

Of Tragedy and the Blues in an  
Age of Decadence:  
Thoughts on Nietzsche  
and African America

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If you could imagine dissonance assuming human form—and what else is man?—this dissonance would need, to be able to live, a magnificent illusion which would spread a veil of beauty over its own nature. This is the true artistic aim of Apollo. At the same time, only as much of that foundation of all existence, that Dionysiac underground of the world, can be permitted to enter an individual's consciousness as can be overcome, in its turn, by the Apolline power of transfiguration, so that both these artistic drives are required to unfold their energies in strict, reciprocal proportion, according to the law of eternal justice. . . . That there is a need for this effect is a feeling which each of us would grasp intuitively, if he were ever to feel himself translated, even just in a dream, back into the life of ancient Hellene. As he wandered beneath rows of high, Ionic columns, gazing upwards to a horizon cut off by pure and noble lines, seeing beside him reflections of his own, transfigured form in luminous marble, surrounded by human beings who walk solemnly or move delicately, with harmonious sounds and a rhythmical language of gestures—would such a person, with all this beauty streaming in on him from all sides, not be bound to call out, as he raised a hand to Apollo: "Blessed people of Hellas! How great must Dionysos be amongst you, if the God

of Delos considers such acts of magic are needed to heal your dithyrambic madness!" It is likely, however, that an aged Athenian would reply to a visitor in this mood, looking up at him with the sublime eye of Aeschylus: "But say also this, curious stranger: how much did this people have to suffer in order that it might become so beautiful! But now follow me to the tragedy and sacrifice along with me in the temple of both deities!"<sup>1</sup>

So Nietzsche concluded his first book, *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik* (*The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music*). Although his remarks exemplify nostalgic valorization of the ancient Greeks, they can be applied, ironically, to African Americans. I say "ironically" because of the familiar motif of pitting ancient Greek history against black history in modern racist scholarship, as found in Comte Arthur de Gobineau's remark, wrongly attributed to Léopold Sedar Senghor, that "Reason is Greek as emotion is Negro."<sup>2</sup> The criticism that Senghor made of that remark is in stream with the homage to the two gods in Nietzsche's final sentence: It is not to rely on one of these gods over the other—the rational, ordered, beautiful Apollo versus the passionate, ecstatic, dramatic Dionysos—but to develop a higher synthesis of both<sup>3</sup> (*BT* 1 and *BT* 8). For Senghor, a man or woman without passion was not a human being, and one locked solely in ecstatic revelry similarly falls short.

These reflections from the dialectical period in Nietzsche's thought resound the contradictions between African Americans and American (that is, "white") society.<sup>4</sup> In whiteness is presumed the Apolline rationalization of spirit. From modern technological achievements to the world of twentieth-century art, the role of whiteness has been consistently articulated by its major proponents as that of domestication of once chaotic forces. George Gershwin, we must remember, supposedly "made a lady out of jazz," African American classical music. In contrast, African Americans have been consigned the Dionysiac world of debauchery, passion, ecstasy; intoxication; sex; and music. Yet this dichotomy misrepresents much of the story, for, as is well known, the suffering whose purpose was to break the spirit of African Americans has also been the condition through which African Americans have created syntheses that have been the hallmarks of American aesthetic achievements: spirituals, ragtime, blues, jazz, rhythm and blues, soul, and hip-hop, as well as their many offshoots, which include reggae, samba, and salsa. This achievement is more than musical performance. It is the leitmotif of African American expression. The blues and jazz thus emerge through writings ranging from those of Langston Hughes to Richard Wright

and James Baldwin and, today, Toni Morrison. They emerge on the level of theoretical reflection as well. Just read and feel it in W. E. B. DuBois's *Souls of Black Folk* through to Richard Wright's *Black Boy* and on to James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time* and Amiri Baraka's *Blues People*. Often misunderstood as an art form of lamentation, the blues is much more: It is life-affirming testimonies in the face of misery and the threat of despair. As Ralph Ellison reflects in his poignant essay, "Richard Wright's Blues":

The blues is an impulse to keep the painful details and episodes of a brutal experience alive in one's aching consciousness, to finger its jagged grain, and to transcend it, not by the consolation of philosophy but by squeezing from it a near-tragic, near-comic lyricism. As a form, the blues is an autobiographical chronicle of personal catastrophe expressed lyrically.<sup>5</sup>

The legendary jazz pianist Mary Lou Williams brings Ellison's reflections to the collective level when she adds that the blues and

jazz—this derogatory title has been given to a great spiritual music . . . is healing to the soul. . . [They] came out of the suffering of an entire race of people—not of just one person or one artist—making it a special music—the only true art in the world. Through the suffering and experiences of the early black slaves . . . this music was born. This beautiful music has special healing power—because of the nature of its origin and contents—for those who listen with the ears of the heart. The healing power comes from the deep feeling that is in jazz—the feeling of the blues which is characteristic of all good jazz no matter what form it takes.<sup>6</sup>

That the blues exemplifies an Apolline-Dionysiac synthesis (albeit through African quarter-tonal exemplifications of mediation—the "blue note," the musical note between half tones) raises an important challenge to the prevailing assessment of African Americans in American society. As Du Bois pointed out in his presentation to the American Academy of Political and Social Science, and then subsequently in his foreword to *The Souls of Black Folk*, African Americans are always presumed by the prevailing norms of American society "to be" a problem, to be unhealthy.<sup>7</sup> More recently, this query takes the form of the so-called "culture of poverty" or pathological culture motif. In each instance, African Americans are treated, even by some eminent

African American social critics, as problems, as unhealthy exemplars of “death, disease, and despair.”<sup>9</sup> Looking at African Americans from the standpoint of Nietzsche’s thought, however, suggests a different story.<sup>9</sup>

Health, for Nietzsche, should not be understood as the absence of disease.<sup>10</sup> It should be understood as what emerges in the struggle with disease, as Walter Kaufman observes in his influential study of Nietzsche’s life and thought: “In terms of health: Nietzsche—though he does not use exactly these expressions—defines health not as an accidental lack of infection but as the ability to overcome disease; and unlike Lessing and Kant’s conceptions of providence and nature, this idea of health is not unempirical. Even physiologically one might measure health in terms of the amount of sickness, infection, and disease with which an organism can deal successfully.”<sup>11</sup> Nietzsche considered the ancient Greeks healthy because they confronted their suffering by creating life-affirming practices, the most notable of which was tragic drama (*BT* 8).<sup>12</sup> Reading the history of African Americans through the lens of such a theory, it is easy to see that African Americans should not be interpreted simply as a “surviving” people. Many people can, and have, survived in the face of suffering. What is significant about African Americans is the creativity of their form of survival. Theirs has not been at the price of assimilation, which, in principle, is a form of eradication of group survival for the sake of individual survival. In assimilation, descendants of Africans would live in North America as people who have been ingested into the American system both politically and culturally. A thorn in this narrative, African Americans have been the embodied criticism of melting-pot ideology. That ideology demands absorption into the American Body Politic as a white body politic. Because of their creativity as a black creolized people—that is, as black-inflected mixture with other racial and cultural formations—they have been fundamentally an indigestible people.<sup>13</sup> The metaphor of feces comes to mind: the demands of the system are for ingestion for the sake of emerging as the same excrement, but there are those who always come out of the system as they had gone in.<sup>14</sup>

African Americans have been so creative that they are a source of constant distress for much of white America. As Ellison revealed in *Going to the Territory*, for white America to destroy things black from American society requires destroying much that is original and culturally positive in their identity—including their way of speaking, and these days, even their ways of expressing joy and sorrow:

For one thing, the American nation is in a sense the product of the American language, a colloquial speech that began emerging long before the British colonials and Africans were transformed

into Americans. It is a language that evolved from the king’s English but, basing itself upon the realities of the American land and colonial institutions—or lack of institutions, began quite early as a vernacular revolt against the signs, symbols, manners, and authority of the mother country. It is a language that began by merging the sounds of many tongues, brought together in the struggle of diverse regions. And whether it is admitted or not, much of the sound of that language is derived from the timbre of the African voice and the listening habits of the African ear. So there is a de’z and do’z of slave speech sounding beneath our most polished Harvard accents, and if there is such a thing as a Yale accent, there is a Negro wail in it—doubtlessly introduced there by Old Yalie John C. Calhoun, who probably got it from his mammy.<sup>15</sup>

The Nietzschean query suggests a flipping over of the question of health from the standard American discourse of black pathology to the question of white inadequacy. Instead of asking whether African Americans are healthy, we should ask whether white Americans are so, especially since it is white, not black, America that dominates the institutions that dominate the image and values of American civilization.<sup>16</sup> The image of America as white, where even so-called value-neutral terms ultimately appeal to whiteness, creates a false reality that masquerades as a primordial feature of personhood in American civilization. The image of white versus black hides the truth that all Americans—and all human beings, for that matter—are, underneath, ultimately members of the same species. Moving from the level of group or “race” to individual, the situation of living through the weight of historical advantages poses the question of whether most white Americans could pass the test of double standards—at times even quadruple standards—that most African Americans faced and continue to face on a daily basis. An insight into this matter emerges in an old debate touched upon by Frantz Fanon in the 1950s:

Why have black suicide rates been historically low? Some racists confess that just the thought of being black brings suicide to their mind. This is because they do not see anything life affirming in blackness. For them, the “rational” response to being black is to prefer death over living in such a hell.<sup>17</sup>

American society does not want to look truly at African Americans. To do so often requires a truth too painful to bear. That is why preference is made to the bad-faith activity of elevating the negative as a

positive standard for blacks. As Fanon pointed out in chapter 6 of *Black Skin, White Masks*, there is no such thing as “normal” psychology for black people in societies like America. There is the “catch-22” situation of being abnormal if well adjusted, which makes abnormality the supposedly “normal” state for blacks. This means that the language of pathology dominates discourses on blackness, which makes black failures block out black achievements. Because of the absence of a systemic critique in such logic, American society invests failure in blacks at an abnormal level and becomes an ontological mode of being—at least through the eyes of the anti-black racist.

Much of American society is not, however, life affirming. The overflowing opulence and safeguards created by white supremacy have, if Nietzsche’s argument is advanced to its dialectical conclusion, made many (if not most) white Americans patently unhealthy. They are unhealthy because these safeguards have created the nihilistic conclusion of leveling out all white people to afford the luxury of white mediocrity.<sup>18</sup> That the price of black achievements is often death threats from whites exemplifies this conclusion. Think of the death threats that Hank Aaron received for breaking Babe Ruth’s home-run record; Tiger Woods for his achievements in golf; and even the conservative General Colin Powell when he was considering running for the presidency of the United States. Famed scholar and public intellectual Cornel West received similar ire as he emerged in the majority-white “public” eye.<sup>19</sup>

Another variation of such safeguards is the notion of “standardized exams.” A standard is meant to identify an average. There are, however, activities that cannot be exemplified by averages nor by even the notion of being “above” average. Those activities, often marked by genius, simply “are.” It might be that standardized tests, such as IQ tests, exemplify what the most refined average person can achieve. The results are life-inhibiting activities, such as the effort to configure the absolute rationalization of human life. Think of the absurdity of women today who purchase sperm to produce children from men toward whom they have no passionate attachment. A child born from a man one would not sleep with carries a greater probability of lacking features that will excite one’s admiration beyond one’s own, which would make one’s attachment to that child firmly rooted in the self-reflecting waters of one’s self, which is a sure indication of narcissism. The same applies, no doubt, to fathers who seek an impersonal birthmother.

African Americans live with a reality that most white Americans despise. They (African Americans) have been tested. The violence against blacks that emerged, and continues, in American society is guided by

that anxiety. White men scurrying about in camouflage on weekend militia retreats; victimological discourses of “reverse discrimination” and “white pride” are rehearsals of this need to be tested. This urge transcends nearly all aspects of white American cultures and political spectra. On the Right it is often couched in American patriotism: Protect the (white) Constitution of the United States against its colored enemies. On the Left, it is usually advanced through the vagueness of class. I say “vagueness” because “class” in the United States is often conflated with income instead of the ownership or lack of capital. Class is often used for the sake of the evasion of race, and it is done so through attributing to whites an affliction through which to produce a heroic narrative of triumph in the face of adversity. But as Joe Feagin has shown so well in *Racist America*, whiteness is a very powerful commodity. It is what affirms American identity. One becomes an American when one becomes white, and one becomes white by demonstrating one’s dialectical opposition to blacks. Each “white ethnic” has done so in the past few hundred years, and now Asian immigrants, too, have followed suit.<sup>20</sup>

The price of much modern whiteness is a sacrifice of the soul to the god of technocratic reason.<sup>21</sup> I say “much” because not all whiteness was such. The Romantic movement that succeeded eighteenth-century rationalism in Continental Europe was an example of an effort to construct an alternative route for, at least, European humanity, and Nietzsche’s thought was on the heels of that effort. Technocratic whiteness is a world governed by the predictable and the secure. It is a world of a rationality that, as Nietzsche observed in *The Will to Power*, seeks method over the art of inquiry.<sup>22</sup> By art of inquiry, I mean the poetics of the imagination exemplified not only by musicians and painters but also by the understanding as we find it in the best of scientists. The predictable and the secure are not, however, healthy attributes of human existence, and to some extent this realization haunts the daily lives of many white Americans. Many are bored with what they are, and this boredom at times is so overwhelming that it implodes and becomes so self-destructive that it drags others in like the gravitational pull of a heavy star: think of how the phenomenon of young white men who “snap” has become a mundane feature of American society. Think of how this phenomenon works its way through the fantasy life of popular culture, where to be a white man is to be, in effect, a legitimate killer.<sup>23</sup> The great white hunter, whether as the fictional Tarzan or the charismatic Theodore Roosevelt and Ernest Hemingway, recurs as a theme of legitimate carnage. His “affliction” emerges as a consequence of unleashed nature. His “health” is to fight off those who are the system’s

disease. A white man, it seems, does not properly feel white until he has conquered something—whether it be another group of people, an animal, or one of nature's puzzles.<sup>24</sup> A problem emerges, however, in the question of the body's relation to mind in such regard. For this dualism of Apolline forces versus Dionysiac ones creates a schizophrenic relationship of the self's relation to itself as flesh. The flesh is the site to be conquered, which means that letting the flesh "go" is a rather difficult ideal for such a man. In Apolline clarity one gives; in Dionysiac revelry, one "gives up," one is enthused and ecstatic. Thus although Europeans once danced and, as we saw as recently as in the compositions of Ludwig Van Beethoven, danced passionately, today only few of their descendants are willing to let themselves "go with the rhythm."<sup>25</sup>

The semiotic order that locates blacks with music and dance (activities that Nietzsche advocated for whites, in his early valorization of Richard Wagner, to let loose of their yokes and partake in) paradoxically affords a freedom for blacks in the face of bondage. Ellison's parable of the Invisible Man's admission of loving soul food (which, here, literally becomes food for the soul) sets the stage as well for the moment of critical engagement with African American aesthetic production. As Ellison's Invisible Man describes tasting but a piece of this form of liberation,

I took a bite, finding [the yam] as sweet and hot as any I'd ever had, and was overcome with such a surge of homesickness that I turned away to keep my control. I walked along, munching the yam, just as suddenly overcome by an intense feeling of freedom—simply because I was eating while walking along the street. It was exhilarating. I no longer had to worry about who saw me or about what was proper. To hell with all that, and as sweet as the yam actually was, it became like nectar with the thought. If only someone who had known me at school or at home would come along and see me now. How shocked they'd be! I'd push them into a side street and smear their faces with the peel. What a group of people we were, I thought. Why, you could cause us the greatest humiliation simply by confronting us with something we liked. Not all of us, but so many. Simply by walking up and shaking a set of chitterlings, or a well-boiled hog maw at them during the clear light of day!<sup>26</sup>

The realm of music affords many manifestations of such insight. Perhaps the best fusions of the dual gods were such classic and broad-ranged performances as Billie Holiday's performance of Lewis Allan's "Strange Fruit" (1940), Max Roach's and Abbey Lincoln's protest album *We*

*Insist: The Freedom Now Suite* (1958), Marvin Gaye's *What's Going On* (1971), and Public Enemy's *Fear of a Black Planet* (1988), to name but a few. They exemplify a balance the tipping of which produces purely Dionysian abandonment. Gangsta rap's valorization of intoxication and sexuality—no doubt Maenads as female sex reduced purely to the plentitude of unreflective female bodies—plays out each classic motif.

Yet there are limitations. A fault in Nietzsche's thought is the amount of stock he placed in aesthetic resistance to life's vicissitudes, particularly by way of music. It is a problem whose legacy continues in contemporary valorizations of aesthetic or semiotic resistance to social and political injustice. Revolution or the effort at radical social transformation that remains on those levels tends often to change fashion more than the infrastructures of society and the travails of those who are institutionally locked at the bottom. This is not to say that such activities are not necessary for projects of social change. It is just that they are insufficient, and as a consequence their champions almost always promise more than they can deliver. White rebellion through the resources of black music has never, for instance, done more than either eradicate black competition in the performance of black aesthetic production or offer occasional black participation in popularized (read "white") versions. It is a pessimistic dialectic: black creativity, white capitalization (by virtue of owning both the means of production and cultural capital for the preferred "image" of its dissemination). Think of the losing situation that black management has in the record industry, where music remains black the extent to which it does not sell enough to "cross over" and become "pop." Perhaps hip-hop music's achievement in this regard is that even where white artists participate, it still keeps its meaning as a black creolized art form. An absurdity of rock 'n' roll is the legions of white devotees who claim to detest black music.

Frantz Fanon offered some insight into the question of the relation of the aesthetic/semiotics to the problem of achieving radical social change. Without a semiotic intervention, mere material reconstruction or redistribution leads to a grammar of the same. A disruption of the grammar and its significations is necessary for a radically different world or radically different way of life. By itself, however, such an effort leads to stoic resentment. Changing one's language, performing one's art, may help one get through the day, but the consequence of having more will than power is implusive. The self becomes the overwhelming project. It is thus no accident that American racism is wrought with demands for blacks to fix themselves. And fix themselves they do, constantly, through the continual offering up of creative expressions

of social misery and defiant hope, often beautiful, sometimes ugly, and always ironic.

The content, however, of these modes of resistance is not always for the sake of resistance. A demanding feature of the American racial landscape is that it militates against black people living an everyday or a mundane existence. Because their existence is preemptorily treated as illegitimate, it means, ipso facto, that such activities are causes for correction. "Rest" is not afforded black people, only "laziness." A black person cannot be "average," for being so in the dialectics of anti-black racism means being "unqualified," which means being "below average." For black people to "play," then, represents a transgression of social norms, whether they intend it to be so or not. Functional play is by definition too serious for play. It is work. Black people thus paradoxically challenge many American social norms most when they have absolutely no intention of doing so. They do so when they simply play, because this society demands that they are only legitimate when they are locked in the mechanics of labor. In play, which suspends the seriousness of many institutions, they commit an illicit act. This is a peculiarly Nietzschean reading of African American society. One need only think of the contrast between black "house parties" and the many variations of white ones. Whether it be such depictions as Fats Waller's "The Joint Is Jumpin'" (1937) or Reggie Hudlin's *House Party* (1990), play is a ritual guided by a circular pattern of dance until the cops intervene. Many African American celebrations and playful get-togethers have the veneer of a secret meeting of joy beyond the overseers' eyes. White functions, as is well known, tend to have two forms. There is the gathering, dominated by speech (e.g., cocktail or dinner parties or suburbia backyard barbecues—Apolline-dominated leisure events), and the destructive, youthful (e.g., white rock 'n' roll and fraternity house) parties of drugs and destruction. Although both "parties" are moments in which ultimately Dionysos is to be celebrated (with alcohol and sometimes with dance and sex), the "meaning" is distinguished by the simple fact that even rabble-rousing whites know that they have the "right" to enjoy themselves. That is why to this day, white teenagers and white adults enjoy "wild parties" and "wild nights" that would be, if they were black, simply "criminal."

What African Americans bring to their leisure time that can be correlated with while being entirely distinct from tragedy for the Greeks is the blues. The blues, as we have seen, is the beautiful transformation of sorrow.<sup>27</sup> Although Frantz Fanon was a critic of the blues, he himself exemplified the blues well in his work.<sup>28</sup> In *Black Skin, White Masks*, he portrayed the failures of intrasystemic resistance by writing

the autobiography of a protagonist whose cathartic tears afforded psychotherapeutic clarity that enabled him to face Negrophobia.<sup>29</sup> In true blues fashion, Fanon told a story in repeated instances of growing clarity. An admirer of Nietzsche's writings, he charted the dialectical path from language to sex to introspective stoicism to demonstrate that a healthy position would be to wage a struggle on both social and individual levels because "... society," he reminds us, "unlike biochemical processes, cannot escape human influences. Man is what brings society into being."<sup>31</sup> For him, the important thing is that blacks become actional.

Nietzsche's interpretation of the ancient Greek situation provides a chilling correlate to African Americans'. Those Greeks, as he sees them, faced Apolline statism versus Dionysiac resistance (liberation of the oppressed). Aeschylean tragedy, marked by a balance between the chorus and music, gave way to Sophoclean tragedy, where the hero (and dialogue) began to take the place of the chorus through to Euripedian tragedy, where women and sexual revelry (Dionysos) came to the fore. The African American situation is one of negotiating one's way between a racist state (the United States) and nationalistic hopes. This challenge dates back to the Booker T. Washington-W. E. B. DuBois debates over economic and political strategies and the magnificent critical theoretical work on double consciousness that emerged through DuBois's continued explorations of the African American condition. DuBois drew constantly on the potential of African American spirituals and subsequently African American music in general. He hoped for a fusion of formal and energetic forces in the creative synthesis of sustained improvisation. That the blues and jazz exemplified that ideal is without question. But within jazz, the role of the soloist grew and grew, and the art form, as is well known, eventually achieved a level of the esoteric that seemed more Apollonian than Bacchic. The reassertions of Bacchus/Dionysos were in the "birth" periods of the many offshoots of jazz and the blues. One of them was rhythm and blues (R&B), which focused on dancing to music marked by short, repetitive melodies and brief solos. By the time the blues achieved its specialized zenith of long, esoteric solos, rock 'n' roll emerged, and it too followed similar paths. When R&B and rock 'n' roll were getting too "polished," soul came about in North America, and in the Caribbean there appeared first ska and rock steady and then reggae. Within reggae, one could chart a history from chorus singing to a single lead, stating social criticism to the irreverent response through a new (and very sexual) form known as "dance hall." In North America, funk and then disco played their roles through their focus on dance, and from the same sites of social suffering, from the same inner-city regions from which the "funky chicken" and "the

hustle" were born, came early break dancing and rap recordings and subsequently hip-hop. In hip-hop, a chart was paved from the initial focus on dancing to the realm of social commentary and then, eerily in stream with the dialectic that marks the early Nietzschean analysis, to ecstatic sexual release as "club" hip-hop returns, as evidenced by both the images and artists that dominate popular hip-hop by the middle 1990s and the early twenty-first century.<sup>31</sup>

The dialectical movement of a declining set of values in the expression of aesthetic production raises the question of decadence.<sup>32</sup> It is clear that African American art faces processes of decay that have a peculiar "interracial" quality to it. One need not speak long on black aesthetic production with African Americans before the thesis of white appropriation is brought up. For many blacks, the moment of decay in their cultural production begins with white involvement. This moment of white participation has two levels of decadence. The first is the unjust appropriation of wealth. Whites, in a nutshell, receive more rewards for performing black art forms than do blacks.<sup>33</sup> Few white artists, for instance, faced paying what Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington had to pay their white managers (that is, more than 50 percent of their earnings), and it is rarely the case that black performers, writers, and athletes are paid on a par with their white counterparts. Yes, there are "exceptions," but that is the point: those are the exceptions. The "rule" is that average whites receive above-average rewards as performers of black aesthetic and intellectual production. The second criticism is, however, more at the heart of aesthetic evaluation. Most whites simply perform black aesthetic productions at either a lower level of quality or, at least in the case of music, without the blues. Even white blues artists, interesting though they may be, sound more like imitation than exemplification. Their participation often creates a different form, a "white" one. How is this possible, and why is it so?

The first thing to reject straight out is the notion of any biological inhibition for their performance. What makes the difference is the absence of the kind of group suffering, as Mary Lou Williams pointed out, that stimulates the blues.<sup>34</sup> This is true as well for blacks, who have been sheltered away from that suffering. For such blacks, the production is more anxiety ridden and often neurotic than blue. The underlying blues experience of being an unjustified existent in modernity is shared by those who have felt the weight of anti-black racism across the African diaspora. Cultural inflections from Africa in the forms of tone and execution of meters provided the syntax for this suffering. In premodern terms, the sources of such suffering were expressed in the existential struggles with predestination and life's travails that called for shouting

out a resounding "why?"<sup>35</sup> But the modern semantics, the onomatopoeia of modernity, are constructed out of this ongoing realization, as Ellison's *Invisible Man* lamented, echoing Louis Armstrong, of being so "black and blue."<sup>36</sup>

So why do whites bring decay to black aesthetic productions? The answer is that whiteness affords a luxury that is paradoxically healthy for whiteness but unhealthy for blackness. It is a luxury that stimulates activities that are part of the process of a decaying society. For Nietzsche, a society that collapses into complacency and leveled equality for its ruling group is an unhealthy one. A Manichaean dualism emerges between white health and black health. White health is the moment of conquest. Although it is not the picture that contemporary America prefers, the many monuments to conquerors, the heroic celebration of killers and slave masters, found on everything from money to popular cultural celebrations in cinema and literature, reveal a legacy of a whiteness that begins to decay the moment it ceases to be imperial, racist, and narcissistic (holding a godlike self-image). The health of black people is exemplified by their struggle against that white world and their ability to transcend it. As that white world cedes, however, and the black world grows, the future becomes one in which whites are not so much eradicated as transformed into a relationship of obsolescence or irrelevance as whites.<sup>37</sup> Thus at the moment of convergence, in the art forms, what inhibits whites is the baggage of whiteness. Whites do not offer innovation but mass appropriation. Although political writers may use the phrase "the masses" to refer to the common folk, including those of color and those in the Third World, in practice, "mass" is a peculiarly white phenomenon. There is nowhere more "mass," for instance, than the white, middle-class societies of Europe and North America.<sup>38</sup> Black productions are not mass productions, although "massification" is a constant aim of those who seek their commodification. They speak to the peculiarity of a condition that is *prima facie* not easy to assimilate. The transformation of black productions into mass items often requires reducing the elements of the production that are difficult for white assimilation—particularly those that are carried in black bodies. If a black body is inadequate for a white mass (often referred to as "the public"), then either an aesthetics of domestication is needed or simply a nonblack exemplar. The white exemplar brings with him or her the decadence of whiteness and the absence of communal suffering—that is, the suffering of a people as a problem people. Yes, there are whites who were and continue to be poor, and there are whites who have faced political persecution, but those individuals and ethnic groups have never faced these forces on a historical

level as whites. As whites, they face the history of other groups encroaching on that for which whites consider themselves entitled.

Is it possible for whites to participate in black cultural productions without ushering in the leechlike forces of decay? It should be clear that they can do so, but not as whites. They must do so as participants in a project that transcends white hegemony. Such a white has to come out of, learn through, and manifest the respect for the expressive resources of a world that is not white.

We have, then, two forms of nihilism linked to the question of white-black dynamics.<sup>39</sup> The first type of nihilism is passive nihilism: "I am white, and that's the way it is." The other is active nihilism: "I am white; that's the way it is; and I have no faith in the continued preservation of whiteness, so I fight for a world beyond this one." The former affirms white supremacy and struggles against its decay as a threat to reality: "If I cease to be white, all is lost." "If white supremacy falls, it will be the end of the world." Here there is a failure to imagine the end of this stage of empire. There is a failure, as in what Nietzsche calls "Socratic" culture, to realize that literally nothing lasts forever: "We should not now disguise from ourselves what lies hidden in the womb of this Socratic culture: an optimism which imagines itself to be limitless!" (*BT* 18). In his later years, he reminds us that "A society is not free to remain young" (*WP*, Book I, chap. 1, par. 40, p. 25). There are many manifestations of evading this reality. The query, for instance, on what causes the fall of the many empires of the past carries with it the mistaken notion that but for such and such a factor, those empires would have lasted forever. Such a feat is not only unnatural but also not desirable. It militates against the birth of the new, an insight revealed by many myths from antiquity, as in the case of Ouranos, god of sky, who attempted to prevent subsequent generations of gods from emerging from Gaia, mother earth, or Egyptian Horus/Osiris myths of rebirth.<sup>40</sup> The active nihilist wants to hasten the collapse of the decaying process: "We're at a moment of decline so a new world can emerge." "Let us build an alternative future since there is no hope in this present." Renewal is part of the natural order of things, which makes doom the constant tale on the horizon of every empire.

In the end, there is, however, an odd flaw that emerges both in Nietzsche's analysis of healthy individuals and healthy people. The former exemplifies the individualistic tendencies of an Overman. He emerges as healthy in spite of living among unhealthy people. His health is literally an overcoming of forces that militated against such an achievement. The latter represents a general achievement between the dialectic of individual genius and community values. The language

of tragedy as an accomplishment of "the Greeks" is in stream with much European identification with those southeastern Mediterranean sets of people, but is this an appropriate position for Nietzsche to take? Is the blessing of the ancient Greeks simply a matter of their willingness to participate in festivals that culminated in the appreciation of excellent portrayals of their contradictions and anxieties? Or is it ancient Greek culture that is the source of great admiration the consequence of which is a disregard for its mundane dimensions? We know of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, men who won various prizes for their productions, but a culture that is so admired receives the blessing of invisible mediocrity: the losers are as if they were more exceptions than the rule at best and at worst—as if they had never existed.

African American achievements reveal a different relationship. They are the stuff of a nation within a nation. Although African American athletes may receive cheers from white Americans while they wave the U.S. flag during moments of triumph, the reality is that many white Americans would prefer to have been represented in such moments of glory by another hue. There is always a racial subtext that demands willful blindness in the face of triumph. Although African Americans definitely fail as African Americans, and they sometimes succeed as "Americans," the contentious thesis of Americanization through antipathy to blackness often calls upon them to commit a second act of allegiance. That is why blacks who "make it" often do so through openly distancing themselves from blackness as much as possible.<sup>41</sup> Each act of black distancing garners a little more Americanization. The consequence is that African Americans rarely, if ever, succeed as African Americans, which makes the thesis of excellence elusive. Since failure is the rule instead of the exception, "America," an America sterilized of black achievement, always wins, while "black America" loses.

## Notes

Special thanks to Jane Anna Gordon and Rowan Ricardo Phillips for discussion of an early draft of this chapter.

1. The text will hereafter simply be referred to as *The Birth of Tragedy*. I have opted for Ronald Speirs's translation, which appears in Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, ed. Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speirs, *Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). The opening quotation is from section 25, pp. 115–16.



2. See Comte Arthur de Gobineau, *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*, présentation de Hubert Juin (Paris: P. Belfond, 1967), volume 2, chapter 7.

3. See Léopold Senghor, *Liberté: I* (Paris: Seuil 1964), 24. For discussion, see Jacques Louis Hymans's excellent study, *Léopold Sédar Senghor: An Intellectual Biography* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press, 1971), 66.

4. Nietzsche's early thought was dialectical, that is, under the immense shadow of Hegel albeit with the influence of Arthur Schopenhauer's dissatisfaction with Hegelianism, but the impact of his genealogical approach, which marked his subsequent approach, is more known. For discussion, see the collection of essays in *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality: Essays on Nietzsche's "On the Genealogy of Morals,"* ed. Richard Schacht (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), part II, "Genealogy and Philosophy." The influence of this later approach on African American thought is quite clear in the Foucauldian wing of African American thought. Particularly noteworthy is Cornel West's *Prophesy, Deliverance: An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), chapter 2, "A Genealogy of Modern Racism." The importance of this aspect of Nietzsche's thought in African American academic struggles with intellectual history warrants a chapter of its own.

5. In Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act* (New York: Vintage, 1964), 78–79.

6. This quote is from the liner notes to the album *Mary Lou Williams and Cecil Taylor: Embraced*. Pablo Records, 2620 108 (1978). It also appears in Josiah Ulysses Young III, *A Pan-African Theology: Providence and the Legacies of the Ancestors* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1992), 119.

7. For discussion, see "The Study of African American Problems: W. E. B. DuBois's Agenda, Then and Now," ed. Elijah Anderson and Tukufu Zuberi, special issue of *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 568 (March 2000): 7–316.

8. See, for example, Cornel West, *Keeping Faith: Philosophy and Race in America* (New York: Routledge), x, and Orlando Patterson, *Rituals of Blood: Consequences of Slavery in Two Centuries* (Washington, DC: Civitas, 1998), passim. A logical conclusion of Patterson's argument, for instance, is that the ultimate problem with black families is that they are not white nuclear ones. And the travails that black families face receive no systemic critique but are instead located in the moral depravity of black men. The scapegoat dimension of this form of argument is obvious. We also may be suspicious of the kind of wisdom that would replace black extended families (through which vibrant African-inflected cultures have been developed under the hostile conditions of modern slavery, colonialism, and racism) with a white structure—the bourgeois nuclear family, a wonderful breeding ground for neurosis. Another more recent and very popular exemplar of this trend is John McWhorter's *Losing the Race: Self-Sabotage in Black America* (New York: The Free Press, 2000).

McWhorter argues that blacks are their own worst enemies through their allegiance to values embedded in a logic of victimization, separatism, and anti-intellectualism. Unlike Patterson, whose arguments can be addressed analytically, McWhorter's arguments defy empirical evidence. The first claim requires denying the existence of racism and the history of racial violence. The second claim presumes that blacks control the conditions of their economic and social mobility on a par with whites; that, for instance, there has not been any study demonstrating that blacks have moved out of neighborhoods to more expensive or distant ones because too many whites have moved in basically contradicts such a claim. And the third examines at least black Americans outside of the context of the society in which they live. After all, the charge of anti-intellectualism could be, and often has been, made about American society in general. The fame of black intellectuals hardly suggests that black people are *intrinsically* anti-intellectual. But McWhorter's point is about a set of values, so we must ask, how does one *show* that black people *value* being victims—through a questionnaire on whether one would rather be the victim in many situations than not? It has been my experience that there *are* blacks who masochistically cling to the identity of victim and others who do *not*. In the world of race publishing, however, much depends, as in national polls, on what people are likely to *believe*, and since pathology is often treated by such writers as an intrinsic feature of blacks, the popularity of McWhorter's text (it went into a second edition in one year) exemplifies a continued, bad-faith (because of many people believing what they want to believe even in the face of contradictory evidence) tradition.

9. By looking from the standpoint of Nietzsche's thought, I do not mean his thought *on* blacks. There the material is not pretty. As William Preston remarks, "Nietzsche, to be sure, does not mention blacks that much. When he does, of course, they are described as inferior. All in all, blacks simply do not figure that much to Nietzsche's writings, and with good reason: the feeling of distinction derived from a sense of superiority towards blacks is not worth much. A man of distinction, on Nietzsche's account, could not feel ecstasy in his pathos of distance from blacks. In Nietzsche's scheme of things, the value to life of black people is so negligible it is absurd to try to acquire a rise by oppressing them." See "Nietzsche on Blacks," in *Existence in Black: An Anthology of Black Existential Philosophy*, ed. Lewis R. Gordon (New York: Routledge, 1997), 169–70. Still, this is a charge that could be made against most thinkers in the European canon since the Middle Ages. The usefulness of their thought, beyond their particular vices, is another matter.

10. See, for example, Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. W. Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, intro. by W. Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1989), 1–4. This view is consistent with, although not reducible to, the Darwinian view of health. From the Darwinian perspective, disease is only consequential if it leads to the extinction of a species. Where extinction does not occur, disease could at times paradoxically be interpreted as what facilitates

survival. In some instances, disease leads to adaptation, and the most adaptable species to disease is the most likely to survive. This view has no bearing, however, on the individual organism. An organism could succumb to disease and yet be healthy from a Darwinian point of view because it has passed on its genes, which paradoxically could mean the survival of suffering and disease on the species level.

11. Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 4th ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974), 131. Although Kaufmann's discussion is more known in the English-speaking world, his point is supported by Karl Jaspers's classic, early study: *Nietzsche: An Introduction to the Understanding of His Philosophical Activity*, trans. Charles F. Wallraff and Frederick J. Schmitz (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 111–15. In the main, this early study (originally published in 1936) supports Kaufmann's view: "Nietzsche's concepts of illness and health possess a peculiar ambiguity: Illness which derives from and serves true health—the health of *Existenz* [authentic existence] which comes from within—is actually an indication of this health. Health in the medical sense, which typically belongs to a being without substance, becomes a sign of true illness" (111). Jaspers's point is poetically formulated by Nietzsche himself: "There are those who, whether from lack of experience or from dullness of spirit, turn away in scorn or pity from such phenomena, regarding them as 'popular diseases' while believing in their own good health; of course, these poor creatures have not the slightest inkling of how spectral and deathly pale their 'health' seems when the glowing life of Dionysiac enthusiasts storms past them" (*BT*, § 1, pp. 17–18).

12. The reader might wonder what is the nature of ancient Greek suffering? It is, for Nietzsche, connected to Silenus's, (or the Silens's) response, referenced in Aristotle's dialogue *Eudemos*, to the question of whether life is worth living: ". . . The very best thing is utterly beyond your reach: not to have been born, not to be, to be *nothing*. However, the second best thing for you [human beings] is: to die soon" (*BT*, § 3, p. 23). The Greeks, in other words, were dealing head-on with the problem of *living*. (Cf. also Raymond Geuss's introduction, pp. xvii–xviii, which explores the theodicean Platonic view of the power of good and Christian view of a good, all-resolving God, conceptions against which this view is posed.)

13. By "black creolized people," I mean the many African communities and varieties of non-African communities that have led to the formation of New World black cultures, although this does not preclude Old World mixtures as well. These mixtures are normative practices exemplifying the lived realities of such people. That is, they are not superficial. For a discussion of this conception of creolization and its relation to black peoples, see Paget Henry, *Caliban's Reason: Introducing Afro-Caribbean Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

14. That this is a chapter exploring the contemporary relevance of Nietzsche's ideas, excrement is a fitting metaphor here, since for him the nihilism of leveling, of making all of the same, stinks.

15. Ralph Ellison, "What Would America Be Like without Blacks?," *Going to the Territory* (New York: Vintage, 1987), 108–109.

16. I am not here denying the realities of black mortality rates and other statistically and demographically significant information available by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and other institutions offering quantitative epidemiological assessments. The Nietzschean argument does not lay claim to the absence of disease and physical illness.

17. See the introduction to Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lamm Markman (New York: Grove Press, 1967). See also Lewis R. Gordon, *Existential Africana: Understanding Africana Existential Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2000), chapter 1, "Africana Existential Philosophy." The question of rationality is affected by the reality of "racist rationality." For discussion, Lewis R. Gordon, see *Bad Faith and Antiracist Racism* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1995), part II, and also see Fanon's essay, "Racism and Culture," in *Toward the African Revolution: Political Essays*, trans. Haakon Chevalier (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 29–44. See as well David Theo Goldberg's very influential *Racist Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990) and, also by Goldberg, *The Racial State* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001).

18. This aspect of American "mass" culture has received critical treatment from philosophers and social theorists ranging from Antonio Gramsci to Ortega Y Gasset to Herbert Marcuse and C. L. R. James.

19. This is a familiar feature of the American racial landscape. Their ongoing documentation can be found in the very vigilant *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*. Consider Eldrick "Tiger" Woods: "Despite his success and celebrity, there still are [golf] courses in the United States on which he cannot play because of his race. Woods routinely receives death threats and hate mail. (At Stanford [University], he taped the most threatening and offensive letters to his dormitory wall, and to this day Tiger Woods insists that he be shown every piece of hate mail that he receives.) He channels this hate into repressed rage with which he is able to focus his energies on becoming the greatest golfer who has ever played the game" (*Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 31 (Winter 2000–2001): 78).

20. Joe R. Feagin, *Racist America: Roots, Current Realities, and Future Reparations* (New York: Routledge, 2000). See, for example, pp. 31–32: "From at least the 1830s and the first decades of the 1900s new European immigrant groups, especially those not initially considered to be white—for example, the Irish and the Italians—by native-born whites, clamored to be defined as white in the U.S. Whiteness has long been the goal for all those who can squeeze into the category. . . . Historically [with regard to class and gender], most white workers and most white women have been uninterested in building unity of identity and protest with, respectively, black workers or black women across the color line." For a similar discussion, see Jane Anna Gordon, *Why They Couldn't Wait: A Critique of the Black-Jewish Conflict over Community Control*

in *Ocean Hill-Brownsville (1967–1971)* (New York: Routledge, 2001), especially chapters 3 and 4. And for a discussion of the complexity of Afro-Asian dynamics, see Vijay Prashad, *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001).

21. Premodern whiteness was primarily theological and infused with an aesthetics premised upon metaphysical realism. In other words, white skin was an indication of divine selection and distinction. For discussion, see William R. Jones, *Is God a White Racist?: Prolegomena to Black Theology*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996). See also Gordon, *Bad Faith and Antiracist Racism*, part IV.

22. “It is not the victory of science that distinguishes our nineteenth century, but the victory of scientific method over science.” Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1968), 261 (Book II, Part I, section 1, par. 466).

23. This calling is a consequence of the presumption of white leadership in the world. For discussion of why such conceptions of leadership require killers, see Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, 219, 231–34.

24. There are many classic studies of this aspect of white identity. Fanon observed this in *Black Skin, White Masks*, chapter 6. See also Eric Erickson’s *Childhood and Society*, 2nd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1963). An immediate contrast emerges in psychological studies of black children, where the objective is not to raise a conqueror but to raise someone who can first survive and then (hopefully) excel in spite of anti-black racism. See, for instance, James Comer’s and Alvin Poussaint’s *Raising Black Children: Two Leading Psychiatrists Confront the Educational, Social, and Emotional Problems Facing Black Children* (New York: Plume, 1992).

25. This is not to say that there are not moments of upsurge. The swing, rock ‘n’ roll, and disco eras are recent examples. But all three were instances of colonizing *black* and *brown* creative upsurges.

26. Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Vintage International, 1990), 264–65.

27. Many works are dedicated to the blues, but among the most poignant and insightful are Leroi Jones (Amiri Baraka), *Blues People: The Negro Experience in White America and the Music That Developed from It* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1963) and Ralph Ellison’s several wonderful essays on the subject in *Shadow and Act*, which includes an essay on Jones’s work. See also Josiah Ulysses Young III, *A Pan-African Theology*, and Albert Murray, *The Blues Devils of Dada: A Contemporary American Approach to Aesthetic Statement* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997).

28. “Thus the blues—‘the black slave lament’—was offered up for the admiration of the oppressors. This modicum of stylized oppression is the exploiter’s and the racist’s rightful due. Without oppression and without racism you have

no blues. The end of racism would sound the knell of great Negro music.” Frantz Fanon, “Racism and Culture,” in *Toward the African Revolution*, 37. Although not explicitly formulated as the blues, that quality of Fanon’s writing emerges in Nelson Maldonado-Torres’s powerful analysis, “The Cry of the Self as a Call from the Other: The Paradoxical Loving Subjectivity of Frantz Fanon,” *Listening: A Journal of Religion and Culture* 36:1 (Winter 2001): 46–60.

29. See my discussion of this dimension of Fanon’s work in my *Existential Africana*, chapter 2.

30. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 11.

31. This interpretation of the path of black music, particularly hip-hop, is based on some of the ideas I propounded in *Her Majesty’s Other Children: Sketches of Racism from a Neocolonial Age* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997), part III, where my discussion of decadence in recent black music is based on an understanding of black music as what Clevis Headley has rightfully characterized as a metaphor for freedom. See Clevis Headley, “Race, African American Philosophy, and Africana Philosophy: A Critical Reading of Lewis Gordon’s *Her Majesty’s Other Children*,” *Philosophia Africana* 4:1 (March 2001): 56–57. Commentaries on the movement from joy to social critique to hypersexual play usually emerge in lamentations among hip-hop critics. Among such critics most deserving of such attention in this regard is Ewuare Osayande. See, for instance, his *So the Spoken Word Won’t Be Broken: The Politics of the New Black Poetry* (Philadelphia: Talking Drums Communications, 1999), and *Caught at the Crossroads without a Map* (Philadelphia: Talking Drum Communications, 2001).

32. The discussion of nihilism that follows the discussion of decadence here is premised on Nietzsche’s view, in *The Will to Power*, that nihilism is a symptom of decadence, and decadence is a normal process of the life span of living things. See, for example, Book I, chapter 1, par. 23. For a detailed discussion of Nietzsche’s theory of decadence, see Jacqueline Renee Scott, “Nietzsche and Decadence: The Revaluation of Morality,” *Continental Philosophy Review* 31 (January 1998): 59–78. See also Jaspers’s *Nietzsche*, especially 391–92.

33. This is well known. For example, the emergence of Paul Whiteman as “the King of Jazz,” with his pale, saccharine versions of the music, is a story that takes the chilling form of eternal recurrence in the history of black-white relations in both popular and classical music. Think of the absurdity of this early assessment of that dynamic by an influential white critic: “Nowhere have I gone into detail about negro jazz bands. There are so many good ones, it would be hard to pick out a few for special mention. None of them, however, are as good as the best white bands, and very rarely are their best players as good as the best white virtuosos.” H. O. Osgood, *So This Is Jazz* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1926), 103. For a discussion of Paul Whiteman, see Leroy Ostransky, *Understanding Jazz* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall,

1977), chapters 1 and 2, and Marshall W. Stearns, *The Story of Jazz* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), chapters 14 and 15.

34. This is not to say that living under the weight and expectations of presumed "superiority" does not lead to a form of group "suffering" of its own—the suffering of untested existence. This was suggested earlier in our discussion of individual whites not really knowing whether they can live a day in the shoes of blacks. Bad faith can, however, allow such whites to transform the meaning of failure in such circumstances to *cultural superiority*, as Nietzsche himself does by making a comparison between blacks and whites on the question of the pain thresholds of each group: "[In prehistoric times]. . . pain did not hurt as much as it does now; at least that is the conclusion a doctor may arrive at who has treated Negroes (taken as representatives of prehistoric man) for severe internal inflammations that would drive even the best constituted European to distraction—in the case of Negroes they do *not* do so. (The curve of human susceptibility to pain seems in fact to take an extraordinary and almost sudden drop as soon as one has passed the upper ten thousand or ten million of the top stratum of culture" [*GM*, pp. 67–68].)

35. Paget Henry advances this interpretation of African struggles with existence in his book, *Caliban's Reason*, and his article, "Self-Formation and the Call: An Africana Perspective," *Listening: A Journal of Religion and Culture* 36:1 (Winter 2001): 27–45.

36. See Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 8.

37. I explore this observation in the chapter "Exoticism," in *Bad Faith and Antiblack Racism*, part III.

38. The distinction between mass and class emerges in a peculiar way with the achievement of the white middle "class." Although the working class wants a better life, it lacks the hubris of entitlement that characterizes the white middle class in the world, although the white members of the American working class often dream of it. Although obviously not the sentiment of every individual within the group, Ortega Y Gasset's depiction of mass consciousness provides a fairly accurate description of such an ethos: "*The characteristic of the hour is that the commonplace mind, knowing itself to be commonplace, has the assurance to proclaim the rights of the commonplace and to impose them wherever it will.* As they say in the United States: 'to be different is to be indecent.' The mass crushes beneath it everything that is different, everything that is excellent, individual, qualified and select. Anybody who is not like everybody, who does not think like everybody, runs the risk of being eliminated. And it is clear, of course, that this 'everybody' is not 'everybody.' 'Everybody' was normally the complex unity of the mass and the divergent, specialized minorities. Nowadays, 'everybody' is the mass alone. Here we have the formidable fact of our times, described without any concealment of the brutality of its features," *The Revolt of the Masses* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1932), 18. Need we mention malls and suburbs and gentrified white oases in dark cities?

39. Cf. Book I, chapter I, par. 22 of *The Will to Power*:

nihilism. It is *ambiguous*:

A. Nihilism as a sign of increased power of the spirit: as *active* nihilism.

B. Nihilism as decline and recession of the power of the spirit: as *passive* nihilism.

40. The Greek myths are more well known because of European identification with Greece. For the version offered here, consult Hesiod's *Theogonis*. The much older Egyptian or East African ones are increasingly less familiar. For a wonderful outline and discussion of the influence of these myths, even on the early Mycenaean, Canaanite, and Sumerian myths, see Charles Finch III, *Echoes from the Old Darkland: Themes from the African Eden* (Decatur, GA: Khenti, 1996).

41. The popularity of John McWhorter's *Losing the Race* attests to this fact.