans up after both, providing them with cheap invisible labor as they negotiate their stake in the local geography that threatens to swallow his children.

Despite the consequences of Mama's denial, Poppy refuses to acknowledge the distant past. Instead, he focuses on the recent past—a time when he and Eleanor believed their new family had suppressed leprosy's stigma. Unwilling to give up that dream, he asks Ivah to fill her mother's shoes, inadvertently changing the family model he mimics. Yamanaka highlights the contradiction in Ivah's new role when Ivah says, "I figure Poppy might kick my ass upside down if anything happened to Blu or Maisie." Although Ivah initially views herself as both parent and child, Poppy's patriarchal aspirations fade steadily away. Left with only a "two-dimensional picture of [her] father," Ivah becomes a surrogate parent.<sup>29</sup> She sets financial priorities, shops for necessities, provides emotional support for her siblings, and looks out for their general safety. She even attends a conference with Maisie's teacher.

Ivah's mutation marks the changing relationships among her family, its history and the nation. In addition to performing her new responsibilities, she seeks out information about her family's past and rejects the assimilationist ideals of her parents. Yamanaka emphasizes the changes by contrasting Ivah with her brother Blu. Unlike Ivah, Bertram views Blu as a child. Consequently, he expects Blu to be "perfect," and thus, blames him for the family's shortcomings. Ivah notes Poppy's unfair treatment of her brother, lamenting that when it comes to the goodness in Blu, Poppy "Doesn't see." She associates Poppy's critical eye with the white national standard they have failed to achieve when she says, "He sees us differently ever since we went to Aunty

Betty's...It's Aunt Betty in him. It's Aunt Betty in all of us. Even Blu."<sup>30</sup> By rejecting him, Poppy sends Blu on a search for acceptance as a student, a consumer and a son. Where Blu's desire for acceptance represents ideals of historical denial and social assimilation, therefore, Ivah's independence serves as a model for resistant childhood and citizenship.

Blu and Ivah's contrasting roles at home mirror their experiences at school. In Blu's Hanging, teachers operate as imperial agents. When Blu's teacher, Miss Ota, complains that his Haiku has no flow or rhyme, Blu asks a friend to write a more metered version for him. Significantly, Blu's first poem includes information about Mrs. Ikeda's kennel. While Blu only understands the literal meaning of lines such as "The dogs are dying," Yamanaka makes the metaphoric reference to Kalaupapa clear. She juxtaposes Blu's editing with Ivah's discovery of her mother's mug shot—a picture of a naked five-year-old with "the numbers of a criminal in front of her." Ultimately, Blu turns in a banal collection of lines such as "honey is sweet, and so are you!" They not only dispense with personal sentiment and family history, but are written by a friend and are intended to flatter the teacher.<sup>31</sup> With the "A+" she gives Blu for his revised poem, Miss Ota affirms style, but she also censors unwelcome information. Through the obfuscation, Yamanaka suggests that state-sanctioned education validates only those Hawaiian histories that conform to ideologies of national innocence. It therefore forces students into a binary world where multicultural intricacies disappear in the impossible choice between oppressor and oppressed. When Blu relinquishes his own voice for the falsetto of Miss Ota's, Yamanaka aligns academic success with political assimilation.

Too young to navigate the predicament, Maisie responds with a silence so infantilizing that, rather than ask to use the bathroom, she regularly urinates in her classroom.

In contrast, Ivah rejects teachers who blame her for their disappointment with Hawaii's paradise. In particular, Maisie's kindergarten teacher, Miss Owens, regrets her move to Hawaii, cursing the "darn lyin' recruiter" who promised her a "lousy teacher's cottage in paradise." Similarly, Mrs. Nishimoto admits that she hates "the heat, the mosquitoes...and the brown people all on welfare." She asks, "And this is paradise? Oh well, we must've read the wrong travel brochure."<sup>32</sup> Henry Giroux argues that, in a world where commercial culture has begun to supplant public culture, education and entertainment have begun to fuse.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, through her representation of Miss Owens' and Miss Nishimoto's naiveté, Yamanaka connects education to entertainment, portraying a school system that serves tourism by misrepresenting Hawaii's colonial history to its own teachers.

When Ivah reflects that the dust outside Maisie's classroom looks like "pixie dust," Yamanaka evokes Walt Disney's Peter Pan (1953). She suggests that the fantasies of the entertainment industry permeate the school hallways, creating a make believe world where no one ever has to grow up. From within this fantasy-world, teachers like Miss Owens and Mrs. Nishimoto overlook Hawaii's socioeconomic realities. They blame their students for ruining paradise. Accordingly, when Maisie refuses to talk, Miss Owens punishes her for stubbornness, speculates that she cannot hear, and finally, recommends her for "Special Ed." She never interprets Maisie's silence as grief. Yamanaka contrasts Miss Owens naiveté with Ivah's insight when Ivah looks critically at the dust. She says, "it's red dirt from the pineapple fields. That's

all.”<sup>34</sup> With Ivah’s observation, Yamanaka suggests that entertainment giants like Disney and multinational corporations like Delmonte cooperate with state-sanctioned education to disseminate the myths that erase the Ogas while profiting from their invisible labor.

In addition, Ivah’s teachers use language to degrade her. While Miss Owens complains that Maisie is “uncommunicative,” she ironically attacks Ivah’s language skills during their conference. She demands that they “speak to each other in standard English for the duration of this conference. I find the pidgin English you children speak to be so limited in its ability to express fully what we need to cover today. Am I clear?”<sup>35</sup> Miss Owens’ attitude reflects the values of the English Standard Schools that systematically segregated Hawaii’s public school system from the 1920s to the 1940s. Young argues that such schools used language proficiency as a pretense to segregate students based on racial and national categories. While protecting the “American” experience of white middle-class students who could not afford private school, language proficiency tests also channeled nonwhite students into classrooms that stressed agricultural over academic training. Such schools inhibited upward mobility for second-generation plantation workers. Even after Japanese families began preparing their American-born children to pass language proficiency tests, English Standard Schools resisted their admittance.<sup>36</sup> By portraying Miss Owens as an agent of the English speaking nation-state, Yamanaka suggests that although the English Standard Schools were abolished in 1948, their influence could still be felt in the 1970s.<sup>37</sup>

Since Ivah encounters Miss Owens as a pseudo-parent instead of as a student, she behaves more like an equal. Her version of “parent,” however, breaks from the

examples set by Mama and Poppy. Poppy replaces his dialect with perfect English while on the phone with Miss Owens; he also advises Ivah to “be like your mama” and “no talk wise” at the conference. He does not know that Ivah has already transgressed such decorum, calling Miss Owens a “fuckin’ haole” on the previous afternoon.<sup>38</sup> She strays further when she defends Maisie in pidgin during the conference. Ivah defiantly asserts, “She not deaf” and “She not stupid.” Miss Owens responds with a “sneering smile” that only provokes Ivah to think, “I don’t even care.”<sup>39</sup> Her defiance represents more than a showdown with a closed-minded teacher or a predictable rebellion against an overbearing parent. It signals Ivah’s unwillingness to give up her voice to a national standard. She attributes her attitude to the dissolving family when she thinks, “I don’t care. I answer all the phone calls anyway. My Poppy’s never home. My mother’s dead.” Furthermore, Yamanaka connects independence to curiosity when Poppy mistakenly alludes to Eleanor’s illness while advising Ivah to conform. Ivah ignores the advice but hones in on the tidbit of information. She quietly pleads, “*Tell me, Poppy, tell me*” (emph. in original).<sup>40</sup> From outside of the nuclear family, the school and the nation that would deny her language and her past, Ivah wants to know: what happened?

Yamanaka endorses Ivah’s choices by featuring pidgin English in the novel. In Hawaii’s complex cultural setting, however, she risks eclipsing the voices of others. Haunani-Kay Trask argues, in “Decolonizing Hawaiian Literature,” that Asian American writing celebrates pidgin at the expense of Hawaii’s other “authentic” voices. Trask discounts the counterhegemonic potential of Hawaii’s Asian writing, claiming that it erases the Native and fails to question the dominant literary culture.<sup>41</sup> By taking such a hard line, Trask risks a condemnation of all Asian writing in Hawaii, suggesting that

pidgin voices should be silenced for the benefit of Native voices. Likewise, however, Yamanaka's celebration of pidgin barely acknowledges a Native presence, let alone Native sounds. Thus, both Yamanaka and Trask illustrate the difficulties of finding a counterhegemonic voice.

Similar questions arise when Ivah ironically labels her teachers foreigners. She ignores their shared citizenship and instead distinguishes between groups of people by geography, race, religion, and ethnicity. She notes Miss Owens' "Texas drawl" and calls her and Mrs. Nishimoto "Two rotten haoles." She also wishes they would "Go home to the Midwest," resentfully wondering, "Who told you to come here?"<sup>42</sup> Without a concept of nation or state, Ivah overlooks the imperialist history that imported one population while displacing another. To challenge the ideology of island paradise, therefore, Yamanaka critiques from the perspective of exploited immigrant laborers who resist whitewashing, not from the perspective of dispossessed Natives who resist annihilation. A quick dismissal of Blu's Hanging, however, would consign Yamanaka to Maisie's humiliating world of silence without addressing the complexities of how to speak justly.

In addition to stressing the ideological importance of schools, Yamanaka focuses on children's entertainment and commodity culture as equally predominant factors in shaping their world. She starkly contrasts Blu and Ivah's relationship to commodities in the first chapter when the children fantasize about the foods that they miss after Mama dies. Blu dreams about store bought foods, craving "eggs (from the carton)," and missing American sounding brand names such as "Farmer John bacon" and "Florida orange juice." In contrast, Ivah craves the Japanese-influenced foods their mother

gathered and cooked, longing for “Pumpkin from the yard with shoyu, sugar, and dry ebi” or “Squash from the ravine with a small piece of pork belly.”<sup>43</sup> To emphasize Blu and Ivah’s differences, Yamanaka represents each as an exaggeration. Blu rebuilds his lost sense of home and identity almost entirely through commodity consumption while Ivah exhibits a romantically pure detachment from it.

Yamanaka portrays Blu’s consumerism as both a sad legacy and an ineffectual defense mechanism. Mama identifies him with popular culture from birth when she names him Presley, and she reinforces the connection later with nicknames like “Blue Moon” and “Blue Hawaii.” She also leaves her collection of Elvis memorabilia to him. Yamanaka’s representation of Blu resembles the picture of contemporary youth painted by Giroux. He claims that today’s youth live in an environment where commodification “reifies the range of possible identities they might assume while simultaneously exploiting them as fodder for the logic of the market.” To make resistance possible, Giroux argues, parents and educators should grant young people their own voice and encourage them to think of themselves as citizens.<sup>44</sup> Yamanaka portrays a child whose family and school discourage these things. Wholly identified *as* a consumer and *by* commodities, Blu trusts in the promises of corporate marketers. He reads the Walter Drake catalogue as if the product descriptions came out of a dictionary. After Ivah criticizes him for joining both the Archie Fan Club and the Olympic Sales Leadership Club, Blu defends himself, saying, “I belong to something that mean something to me. So there. So shut up.”<sup>45</sup> Confusing consumerism with citizenship he imagines that belonging to the Sales leadership Club will actually make him a sales leader. His empty investments fail him, of course, so he seeks refuge in oblivion. He regularly holds his

breath until he faints, and in one instance, will only say “Duh” after he wakes up. When an angry Ivah complains, “He’s acting like Big Moose from the Archie comics with his “Duhs” and that empty stare,” Yamanaka recasts the comedy of Big Moose’s stupidity as the tragedy of youthful escape.<sup>46</sup>

Unlike Blu, Mama leaves Ivah a legacy of consumer independence. She gives Ivah a Japanese ruby ring that connects her to family-past. She also imparts her “Ponderosa Pines land,” a place where she imagines Ivah can fish for (rather than buy) fresh trout for her family. According to her legacy, Ivah looks critically at the products that seduce Blu, complaining that he watches too many cartoons and criticizing his “cheesy” Archie bookmark and “Secret Compartment Book.”<sup>47</sup> She also resists buying the “BEST MOTHER” and “BEST FATHER” statues that Blu and Maisie pick out for Poppy’s Christmas present. She sees the statues as meaningless objects that have collected dust on a shelf, not as pieces that somehow communicate an ineffable connection between the children and their parents.

Seemingly impervious to the seductions of commodity fetishism, Ivah sometimes also modifies the messages she rejects. She creates a new version of Mickey Mouse, transforming Walt Disney Corporation’s “ambassador of goodwill” into a predatory rat.<sup>48</sup> Ivah assigns each member of the neighboring Reyes family with a Disney-associated rat label such as “Mickey Rat” or “Minnie Rat.” With her juxtaposition of the Reyes “rats” and the Ogatas’ pet cats, Yamanaka creates a complex metaphor through which she accuses Disney of forgetting while charging women with remembering. She connects felines with femininity when Ivah’s friend Mitchell brags that he saw Blendaline Reyes’ “cat” under her dress. In addition, Mama, who typically

engages in consumer rituals of forgetting, significantly tells her daughter and not her son, “be good to cats—they have good memories and exact revenge for the evil done to them.”<sup>49</sup> In an unnatural reversal of cat versus mouse, the Reyes Rats torture and kill the kittens that the Ogata children adopted and nurtured, symbolically hanging them with their memories in the ravine. Thus, Yamanaka portrays Ivah in a violent contest with the amnesic agenda of nationalist image-makers such as Walt Disney. Like Giroux, who argues that “educators and other progressives” should teach children to read consumer messages with a critical eye, Yamanaka portrays Ivah as an ideologically savvy figure capable of such critique.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, while Ivah struggles to save memory from the creeping forces of forgetting that seduce Blu, Yamanaka suggests that Ivah draws on a uniquely feminine tradition of remembering that her mother ironically both abandoned and perpetuated.

Yamanaka clearly establishes Ivah’s sufficiency over Blu’s vulnerability, but with the pain of missing parents omnipresent in the novel, she does not suggest that children like Ivah can or should replace adults in families. Instead, Ivah’s period of mothering represents a conflicted transition period that moves the family away from its patriarchal origins. Yamanaka makes clear when Ivah prays, “Now I lay me down, down,/ let me go, let me be normal./ Don’t wanna be a Mama too,” that Ivah performs her motherly duties for lack of a better alternative. Although Ivah tells herself, “I *can* be a mama too” (emph. in original), neither the reader nor Ivah believe her.<sup>51</sup> Yamanaka instead explores the possibilities and limitations of empowering children through her portrayal of Ivah’s efforts. In the connection that exists between hunger and sexual vulnerability in Blu’s Hanging, Yamanaka highlights both Ivah’s strengths and her

weaknesses. Ivah succeeds in protecting her siblings from starvation, but hunger in Blu's Hanging creates concerns that surpass typical worries about malnutrition and its effects on emotional, intellectual and physical health. Immediately following Ivah's litany to hunger in Chapter One, Chapter Two describes how Paulo Reyes (uncle to the neighboring Reyes sisters) propositions the children by offering ten dollars in exchange for sexual favors. When Ivah says, "Blu slowly looks at me. Eyebrows go up: May I? May I?" Yamanaka stresses the vulnerability of hungry children. The value of ten dollars grows exponentially for Blu whose "ONE WISH" is to live underneath a grocery store.<sup>52</sup> Yamanaka makes the point again when Mr. Iwasaki, an aging Japanese neighbor who often masturbates outside his house, lures Blu into his yard with candy bars and money.

Although Ivah manages to rescue Blu in both instances, the scenes highlight her dual role as parent and child. She better understands the threats posed by Uncle Paulo and Mr. Iwasaki because she has been given more information. She explains that, "My Mama told me about sodomy between men and boys, but I don't tell Blu. The words wouldn't leave my mouth." Like a parent, therefore, Ivah has the information Blu needs, but like a child she lacks the maturity to share it with him. Similarly, when Uncle Paulo circles the children menacingly in his car, Ivah protects her siblings but simultaneously longs for her father's help, lamenting, "And Poppy has gone to work in the pineapple fields."<sup>53</sup> Finally, as both parent and infant, she wets her pants in the panicky moment when she rescues Blu from Mr. Iwasaki.

Both Ivah and Blu would have benefited if Eleanor had been more forthcoming with them about such threats. Blu feels curious rather than cautious because Eleanor,

hoping to preserve his sexual innocence, only hinted at the hazards he could face. When contemplating the implications of her vague warnings regarding still another neighborhood man, Blu asks, “What he like do with small boys like me, what you think, Ivah? Get something to do with my dick and his dick, yeah, Ivah?” Since Ivah will not share, Blu takes risks to get answers on his own. Similarly, Ivah wishes her mother had better prepared her to parent. She thinks back with disgust on the banality of lessons such as “Steam, don’t fry. Turn off the TV,” and “No soda in the morning.” She complains, “Mama, you died and didn’t leave me a damn clue. Teach me how to be a mama too.”<sup>54</sup> Through Blu and Ivah’s curiosity and exasperation, therefore, Yamanaka portrays poor judgement and naiveté as behavioral products of protective parenting rather than as inherent qualities of childhood. Considering the children as metaphors for infantilized subjects of colonization, Yamanaka portrays racial and ethnic inequity not as an inherent reality, but as a construction of the colonial “parent.”

In a narrative turning point that accelerates Blu and Ivah’s respective journeys, Poppy finally lifts the “veil” between past and present. To tell his story, Poppy anchors himself to the kitchen chair with an imaginary rope and takes a “dream walk” to the “place of memories.” Blu can only understand Poppy’s divulgence through the self-effacing lenses erected by his teachers and popular culture. For him, past truths represent “Shame under his skin.” Ivah observes, “my brother puts his face in his hands.” In the scene immediately following, Yamanaka places a new distance between Blu and his family. Ivah complains that he is “obsessed with cartoons, TV and movie stars these days” and is shocked to discover that he has been spending more time with the Reyes family. In contrast, Poppy’s confession strengthens Ivah. She takes her

father's dream-walking rope and wraps it around each living member of her family, symbolically binding them for the first time in memory rather than nostalgia.

Significantly, Ivah leaves her mother out of the family circle, telling Eleanor, "Mama, let go of the rope."<sup>55</sup> Since Ivah cannot let go of Eleanor until after Poppy lifts the veil, Yamanaka suggests that only historical knowledge can remedy nostalgia.

Ivah continues to mother her siblings until Uncle Paulo rapes Blu. Afterward, she thinks, "I don't know what to do./ Never was a Mama."<sup>56</sup> She turns to Poppy for help, but as the other parent in their failed experiment, he only indicts himself. Poppy says, "Was my fault. Where I was? How come I no could protect our boy? What the fuck's wrong with me?" He understands that while Eleanor had hoped to protect Blu from the mere *knowledge* of sodomy, in what Eve Sedgwick calls the "heterosexual hygiene of childrearing," he has failed to protect Blu from actually *experiencing* it.<sup>57</sup> In addition, when he adds, "I get one boy who going be homo 'cause of me," he couches his failure in heteronormative terms, blaming himself for defaulting on the patriarchal promise of a heterosexual son. Sedgwick explains that the movement of family structures from pre-capitalist kinship models to smaller biological units barricades children in a "closed system of family" in which adults are "already defined as procreative within a heterosexual bond." Aunts and uncles, however, have an intimate access to children that exists independent of their own procreation; thus, they often represent "nonconforming or nonreproductive sexualities" to children.<sup>58</sup> Considering that the Ogata children call Paulo "Uncle" Paulo, despite the absence of a blood relation, Yamanaka associates him with such an avuncular influence. By representing Uncle Paulo as a sexual predator instead of as a benevolent homosexual, however, she

transforms influence into threat, illustrating Poppy's fear, not that someone might harm his son, but that they might interfere with the transmission of heterosexual desire within the patriarchal family. Overwhelmed by such a glaring example of his inability to produce "perfect" children, Bertram turns from victimized parent to unwitting oppressor. Rather than console Blu, Poppy rejects him for embodying the shame of their failed assimilation past and present.

With Poppy's rejection, Yamanaka reiterates how assimilationism can lure families and communities into a spiral of self-destruction. Not only does Poppy turn on Blu after the rape; Blu turns on himself. He laments, "I got no parents," and prays to his mother, "I wish with all my soul that Poppy forgive me." In the absence of his father's affection, however, he also prays to Eleanor, confessing that he "wanna tell somebody the truth. When Uncle Paulo did that to my penis, wen' feel good 'cept for the ass part. Maybe I like do um again, but not the ass part. Is it wrong when something feel good?"

<sup>59</sup> While Blu substitutes Uncle Paulo's abuse for fatherly love, Yamanaka illustrates the final extreme of a child's self-effacing journey of conformance. More broadly, she also portrays assimilationist desire as a misguided capitulation to the "rape" of colonization.

While Yamanaka's portrayal of Blu evokes empathy, her representation of Uncle Paulo has provoked heated debate. Candace Fujikane argues that Yamanaka exploits racist stereotypes of sexually violent Filipino men by under-developing the social conditions that might produce a character like Paulo.<sup>60</sup> The argument bears weight, but the contextual details Yamanaka does include should also be considered. Since Paulo is always playing with the Reyes children instead of supervising them, he operates as an unwelcome playmate rather than as a responsible guardian. More than a simple

stereotype, therefore, he embodies the contradictory discourses of imperialism that construct dark men as infantilized simpletons in need of tutelage *and* as hypersexualized threats to white domesticity. In his abusive relationship with Blu, Paulo symbolizes the operation of these ideologies on young dark boys. In addition, when Yamanaka describes absent parents and an older sister who works two jobs to keep her family afloat, she paints Uncle Paulo with the same brush strokes as Blu. Considering that Blu so easily confuses molestation with the parental affection that Uncle Paulo also lacks, Yamanaka intimates a pattern. She suggests first that Uncle Paulo may have suffered such abuse in a past where he learned the behavior he later mimics, and likewise, that Blu might also mimic such behavior in the future. The abusive pairing links Hawaii's Japanese and Filipino communities in a cycle of self-destruction that starkly contrasts popular representations of American families in the 1970s.

Despite her controversial treatment of one stereotype, Yamanaka explicitly refutes others, especially those regarding the gender roles that typically stronghold nuclear families. Blu and Ivah both live in sexual jeopardy, but Ivah, like her romantically pure detachment from commodities, escapes sure violation unscathed. Blu, on the other hand, endures a variety of sexual advances at the hands of Blendaline (an older Reyes sister), Mr. Iwasaki *and* Uncle Paulo. Through Ivah's guardianship, Yamanaka reverses stereotypical representations that portray women and girls as sexual victims rather than as noble protectors. Additionally, with Blu's exploitation, Yamanaka revises typical images of men and boys who control not only their own bodies, but also the bodies of the women around them. Contrasting Ivah's sexual self-possession and

Blu's sexual dispossession, therefore, Yamanaka deepens the ways in which Ivah's mothering undermines rather than secures the patriarchal aspects of Poppy's family.

Similarly, Ivah looks beyond her parents for help. She recognizes that "Poppy not going do nothing" about Blu's crisis, so she tells Maisie, "Me and you gotta think pass Poppy already."<sup>61</sup> Freed from his authority, she accepts an academic scholarship against his wishes. She tells him, "I cannot be one Mama. I dunno how. I going school in Honolulu."<sup>62</sup> Still thinking in a patriarchal paradigm, Blu imagines that he will fill his sister's shoes. He says, "I trying to act brave because men are the stronger sex. And I have to be the second man in the house when Ivah go to Mid-Pac." Ivah, however, recognizes the futility of his plan. Dismissing her earlier reservations about sharing the family's struggles with outsiders, she turns to her cousin, telling Maisie, "We gotta tell Big Sis. She going know what for do"<sup>63</sup>

With Ivah's decision, Yamanaka constructs an alternative to the patriarchal family out of the more diverse resources of the broader community. Ivah also includes her sympathetic teacher, Miss Ito in that community. While providing emotional and intellectual support for the children, Miss Ito persuaded Ivah to apply to private school in the first place. With Big Sis, she promises to look out for Ivah's siblings in her absence. Ivah tells Maisie, "Big Sis and Miss Ito going take care you. And Blu."<sup>64</sup> Their involvement makes Ivah's escape possible while displacing the mother as primary caretaker. In Blu's Hanging, the role of mother burdens both Eleanor and Ivah with insurmountable responsibilities. It also makes the children vulnerable to their dependence on just one individual. Since Big Sis and Miss Ota are both teachers,

Yamanaka merges blood relatives with public servants in a kinship network that she suggests should serve its children before serving its nation.

Furthermore, through Big Sis's homosexuality and her implied romantic relationship with Miss Ito, Yamanaka points to the limitations of restricting parental roles to heterosexual pairs. In Blu's Hanging, such limits would prevent Big Sis and Miss Ito from helping the Ogatas. In addition, while neo-conservatives frame the heterosexual imperative as a protection that shields children from unnatural examples of adult desire, Sedgwick suggests that such protections are themselves harmful. She argues that all children, on a continuum that ranges from seduction to rape, are subject to "being inducted into, and more or less implanted with, one or more adult sexualities whose congruence with the child's felt desires will necessarily leave at least many painful gaps."<sup>65</sup> Similarly, when Yamanaka ambiguously represents Blu's rape as both an act of seduction and force, she blurs the line between Paulo and Poppy's treatment of Blu. She likens Poppy's efforts to (persuasively or forcefully) "implant" Blu with heterosexual desire to Paulo's efforts to persuade or force him into performing a variety of sexual acts.

The analogy extends to Blu's relationship with corporate marketers as well. In the uncomfortable similarity between Blu's consumption of things that degrade him and his ambiguous feelings about Uncle Paulo, Yamanaka relegates corporate manipulation to the gray area between seduction and rape. While Blu continues to understand himself as a child-member of a nuclear family, therefore, he remains a passive and outcast consumer. Sedgwick explains that children might only exercise "some possible degree of choice" regarding "*by whom s/he may be seduced*" only if given "intimate access to

some range of adults, and hence of adult sexualities” (emphasis in original).<sup>66</sup> When Ivah expands their family to include a wider range of adults, she creates a family network that frees her while reincorporating Blu. In the new family, Blu might acquire the power to choose which parent, neighbor or commodity he finds seductive.

Ivah’s action also flattens familial hierarchies. Since Big Sis is a cousin—an extension of the sibling relation denoted by her name—she joins the family without disturbing its new balance. Preparing for Ivah’s absence, they distribute the household responsibilities according to ability. Big Sis explains their communal efforts to Poppy, telling him that, “If Ivah go now, she can make things smooth for Blu when he go, and then Blu can make things smooth for Maisie.” Unhappy with the changes, Poppy bitterly laments their failure to assimilate. He says, “I knew we neva was going fit in topside...I tried for talk Eleanor out of it for months.” Overwhelmed, he takes a dream walk without his rope. Already independent of his care, Ivah coaches her siblings in how they will nurse him back. Ivah explains, “Us all can be Mama,” and Blu, who before never recognized his own value in the family, agrees that, “Us three, we always was.”<sup>67</sup>

Secure in their new support system, the three turn off the porch light that Mama said would guide her to heaven. Ivah explains, “The priest had um all wrong when he told us for leave um on so she find her way. Mama gotta find her way to heaven, not *home*. She couldn’t tell the difference” (emph. in original). To further discourage their mother from lingering, Blu yells “Mama...Heaven ain’t here.”<sup>68</sup> Freed from nostalgia for a family she never had, Ivah leaves for school the next morning. She takes a box of memories with her to mark her family’s survival rather than its denial of adversity.

Yamanaka warns against nostalgia and assimilation amid concern from critics like Chang, Wilson and Arif Dirlik that a new nationalism is taking hold of Hawaii.<sup>69</sup> While these critics caution elites *and* activists against the hegemonic repercussions of forgetting, Yamanaka explores the complexities of upward mobility through Ivah's escape to MidPac. When Ivah tells Poppy that she intends to accept her scholarship, he accuses her of elitism. He says, "You think you too good fo' Moloka'i High, hah, you kid? Like all the odda rich Japs on this island, every island, the Japs think they big time. You listening, Ivah?"<sup>70</sup> To complicate Poppy's idea that Ivah must choose between oppressor and oppressed, Yamanaka offers Big Sis as an alternative. By helping Ivah and her siblings, Big Sis embraces the family that her mother, Betty, would wish away. She also rejects her mother's materialism when she pursues a low-paying career as a teacher. Finally, she stresses that privileges like education should be recycled into the community when she reminds Ivah of her obligation to help Blu and Maisie in the future. While Big Sis and her cousins represent a new kind of citizen, she and Miss Ito represent a new kind of teacher. Yamanaka distinguishes them from their less invested colleagues when Miss Owens scornfully advises Miss Ito to forget the Ogatas because, "you can't save 'em all."<sup>71</sup>

Although Yamanaka rejects binary formulations of oppression, she limits her narrative to a particular Japanese family without significantly exploring the relationship between the Japanese ruling class and the other communities in Hawaii. Blu's Hanging only vaguely acknowledges the struggles of other groups. Ivah comments that she is the lone Japanese among the Filipinos, Hawaiians and Portuguese who typically collect lunch tokens at school. Elsewhere, Uncle Paulo points to tensions between the Filipino

and Japanese communities when he asks Ivah, “whass wrong with my niece playing wit’ yo’ bradda? What, he mo’ betta than her ‘cause he Japanee? Fuck, Japs for think they mo’ betta than everybody else, fuckas.”<sup>72</sup> In their brevity, however, these gestures feel hollow when considering both the absence of Native Hawaiian characters as a whole and the prominence of the Uncle Paulo stereotype.

Furthermore, Yamanaka dismisses the plight of Filipinos when the novel ends without answering the glaring question: why do Miss Ito and Big Sis help the Ogatas and not the Reyes sisters? Instead of exploring the Reyes’ predicament further, Yamanaka blends them into the oppressive forces that work on the Ogatas. In addition to the sexual threat posed by Paulo, Yamanaka makes the Reyes sisters into symbols of forgetfulness when Ivah associates them with Disney’s famed Mouse. Yamanaka also equips them with greater buying power than the Ogatas. Consequently, Fujikane argues, Yamanaka inverts the economic hierarchy that typically subordinates Filipinos to Japanese in Hawaii. Although Fujikane simplifies Blu’s Hanging by overlooking Yamanaka’s rebuke of ruling class nationalism, she rightly maintains that Yamanaka dissociates Japanese capital from Filipino oppression. By obscuring Japanese privilege, she explains, Yamanaka can reimagine the Japanese as victims of oppression rather than as perpetrators of it.<sup>73</sup>

Yamanaka, however, also makes provocative assertions about childhood and citizenship that counter the assumptions of popular culture. While the media blame children for losing their innocence, Yamanaka blames innocent ideologies for ruining children. She associates the treasured qualities of Romantic childhood with the historical vacuum of amnesia, the nationalist hegemonies of school, the consumer

imperatives of the culture industry and the heterosexual patriarchy of the family. When Ivah deposes Poppy, she lifts the veil that hides past from present while introducing her siblings to broader kinship ties that encourage reciprocity. Armed with history and community, Ivah rejects commodity fetishism, resists the degradations of assimilation, decides the course of her future education and accepts the obligation to community. Read as a metaphor for citizenship in general, Ivah represents a nonwhite citizenry no longer infantilized by the desire to please the white patriarchal nation. Always an exaggeration, Ivah's final victories feel almost utopian. Rather than a reality, however, I suggest Yamanaka presents a model for the future. Through Ivah's creation of a kinship network, Yamanaka suggests a need for coalition building that overreaches not only the boundaries of family, but of community. She envisions a politically and historically informed citizenry that could serve many cooperative localities rather than one dominant nationality.

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<sup>1</sup> Mahele means division; Eileen H. Tamura, Americanization, Acculturation, and Ethnic Identity (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> Candace Fujikane, "Asian Settler Colonialism in Hawai'i," in Amerasia Journal 26.2 (2000): xvi.

<sup>3</sup> Rob Wilson, Reimagining the American Pacific: From South Pacific to Bamboo Ridge and Beyond, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 65. Wilson also discusses more contemporary authors such as Happy Isles of Oceania (1992) by Paul Theroux. Wilson argues that Theroux views the islands as "places without history" that are "waiting to be inscribed/awakened into Edenic trope," 167.

<sup>4</sup> Herman Melville, Moby Dick, (1851; reprint, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1967), 108.

<sup>5</sup> Myra Jehlen, Readings from the Edge of Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 62.

<sup>6</sup> Mark Twain, Roughing It, vol. 2 (1871; reprint, New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1913), 233, 242.

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<sup>7</sup> In Mark Twain on the Loose: A Comic Writer and the American Self (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), Bruce Michelson speculates that Twain derives his version of the West from the fantasies of his audience, noting that, “In a territory of childlike men, make-believe is not merely a sanctioned indulgence, but also a paying job in the public interest,” 65, 68; Similarly, in Mark Twain and the American West (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003), Joseph Coulombe argues that Roughing It portrays the West as “a fun-filled playground for adventurous men,” and “a natural escape from the workaday world of the East,” 38-40, 114.

<sup>8</sup> Morris Young, “Standard English and Student Bodies: Institutionalizing Race and Literacy in Hawai’i,” in College English 64.4 (March 2002): 408.

<sup>9</sup> Wilson, Reimagining, 75.

<sup>10</sup> Jeff Chang traces Hawaii’s reputation for racial tolerance back to the social science of the 1920s and ‘30s. He argues that sociologist Romanzo Adams contrived Hawaii’s welcoming “Aloha spirit” by painting a picture of unique interracial goodwill, reducing conquest to a set of mutually beneficial trade agreements between an evenhanded colonizer and Hawaii’s welcoming ruling class, in “Local Knowledge(s): Notes on Race Relations, Panethnicity and History in Hawai’i,” in Amerasia Journal 22:2 (1996): 1, 4-5.

<sup>11</sup> Wilson, Reimagining, 165, 173-174.

<sup>12</sup> Chang, 3.

<sup>13</sup> Other groups, such as Blacks, Guamanians, Koreans, Puerto Ricans, Samoans, and Vietnamese also count among the dispossessed, but they seldom make up more than one or two percent of the population in Hawaii according to Michael Haas’ Institutional Racism: The Case of Hawai’i (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1992), 28.

<sup>14</sup> Wilson, Reimagining, 260; Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake, “Tracking the Global/Local,” introduction to Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary, edited by Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 2.

<sup>15</sup> Haas, 24.

<sup>16</sup> While whites dominated professional jobs throughout most of the twentieth century, according to Haas, Chinese, Japanese and Korean immigrants and their descendents made steady progress in professional

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fields, 35. Elizabeth Buck notes the success of the Japanese in particular, explaining that by the 1990s, mostly Japanese investors and developers make up the “new players” profiting from Hawaii’s tourism industry, in Paradise Remade: The Politics of Culture and History in Hawai’i (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 181.

<sup>17</sup> Chang, 22.

<sup>18</sup> The Civil Rights Act of 1964 provided Filipino activists with legal arguments against unfair hiring practices (within the school system especially) that they claimed favored Japanese applicants over Filipino or other immigrant prospects, Chang, 16-22; Local intellectuals created the Bamboo Ridge Press to recognize and publish literature by Hawaii’s residents. In the same year, the state government voted to endorse Hawaiian and English as official state languages. The Native Hawaiian sovereignty movement that seeks compensation for stolen land, also helped, Young argues, to keep the struggles of indigenous peoples and the importance of maintaining the Hawaiian language in the public eye during the 1980s and ‘90s, 424; Chang, 22.

<sup>19</sup> Wilson and Dissanayake, “Tracking,” 6; Wilson, Reimagining, 3; Chang, 3.

<sup>20</sup> Lois-Ann Yamanaka, Blu’s Hanging (New York: Avon Books, 1997), 3-4.

<sup>21</sup> In 1866, the Hawaiian government established a leper colony on the Kalaupapa Peninsula, a site on the island of Molokai so remote that escape was impossible. Leprosy patients endured forced quarantine in Kalaupapa until 1969. After they were freed to go, many patients, having lived in isolation for so long, chose to stay in their homes—as many as forty-one people remain in residence today.

<sup>22</sup> Yamanaka, 141.

<sup>23</sup> See my introduction, 14-15 for further discussion of Higonnet’s “Romantic child” as the artistic articulation of childhood as innocent. Also see Anne Higonnet, Pictures of Innocence: The History and Crisis of Ideal Childhood (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998).

<sup>24</sup> Bradford W. Wright, Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 72.

<sup>25</sup> Darrell Y. Hamamoto, Monitored Peril: Asian Americans and the Politics of TV Representation (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 17-18. Hamamoto discusses television representations of Native Hawaiians and Asians in Hawaii, especially the shows Hawaii Five-O (1968-

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1980) and its unstated replacement, Magnum, P. I. (1980-1988). In the former he argues that Hawaiians and Asians serve as the “Greek chorus to the Euro-American heroes” while the latter omits the regular appearance of nonwhite characters entirely.

<sup>26</sup> Yamanaka, 78.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 191, 190.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 191.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 19, 168.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 103.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 185, 184, 186.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 60, 121.

<sup>33</sup> Henry Giroux, The Mouse that Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1999), 18, 24.

<sup>34</sup> Yamanaka, 62.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 59-60.

<sup>36</sup> Young, 410-412.

<sup>37</sup> Young argues that even though the Standard Schools have disappeared, their presence can be felt as “cultural institutions” that occupy “part of the cultural memory of Hawai’i, where narratives of identity are woven together.” Morris also points out that the school board required Standard English in public schools in 1985 then, in the face of harsh criticism, changed their language simply to encourage it in 1987, 408, 426.

<sup>38</sup> Yamanaka, 58, 46; Tamura explains that use of the word “haole” began as a way of designating foreigners in Hawaii. It evolved to specifically refer to white Europeans and Americans, excepting the Portuguese, Puerto Ricans and Spaniards who, with Asians, comprise Hawaii’s labor force, 16.

<sup>39</sup> Yamanaka, 60.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 62, 58.

<sup>41</sup> Haunani-Kay Trask, “Decolonizing Hawaiian Literature,” in Inside Out: Literature, Cultural Politics, and Identity in the New Pacific, edited by Vilsoni Hereniko and Rob Wilson (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1999), 170.

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<sup>42</sup> Yamanaka, 46, 60.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>44</sup> Henry A. Giroux, Channel Surfing: Racism, The Media, and the Destruction of Today's Youth (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 28, 31.

<sup>45</sup> Yamanaka, 56.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid 38, 42, 53, 27.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 42, 55, 56.

<sup>48</sup> Michael Eisner, qtd. in Giroux, Mouse, 29.

<sup>49</sup> Yamanaka, 34, 35.

<sup>50</sup> Giroux, Channel Surfing, 33.

<sup>51</sup> Yamanaka, 157, 63.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 10, 8.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 15, 11.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 15, 37.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 141, 145, 147, 146.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 248.

<sup>57</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Tales of the Avunculate: Queer Tutelage in The Importance of Being Earnest," in Tendencies (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 63.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 64.

<sup>59</sup> Yamanaka, 257, 253.

<sup>60</sup> Candace Fujikane, "Sweeping Racism Under the Rug of 'Censorship': The Controversy over Lois-Ann Yamanaka's Blu's Hanging," in Amerasia Journal 26:2 (2000): 173.

<sup>61</sup> Yamanaka, 255, 253.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 227, 256.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 253, 82, 253.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 254.

<sup>65</sup> Sedgwick, 64.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>67</sup> Yamanaka, 227, 256, 259.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 260.

<sup>69</sup> Chang worries that Hawaii's ruling class might try to "reattach" itself to America to compensate for the economic and ideological instability created by globalization. He also suggests that Filipino and Native Hawaiian activists have similar concerns. They argue, according to Chang, that Hawaii's local elite overlook the oppressions inflicted against them by *haoles* in the past 22. Similarly, Wilson and Dissanayake warn against nostalgia, asserting that local resistance should avoid a "backward-gazing fetish of purity" while Arif Dirlik insists that a "critical localism" must reject "romantic nostalgia for communities past, hegemonic nationalist yearnings of a new kind, in Wilson and Dissanayake, "Tracking," 5; Arif Dirlik, "The Global in the Local," in Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary, edited by Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 38., 22.

<sup>70</sup> Yamanaka, 227.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 127.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 207.

<sup>73</sup> Fujikane, "Sweeping," 177, 170-171.

## CONCLUSION

### Post-Innocence and the “Knowing Child”

In their respective representations of childhood, Jessica Hagedorn, Don DeLillo, Toni Morrison and Lois Ann Yamanaka all take part in a much larger cultural shift in the ways that children are perceived and portrayed in the United States. Anne Higonnet’s study of child portraits documents considerable changes in representations of children beginning as early as 1971. Significantly, the changes proceed on the historical heels of the 1960s youth movements that included adolescents and young adults alike. Higonnet argues that societies that value innocence, like the United States and Britain, “deal badly” with adolescence. They preclude the process of maturation by trapping teens between the polarities of innocent child and mature adult while expecting them to move instantaneously from one to the other at a given time.<sup>1</sup> With sexual experimentation, drug use, anti-establishment fashions and political activism, youth in the 1960s cast off the expectation that adolescents should be innocent. Hippies especially, also rejected adult responsibilities, calling themselves “flower children” and choosing street life over work. According to Allen J. Matusow’s history of the 1960s, they “inhabit[ed] a gilded limbo between childhood and adult responsibility.”<sup>2</sup> On the eve of deconstruction, when Jacques Derrida would identify the purity of childhood as one of the limit conditions that define the modern adult subject, youths were redefining themselves as neither pure nor mature.<sup>3</sup> Instead, they carved out a place for themselves somewhere between adulthood and its Other.

Although a commodified copy long ago replaced actual flower children, representations of childhood have never quite been the same. According to Higonnet,

“The image of childhood created in the eighteenth century has run its course.”<sup>4</sup> For the more prominent examples, she cites popular images from the youth-oriented music industry, such as the 1991 cover of Nirvana’s album “Nevermind,” as well as the controversial photographs that artist Sally Mann took of her children between 1984 and 1996.<sup>5</sup> Instead of dwarfing the child’s body in adult clothing and paraphernalia, non-innocent images such as Mann’s stress the child’s corporeality. They also omit the flowers and pets that have traditionally connected innocent children to nature in art and photography.

The writers here engage with the same symbolic tradition. Toni Morrison’s The Bluest Eye (1970) and Lois Ann Yamanaka’s Blu’s Hanging (1997) especially stress the physical aspects of their child characters’ bodies, i.e. Pecola’s eyes and Blu’s obesity, while also positioning them as the objects of adult sexual desire. Significantly, the flowers that Higonnet claims so often connect Romantic children to nature die in the first line of The Bluest Eye when Claudia explains: “there were no marigolds in the fall of 1941.”<sup>6</sup> Similarly, the dead cats that appear in both Morrison’s and Yamanaka’s novels sharply contrast Emile Munier’s popular nineteenth-century portrait of an innocent girl with her kittens entitled, “Girl with Kittens” (1850-1860). Higonnet adds, however, that Munier’s kittens were already a source of tension between sexual innocence and sexual knowledge in the nineteenth century. She notes the girl’s coy look and the strategic placement of the “pussy” in her lap.<sup>7</sup> When Morrison and Yamanaka kill the cats in their novels, therefore, they symbolically usher their child-characters into the adult world by portraying their sexuality as not only existent, but as either vulnerable, or already violated.

In these postnational times, then, have we encountered post-childhood? Indeed, like the blurring of boundaries that define subjects and nations, the writers in this study blur the lines between child and adult. Hagedorn's and DeLillo's adult characters engage in rituals of forgetting against the wishes of children who want to know more. Likewise, Morrison and Yamanaka unite mother and child in the specters of teen pregnancy and teen parenting respectively. While the authors shift boundaries between adults and children, however, their problematic representations remind that the two are not interchangeable. Hagedorn leaves Rio somewhere between remembering and forgetting, frustrated by her own infantilization. DeLillo leaves Jack forever in the ominous process of recreating his own innocence. Similarly, both Morrison's Pecola and Yamanaka's Ivah fail as parents. Pecola's baby "shriveled and died," while Ivah ultimately admits that she cannot take care of her siblings alone.<sup>8</sup> Like the youth of the 1960s, these images dismantle childhood innocence without invoking adulthood. They suggest that childhood is possibly something other than we thought—that we are back where we started when Jean-Jacques Rousseau admonished, "Childhood is unknown."<sup>9</sup>

Without the ideal of innocence and its fantasy of a pre-historical, pre-civilized communion with nature, society faces the civilized, alienated self that inspired Rousseau to invent childhood innocence in the first place. David Kennedy contends that Rousseau was the first to dissociate childhood from its place as deficit, as the adult's not-I.<sup>10</sup> On the surface, it appears that he simply reversed the values of the binary by associating deficit with the adult, the anti-child that had fallen from its original unity with nature. Rousseau aimed, however, to blur the binary by arguing through his fictional example of Emile, that instead of conquering children, society should bring them, uncorrupted and

instinctually intact, into adulthood. Conversely, and perhaps less optimistically, late twentieth-century artists and novelists infiltrate childhood with the corruptions typically attributed to adult society. The authors here, therefore, turn what became a symbol of denial into its opposite, what Higonnet observes elsewhere is a “Knowing child.” Knowing children have bodies, and desires, as well as an awareness of the same in others.<sup>11</sup> In isolated instances, of course, Knowing children appear before the late twentieth century. Charles Dickens portrays a Knowing child in the figure of Oliver, who in Oliver Twist (1838), begs for more food while half starving in the workhouse. Likewise, in his 1845 slave narrative, Frederick Douglass depicts the Knowing of slaves and their children. Furthermore, Higonnet names her “Knowing child” after Maisie from Henry James’ What Maisie Knew (1887). She explains that since Maisie knew more about what her adult counterparts were up to than they ever could have guessed, Maisie was “very much ahead of her time.”<sup>12</sup> James would address this theme again in The Turn of the Screw (1898) where the young Miles and Flora intimate a foreboding knowledge of the past, their sexuality and the supernatural.

In their portrayal of Knowing children, the works studied here either remove childhood from the historical vacuum associated with innocence, or satirize their placement in it. Morrison and Yamanaka, depict children who embody rather than mystify history. Even in infancy, as in Morrison’s depiction of Pecola’s dead baby, the Knowing child tells society what it would prefer to forget. In American culture, the eighteenth-century conflation of discourses on race and childhood allowed settlers to discuss racism through the more euphemistic terms of paternalism. The emerging ideology of childhood innocence, on the other hand, provided an a-historical ideal

through which to forget the realities of those “paternal” relations. Morrison and Yamanaka’s *Knowing children* embody the subjugated not-I in the master/slave, man/woman and adult/child binaries that in part constitute white masculine subjectivity in America. Since knowing children have bodies, they defy abstraction. Indeed, Higonet, who rarely mentions race in her study, explains that *Knowing children* see a world divided, citing Lorraine O’Grady’s photographic collection Miscengenerated Family Album (1980/94) as one example.<sup>13</sup> In addition to race, the poverty of Morrison and Yamanaka’s *Knowing children* evokes histories of economic oppression, including slavery, wage and plantation labor. Their sexual violation recalls the rape of the frontier, the rape of the slave, the sexual exploitation of women under colonialism, and the domestic violence and oppression that can occur in the patriarchal home. I do not mean to suggest, of course, that images of *Knowing children* miraculously cure these ills. Rather, I argue that *Knowing children* ask the nation to remember what the innocent child had allowed it to forget.

Morrison and Yamanaka both associate *Knowing children* with the break up of their nuclear families, suggesting that the family itself operates as a mode of ideological mystification. Similarly, Higonet argues that photos of *Knowing children* appear as part of a broader photographic critique of the family that questions “the norm of the dream nuclear family and the fictions of the family album.”<sup>14</sup> Morrison and Yamanaka, like the artists Higonet studies, offer a broader definition of family—Morrison does so implicitly through her critique of the community and its failure to help Pecola, Yamanaka explicitly through Ivah’s creation of sustaining kinship ties. Not just the work of fiction, actual changes in family life have generated a nostalgia for the family

past that Judith Stacey explains has infiltrated national politics in ominous ways. Stacey cites the anti-gay, anti-feminist and anti-abortion sentiments of “family values” that have sparked debates ranging from welfare reform to funding for public broadcasting.<sup>15</sup>

Giroux identifies similar anxieties. Although much of the work of the Civil Rights Movement has been dismantled, he argues, society blames the 1960s as well as children themselves for what it sees as a decline in family life. Consequently, Americans mythologize the 1950s while criminalizing the children who might otherwise have something to say about the material state of education or the socio-economic conditions of their lives.<sup>16</sup>

That American culture remains obsessed with the child’s innocence cannot be doubted in the wake of the investigation that FCC chairman Michael Powell announced the day after Janet Jackson exposed her ornamented breast during the “family” programming of Super Bowl XXXVIII in January 2004. More than an outraged response to children’s exposure to sexual material, however, America’s desire to reconstitute innocent childhood, as it is expressed through nostalgia for the pre-Civil Rights nuclear family, simply reframes the nation’s frontier romance in the more familiar terrain of domestic life. Michael Paul Rogin argues that a romanticized view of the frontier subsumes the commodification of nature into a pastoral scene. In that scene, familial metaphors attributed territorial acquisition to the generosity of a paternal God. Political and economic opportunists, therefore, translate their private pursuit of wealth into the personal rebirth of man under the unifying force of nature.<sup>17</sup> The authors here suggest that while the economic motivations of white patriarchy remain, the nostalgic desire to reinstitute pre-Civil Rights “family values” has replaced pastoral nostalgia as a

way of masking those desires. Rather than diminish the economic factors, therefore, they highlight them, satirizing the family as a sight less about protecting children and more about converging the economic power of white men. Hagedorn especially, associates the purchase of commodities with the uniting and whitening of her family and nation, both of which commodify women as either domestic or sexual servants. Likewise, DeLillo's Jack Gladney understands his own re-creation of a 1950s-style white nuclear family through the control of his wife and through the acquisition and possession of material goods. These images complement Morrison's portrayal of Cholly and Pecola as awkward and ineffectual consumers. They also illuminate the ideals of assimilationism and consumerism that Yamanaka's Ivah learns she must reject if she hopes to survive.

While representations of Knowing children demythologize frontier and family ideologies alike, Hollywood, according to Giroux, often portrays intellectually and morally bankrupted youth who appear disconnected from the future obligations of citizenship.<sup>18</sup> Can or should we reconcile these vacuous children with Knowing children? The contradiction signifies the ideological struggle over the flexible terrain of childhood. In Dogeaters and White Noise, the transformation of children into consumers introduces an element of alienation into childhood that is typically only associated with adulthood. Likewise, Giroux argues that the consumer status of children marks the *loss* of their innocence.<sup>19</sup> Giroux assumes that an essential childhood innocence (that he does not define) exists to be lost in the first place. I agree that the corporate exploitation of children undermines political agency, but rather than signal the *end* of innocence, I argue that DeLillo and Hagedorn, portrays commodity fetishism as a

form of denial, a synthesized innocence that protects their characters from the unwelcome realities of their lives. Perhaps both positions contain elements of truth—and the alienated, but vacuous child-consumer is yet another version of the Knowing child. As both Knowing and innocent, therefore, Rio hopes to escape the alienation of her life in the Philippines by futilely chasing a simulacrum of life in America. Likewise, DeLillo portrays anxiety filled children who can only appease their discontent in the emptiness of consumer culture.

Instead of blaming wayward youth for their own alienation, the authors suggest that the real violence in society is perpetrated by the grown ups who infantilize themselves in nostalgic pursuit of Romantic childhood. While the Dick and Jane stories evoked by Morrison correlate innocent childhood with good citizenship, Hagedorn and DeLillo associate innocence with violence. Their figurations of adult innocents bring the qualities that Hollywood associates with youth together. Rather than portray Jack and Rio as either airheaded or dangerous, the authors suggest they are dangerous *because* they are airheads. Rio longs for her innocent childhood under a murderous neocolonial dictatorship in the Philippines. Jack serenely shoots the dark-skinned man who seduced his wife. For both characters, achieving innocence amounts at once to the perpetration of violence and its denial—a feat made possible in a postmodern world where historical referents have disappeared in the rush of commodity reproduction. As metaphors for innocent citizens and nations, therefore, Rio and Jack figure ominously.

The extended metaphors that connect children to families and to nations in these works, therefore, do not purport to leave us with an idea of what childhood is or should be. Kennedy argues, “any philosophical inquiry into childhood is also necessarily an

inquiry into adulthood.”<sup>20</sup> Likewise, these authors ask instead that we consider childhood as a fluid concept connected to long discursive histories on race, gender, family, nation and adult subjectivity itself. By highlighting these relationships, the authors ask that we give up nostalgia and reconsider representations of childhood as sites that purvey rather than foil history. In this light, even the Romantic child Knows.

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<sup>1</sup> Anne Higonnet, Pictures of Innocence: The History and Crisis of Ideal Childhood (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998), 194.

<sup>2</sup> Allen J. Matusow, The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1984), 306.

<sup>3</sup> In Of Grammatology translated by Gyatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1976), Derrida says, “Man calls himself man only by drawing limits excluding his other from the play of supplementarity: the purity of nature, of animality, primitivism, childhood, madness, divinity. The approach to these limits is at once feared as a threat of death, and desired as access to a life without difference,” 245.

<sup>4</sup> Higonnet, 193.

<sup>5</sup> “Nevermind” portrays a naked infant boy swimming underwater in pursuit of a dollar bill. Sally Mann combined elements of childhood and adulthood in photographs such as “Jesse at 5.” In the picture, Mann’s bare-chested, five year old daughter poses suggestively in jewelry and lipstick between two young, traditionally innocent looking girls.

<sup>6</sup> Toni Morrison, The Bluest Eye (New York: Washington Square Press, 1970), 9.

<sup>7</sup> Higonnet, 37-38.

<sup>8</sup> Morrison, 9.

<sup>9</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, preface to Emile: or On Education, translated by Allan Bloom (1762; reprint, New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1979), 33.

<sup>10</sup> David Kennedy, “The Roots of Child Study: Philosophy, History, and Religion,” Teachers College Record 102.3 (June 2000): 519.

<sup>11</sup> Higonnet, 207.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 207.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 212.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 209.

<sup>15</sup> According to Judith Stacey, three out of five American households were comprised of a breadwinning father, a homemaking mother and their dependent children in 1950. By the 1990s, three out of five married mothers had joined the labor force, defying a single format for family life, In the Name of the Family: Rethinking Family Values in the Postmodern Age (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 6-7, 2-3.

<sup>16</sup> Henry Giroux, Stealing Innocence: Youth, Corporate Power, and the Politics of Culture (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 67, 70, 71, 73.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Paul Rogin, Ronald Reagan, the Movie and Other Episodes in Political Demonology (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 171-172, 177.

<sup>18</sup> Giroux, Stealing, 44, 37.

<sup>19</sup> Henry Giroux, The Mouse that Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1999), 23.

<sup>20</sup> Kennedy, 516.

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