

Post-National Enquiries

Post-National Enquiries:
Essays on Ethnic and Racial Border Crossings

Edited by

Jopi Nyman

CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS

P U B L I S H I N G

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

JOPI NYMAN

The notions of border and border crossings have been widely used in literary and cultural studies since the 1980s. While some of their applications have tended to decontextualize and depoliticize the terms, recasting them as liberating and transgressing tropes, the concepts should not be dismissed and trivialized, not least because of their ability to advance our thinking on various transcultural and post-colonial cultural phenomena. In other words, the subject inhabiting a space between two—or more—different cultures has special characteristics and challenges the traditional model locating the subject in one particular nation-state and culture. As Johan Schimanski and Stephen Wolfe put it in their attempt to construct a poetics of the border, “we are always situated in relation to the border, and there is never one perspective from which we can take in the whole border from all sides.”¹

The multiplicity of perspectives and the general presence of borders in human life characterizes D. Emily Hicks’s description of Latin American writing as a form of “border writing” in her groundbreaking study *Border Writing: The Multidimensional Text* (1991). As Hicks writes:

much contemporary Latin American literature is a literature of borders: cultural borders between Paris/Buenos Aires and Mexico City/New York, gender borders between women and men, and economic borders between dollar-based and other-currency-based societies. Border writing, in a Latin American context, presents the cultures of Europe and the United States in their interaction with Latin American culture rather than as fundamental cultural models. In border writing, the subject is decentered and the object is not present or immediate but displaced. Border writers re-present that

¹ Johan Schimanski and Stephen Wolfe, “Entry Points: An Introduction,” *Border Poetics De-Limited*, ed. Johan Schimanski and Stephen Wolfe (Hannover: Wehrhahn, 2007), 11.

attitudes [sic] toward objects as they exist in more than one cultural context.²

For Hicks, the presence of various borders has created a “border subject,” whose “border writing” may be able to challenge the colonizing and monologic views promoting the aesthetic and cultural values of Western culture and its alleged global hegemony:

It hints at the subversive nature of this writing, a writing that disrupts the one-way flow of information in which the United States produces most of the mass-media programming in the world and thereby controls the images of itself as well as those of other countries. North American critics of Latin American literature must realize that to continue to stress the “magical” or even certain postmodernist aspects of Latin American literature is to deny the larger, broader understanding of reality that informs these texts.³

What Hicks sees as a creation of postmodern discourse, post-colonial theorists such as Homi K. Bhabha have addressed as an effect of cultural hybridity, as a Third Space where the cultures and values of both the colonizer and the colonized transform into something new; for Hicks “[t]he border crosser is both ‘self’ and ‘other.’”⁴ In Bhabha’s view, this space is one of liminality and in-betweenness that transforms the identity of migrants and others passing through it—thus the idea of border crossing is at the same time attractive and frightening, promising a new identity to the subject but also threatening them with change.⁵

While the theorizations of critics such as Bhabha, Hicks, and Paul Gilroy have generated a powerful critical discourse addressing intercultural phenomena in literary and cultural texts, the need to focus on the realities and experiences of actual border crossers in their various concrete historical and cultural contexts has also emerged. It is the aim of this volume to present and analyze such instances where the values of allegedly homogeneous nations and cultures are interrogated and reconstructed. This volume, stemming from an international symposium

² Emily D. Hicks, *Border Writing: The Multidimensional Text* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), xxv.

³ *Ibid.*, xxviii.

⁴ *Ibid.*, xxvii.

⁵ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 4. See also Joel Kuortti and Jopi Nyman, “Introduction: Hybridity Today,” *Reconstructing Hybridity: Post-Colonial Studies in Transition*, ed. Joel Kuortti and Jopi Nyman (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), 1-18.

organized at the University of Joensuu in Finland,⁶ consists of four parts exploring different aspects of cultural, “racial,” and ethnic border crossings.

In the first part of the volume, the emphasis is on questions of “race” and attempts to transcend and cross the borders of racial thinking and practice. In the essay opening the section, Tuire Valkeakari provides a critical overview on the role of “race” in the early work of the British critical theorist Paul Gilroy. In her analysis of the development of Gilroy’s thinking Valkeakari pays particular attention to Gilroy’s critique of purisms and suggests that his texts from “*There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack*” (1987) to *Against Race* (2000) represent a continuum that is both developing and organic. Valkeakari distinguishes three central claims peculiar to Gilroy’s thinking: the contextual specificity of racisms, critique of nationalisms, and the role of the black diaspora. More recently, Valkeakari suggests, Gilroy has sought to recast racial thinking and emphasize utopian impulses.

In the second essay Baron Kelly sets out to examine the role of actors of color in dramatic productions where white actors have traditionally been the norm. While traditional interpretations of such cases have been colorblind and the actor of color playing a white role has been seen as merely passing, Kelly argues for the need to contextualize casting practices in the discourses of race and ethnicity. By using the terminology created by the Non-Traditional Casting Project (NTCP), Kelly discusses the development of non-traditional theatre with particular reference to the United States. What is important in Kelly’s analysis of cross-cultural casting is his focus on the theatre as institution, rather than on merely individual productions.

The third essay in the first part is Pekka Kilpeläinen’s analysis of the utopian elements in James Baldwin’s fiction. With particular reference to Baldwin’s rarely studied late novel *Tell Me How Long the Train’s Been Gone* (1968), Kilpeläinen presents a critical discussion of the ways in which the novel seeks to transcend the boundaries of race and sexuality in order to posit what he calls a “postcategorical utopia.” In Kilpeläinen’s reading of the novel problems of interracial love and normative heterosexuality are probed and transgressed. Unlike earlier critics of the novel, Kilpeläinen argues that the novel participates in Baldwin’s more general attempts to criticize dominant social categorizations.

⁶ Post/National Enquiries: Borders, Migrants and the State: A MESEA Symposium, University of Joensuu, Finland 15-16 June, 2007.

The essays in the second part of the book address a variety of boundary crossings and cultural interaction in the North American context with a particular focus on whiteness. While the first two essays, by Yiorgos Kalogeras and Roy Goldblatt, investigate the immigrant's transformation from "ethnic" to "white" in the twentieth century, Cathy Covell Waegner's essay explores the representation of historical cross-cultural encounters in the fiction of Toni Morrison.

Yiorgos Kalogeras explores the construction of white identity in Elia Kazan's autobiographical film *America, America* (1963), a film about early 20th-century immigration from the Ottoman Empire to the United States. In his reading of the film's projections of identity, Kalogeras shows its ambiguity of identity positions and argues for an interpretation that takes into account the film's multiple generic, autobiographical, cultural, and historical contexts. Ultimately, Kazan's construction of Anatolian identity reflects the privileging of postethnicity distancing Kazan from his Greek heritage.

Roy Goldblatt's essay focuses on the changing representation of mothers and their children in 20th-century Jewish American fiction. In his historical reading of texts representing three distinct phases in the development of Jewish American identity and its gradual "whitening," Goldblatt suggests that the disappearance of community and the increased problems in communication between family members are signs of Jewish assimilation into mainstream American individualism.

In the third essay in this section, Cathy Covell Waegner studies Toni Morrison's new novel *A Mercy* (2008) set in the 17th century. In her reading of the novel Waegner pays particular attention to the ways in which *A Mercy* focuses on the racial and ethnic underpinnings of the formation of the United States by imagining an era of missed opportunities.

The third part of the book consists of two essays that discuss the idea of border as a symbolic and/or concrete marker of difference. In her timely essay on the role of the veil in Islam and the emergent practice of veiling in the contemporary West, Gönül Pultar addresses critically the history of the veil and the various meanings attached to it. While the practice of veiling appears from the perspective of the nation-state as a sign of resistance and a critique of values associated with modernity, for many immigrant women in Europe its function is to link them with tradition: it shows that regardless of the presence of modernity in their life through education and work, something important from the past is present in the West, concretely and symbolically.

Minna Rainio's essay discusses the role of the Finnish-Russian border in stories told by people—Finnish and Russian—about their experience of living by this closed border that separated the West from the East from the 1920s to the 1990s. Rainio's essay is linked with her and Mark Roberts's video installation *Borderlands* (2004) focusing on the same border. The important issues that emerge from Rainio's essay concern nation, border, and memory: the stories told of the border have shaped the identities of people living along it for generations up to today. According to Rainio, the division into "us" and "them" is enforced by the borderline separating "here" from "there."

The final part of the volume consists of two paired essays discussing the work of Bharati Mukherjee, a key post-colonial writer who invariably addresses border crossings in her narratives. Jopi Nyman's essay addresses the role of ethnosexual encounters in shaping the identities of her female characters crossing from one culture to another. Triggered by the way in which Mukherjee's migrant characters' formation of a new identity is framed in their various romantic, erotic, and sexual encounters, the article applies sociologist Joane Nagel's theorization of ethnosexuality to Mukherjee's fiction. Nyman argues that as Mukherjee's narratives transform the traditional plot of immigrant romances positing marriage as a way of locating the immigrant in the nation, such a rejection of middle-class values is linked with a counter-hegemonic discourse of gender and nation emerging in the context of globalization.

The book closes with Maria Lauret's analysis of the role of language(s) in Mukherjee's fiction. By focusing on the problem of English in the context of language politics, Lauret opens up a fascinating view onto the widely debated writer. While Mukherjee's narratives rarely address loss of language, bilingualism or code-switching, in Lauret's analysis they are deeply embedded in the politics of the English language and the border crossings that it enables. As Lauret suggests, English has a double role to play: it is both an imperial language and the *lingua franca* of contemporary globalization and its communications. By contextualizing Mukherjee's works—the recent novels *Desirable Daughters* (2002) and *The Tree Bride* (2004) in particular—in the debates and discourses of globalization, Lauret shows how Mukherjee's dramatizations and translations of languages other than English in her fiction do not violate against the marginalized and the local, nor do they privilege the colonial language. In the end, Lauret argues, Mukherjee's fiction, while linking itself with the possibilities that the mastery of English offers to enable migration and promote the global circulation of cultural traditions, is critical of globalization and its objectifying ideology.

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PART I:
CROSSING RACIAL BOUNDARIES

CHAPTER TWO

BETWEEN CAMPS:
PAUL GILROY AND THE DILEMMA OF “RACE”

TUIRE VALKEAKARI

The status of Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993) as one of the 1990s Black Studies classics is beyond dispute.¹ Nevertheless, Gilroy’s views on what we habitually term “race” continue to provoke controversy: his call for renouncing all racially inflected absolutisms, black nationalisms as well as white supremacy, has generated irritation on both sides of the color line. Resonating with the spirit of James Clifford’s “The Pure Products Go Crazy,”² Gilroy’s writings argue against any type of racial, ethnic, nationalist, and cultural purism. Even as he insists on the importance of studying and dissecting *racisms* (their histories, manifestations, and ever-disastrous consequences), Gilroy critiques essentialist understandings of “race,” strives to find alternative discourses, and positions himself between or outside any traditional raci(ologic)al alignments, as the *Between Camps* titles of both his 1997 inaugural lecture at the University of London and the British edition of his 2000 book (called *Against Race* in the United States) imply.³

Concerned with the genealogy and evolution of his intellectual project, this essay looks at Gilroy’s first three monographs (“*There Ain’t No Black*

¹ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999 [1993]).

² See James Clifford, “Introduction: The Pure Products Go Crazy,” *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, by James Clifford (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 1-18. Clifford’s essay borrows its title from William Carlos Williams’s poem “The pure products of America/go crazy,” originally published in Williams, *Spring and All* (Paris and Dijon: Contact Publishing, 1923), 64-71.

³ All my references to Gilroy’s 2000 book will be to the American edition, titled *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000).

in the Union Jack": *The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* [1987]; *The Black Atlantic*; and *Against Race*) as a single process that is both an uninterrupted continuum and an internally developing and self-correcting enterprise. On the one hand, Gilroy's first three monographs are organically connected: *The Black Atlantic*'s central arguments elaborate and expand on ideas introduced in "*There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*," and the readers of *The Black Atlantic* should have been prepared for the "utopian" (Gilroy's term) overtones of *Against Race* (which, judging from the book's reception, took many by surprise). On the other hand, both *The Black Atlantic* and *Against Race* do, to some extent, revise Gilroy's earlier argumentation, because his project has undergone transformations as it has responded to new cultural and political moments.

This essay sketches the main contours of Gilroy's intellectual project vis-à-vis the notion of "race," identifying both persistent features and some major changes in his thought. As for the constants, at least three main ideas suffusing "*There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*," *The Black Atlantic*, and *Against Race* remain practically unaltered from one book to another. First, Gilroy argues that racisms are always context-specific (hence the plural, "racisms"), and he insists on the intellectual and political necessity of identifying, unveiling, and resisting them wherever and under whatever guises they occur. Second, he also fiercely critiques nationalisms (see below). These two emphases, Gilroy's condemnation of both racisms and nationalisms, merge in his untiring criticism of the racialization of the nation-state—a phenomenon that he sees manifest, for example, in the reductive and racially exclusivist identification of "Britishness" with white Britishness (or, even more narrowly, with white Englishness) in the United Kingdom and in the heavily reified status of "race" as an allegedly "necessary" category of thought and identity formation in the United States. Third, Gilroy interests himself in transnational formations, most famously, the black diaspora. He repeatedly highlights the creative potential of the cultures of the African diaspora to act as counterforces to the discontents of Western modernity.

As for the crucial turning points in Gilroy's oeuvre, his 2000 publications, in particular, mark an important revisiting of the notion of "race." The novelty of *Against Race*, when compared to "*There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*" and *The Black Atlantic*, resides in what must be characterized both as a new aim and a new method, namely, Gilroy's "utopian" desire to abandon race-thinking altogether. In the essay "*The Sugar You Stir...*," published in the same year as *Against Race*, Gilroy writes:

[T]he current crisis of “race” and representation, of politics and ethics, offers a welcome cue to free ourselves from the bonds of all raciology in what might be an ambitious new “abolitionist” project.⁴

Gilroy’s 1980s and 1990s writings did not disclose this new “abolitionist” yearning in full form, but rather indicated a willingness to cautiously embrace certain antiracist varieties of race-thinking. However, the 2000 milestone, *Against Race*, seeks to replace raciology (or, if the plural is preferred again, raciologies) with what Gilroy now calls a “planetary humanism.” The attribute “planetary,” with its inbuilt connotations of transnationality, transraciality, and cosmopolitanism, serves to distinguish his projected new humanism from the more parochial paradigms of the Enlightenment humanists, who, while eloquently exalting humanity, at the same time uncritically embraced the pseudoscientific and heavily oppressive raciologies of their era.

As this essay traces Gilroy’s intellectual journey from a keen analyst of the predicament of black Britons in “*There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack*” to a cosmopolitan visionary of planetary humanism in *Against Race*, the spotlight will be on how he approaches “race,” and how he uses the concept of the African diaspora to facilitate discussion about blackness without the dead weight of racial absolutism. Of the three monographs studied here, the main focus will be on “*There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack*” (atypical as this choice may be in light of *The Black Atlantic*’s now-canonical fame), because Gilroy’s first book is crucial for understanding the genealogy of his project. Both *The Black Atlantic* and *Against Race* revisit and develop themes that already emerged in “*There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack*”—namely, an (initially covert but later overt) interrogation of “race,” a critique of cultural and ethnic absolutisms, and an emphasis on the life-affirming potential of the vernacular cultures of the African diaspora. The comments offered here on *The Black Atlantic* and *Against Race* will be shorter, and will center on paradigmatic continuities and changes among the three works.

Starting Point: Black Britain

After the publication of *The Black Atlantic*, one reviewer complained that the book “continues the project of privileging the African-American

⁴ Paul Gilroy, “The Sugar You Stir,” *Without Guarantees: In Honour of Stuart Hall*, ed. Paul Gilroy, Lawrence Grossberg, and Angela McRobbie (London: Verso, 2000), 126.

experience.”⁵ This complaint is off the mark for two reasons. First, while it is true that *The Black Atlantic* primarily deals with African American authors and intellectuals, Gilroy casts these figures as transatlantic travelers and cosmopolitans, thus transcending any narrowly American focus. Second, the criticism fails to consider the processual nature of Gilroy’s project, which requires that his works be read in dialogue with each other. *The Black Atlantic* was preceded by “*There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack*,” which addresses a European context; indeed, Gilroy’s Britishness is an important starting point for contextualizing his work and for examining his approach to black transnational identity formation.

“*There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack*” opens by dissecting the core of the antiblack sentiment plaguing Conservative Thatcherist Britain (i.e., the Britain that the book primarily addresses). Gilroy considers the ideological main components of this variety of racism to be, first, the dehumanizing notion of black people as “problems,” and, second, the equally oppressive definition of them “as forever victims, objects rather than subjects, beings that feel yet lack the ability to think, and remain incapable of considered behavior in an active mode.”⁶ In pondering how to best contest these two negative assumptions, Gilroy draws on the historicity of black experience and on the knowability of black history. Because British racism rests, in his view, on its “ability to contain blacks in the present, to repress and to deny the past,”⁷ the illusion that blacks are a “historyless” people must be shattered and their history made visible.

Gilroy was not the first to issue this call for a new, historically grounded black visibility in Britain. By the time of the publication of “*There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack*,” the Jamaican-born cultural critic Stuart Hall—a source of vital intellectual inspiration for such younger academics as Gilroy, Hazel Carby, and others—had already been a strong presence at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham for years, having become the Centre’s director in 1968. CCCS scholars had collectively published such important documents as *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* (1978) and *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 70s Britain* (1982).⁸ The white journalist Peter Fryer had provided a comprehensive

⁵ Renée R. Curry, review of *The Black Atlantic*, by Paul Gilroy. *Canadian Review of American Studies* 24.2 (1994): online.

⁶ Paul Gilroy, “*There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack*”: *The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991 [1987]), 11.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁸ CCCS, *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 70s Britain* (London: Hutchinson and the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of

account of black British history in *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (1984), unearthing the presence of black people in Britain since the third century C.E.⁹ However, significant as these 1970s and early 1980s efforts to reconfigure black people's image in the British public sphere had been in quality, they had remained few in number. The initial reception of "*There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*" in the late 1980s thus took place in a sociopolitical climate where Britain's dominant historical memory concerning its black population was still very short and failed to reach as "far" back in time as, for example, the black West Indian contribution to the British World War II effort. Britain's postwar national narrative had, in its mainstream versions, failed to accommodate the experience of black troops, such as Jamaican airmen, and to seriously consider colonialism and its consequences as crucial background to black Caribbean migration to the "mother country" after the war.

Indeed, as Kathleen Paul argues in *Whitewashing Britain: Race and Citizenship in the Postwar Era* (1997), the West Indian migrants were seen, from the *S/S Empire Windrush's* very docking onwards, as "problems" rather than British citizens, even though the 1948 British Nationality Act unequivocally granted them citizenship. The British government's suspicious and "forced" reception of its colonial citizens of color differed drastically from the warm welcome extended, at the time, to white European immigrants to Britain. As Kathleen Paul, echoing William R. Brubaker, wryly points out, "while other countries debated the admission of immigrants to citizenship, Britain alone was discussing the admission of citizens [of color] as immigrants."¹⁰ The colonial subjects, not infrequently cast in the mother country's artistic and political imagination as her colonial "children," found themselves in a land of limited opportunity and flagrant racial prejudice, rather than in the protective arms of a welcoming "mother." These postwar developments underlie the desire of "*There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*," articulated in the book's subtitle, to delve into the complexities of "the cultural politics of race and nation."

Birmingham, 1982); Stuart Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* (London: Macmillan, 1978). For a brief description of the CCCS's heyday, see Paul Gilroy, "Cultural Studies and the Crisis in Britain's Universities," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 48.46 (26 July 2002): B20.

⁹ See Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 1984).

¹⁰ Kathleen Paul, *Whitewashing Britain: Race and Citizenship in the Postwar Era* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), xiv.

In the decades that followed, Britain experienced a social and industrial decline that led to a further hardening of racial attitudes and to a scapegoating of black people for the tarnished condition of the former empire's once-glorious self-image. The racializing treatment of crime by the government and the popular press (in particular, the labeling of muggings as a specifically "black" type of crime in the 1970s) resulted in what Stuart Hall has called a disproportionate "moral panic."¹¹ As Gilroy analyzes this panic and its background in "*There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*," he focuses on the triad of class, race, and nation,¹² explores white anxieties over the black presence in Britain, and addresses black Britons' past and present on their own terms.

Class, Race, and Nation in "*There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*"

In his 1997 inaugural lecture at the Goldsmiths College of the University of London, Gilroy singled out the critique of nationalism as the key element characterizing all his work:

[I]t might be possible to synthesise all my work and articulate it clearly as a single, quite simple project. It is unified by my antipathy towards nationalism in all its forms and a related concern with the responsibility of intellectuals to act ethically, justly, when faced with the challenges that nationalisms present.¹³

Indeed, as early as "*There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*," Gilroy emphasized his reluctance "to analyse culture within neat, homogeneous national units."¹⁴ He linked this reluctance to his frustration with what he in the mid-1980s saw as British cultural studies' tendency towards "a morbid celebration of England and Englishness from which blacks are systematically excluded."¹⁵ Gilroy's first monograph, in other words, targeted any exclusivist identification of Britain with white Englishness

¹¹ See the references to Hall in Houston A. Baker, "Foreword," "*There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*": *The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation*, by Paul Gilroy (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991 [1987]), 3-4.

¹² *Ibid.*, 4.

¹³ Paul Gilroy, "Between Camps: Race and Culture in Postmodernity: An Inaugural Lecture Given by Professor Paul Gilroy on 4 March 1997" (London: Goldsmiths College, University of London, 1997), 2.

¹⁴ Gilroy, "*There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*," 12.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

(or with white Britishness, for that matter) and revealed this practice's catastrophic consequence for cultural studies—namely, the “invisibility of ‘race’ within the field.”¹⁶ According to Gilroy, the silence that at the time enveloped race and racialized thought in British academia implicitly supported the fallacious understanding of race “as an eternal, essential factor of division in society.”¹⁷

In setting out to respond to this challenge in “*There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack*,” Gilroy situates himself within an undogmatically understood New Leftism and a “materialist theory of culture.”¹⁸ Calling for a thorough and “ruthless” modernization of class analysis, he says that 20th-century changes in “[t]he relationship between manufacturing and service work, the role of the state as an employer and as a provider of income, and the growth of structural unemployment” require a revisiting of the traditional Marxist vocabulary and model.¹⁹ It is in this context, faced with the necessity of bringing class theory up to date, that Gilroy quotes and paraphrases Stuart Hall’s now-classic 1980 definition of race as “‘the modality in which class is lived,’ the medium in which it is appropriated and ‘fought through.’”²⁰ This tenet, the notion that class is lived through race, sets the tone for Gilroy’s critical intervention.²¹ He argues that any relevant new methodology within cultural studies should provide tools for a serious, groundbreaking analysis of race and racism (which, in turn, will help to update and revitalize class analysis).

Indeed, although “*There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack*” opens by modestly claiming that it does not attempt to offer a paradigmatic alternative to the sociology of “race relations,”²² it seems in retrospect that the book is best read precisely as an effort to work towards such an alternative. The sociology of “race relations” viewed “races” as fixed givens whose mutual relations were to be examined for a deeper understanding of how societies operate. “*There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack*,” by contrast, defines race as a “political category” consisting of meanings that are necessarily unfixed, fluid, and (for better or worse)

¹⁶ Ibid., 12.

¹⁷ Ibid., 17.

¹⁸ Ibid., 16.

¹⁹ Ibid., 19.

²⁰ Stuart Hall, “Race, Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance,” in *Sociological Theories: Race and Colonialism* (Paris: UNESCO, 1980) qtd. in Gilroy, “*There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack*,” 30.

²¹ In *The Black Atlantic*, Gilroy adds that gender is “the modality in which race is lived” (85).

²² Gilroy, “*There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack*,” 15.

constantly subject to new definitions.²³ In Gilroy's model, "race" is not an "ahistorical essence," but instead resides in political practices and in the "complex relationships between dominant and subordinate social groups."²⁴ Today, Gilroy's argument that racial formation (or race formation, as he initially called it) is "a continuous and contingent process in the same sense as class formation"²⁵ may seem self-evident, but the recognition of race's processual nature was far from commonplace in the mid-1980s when "*There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*" was written. This becomes apparent when we recall that the first edition of Michael Omi's and Howard Winant's *Racial Formation in the United States*, then a trailblazer and now a classic in the study of "race" as a social process, was published as late as 1986.²⁶ The shift from studying "race relations" to investigating societies' processes of racialization and racial coding did not occur either in Britain or in the United States until the late 1980s and early 1990s.

During this paradigm shift, the question of whether "race" had a biological basis was a major issue requiring clarification. In "*There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*," just as in his later works, Gilroy stresses the arbitrariness of any racially motivated act of reading non-biological significance into a purely biological property or set of properties:

Accepting that skin "colour," however meaningless we know it to be, has a strictly limited material basis in biology, opens up the possibility of engaging with theories of signification which can highlight the elasticity and the emptiness of "racial" signifiers as well as the ideological work which has to be done in order to turn them into signifiers in the first place. This perspective underscores the definition of "race" as an open political category.²⁷

Gilroy's focus here, characteristically, shifts rapidly from the physical and phenotypical back to the politics of representation; his brief meditation on the locus of biology in racial formation is not an end in itself, but rather paves the way for a discussion of such issues as the production of meaning and the history of representation.

For Gilroy, these issues are inherently political (hence his later fondness of the term "biopolitics"). Indeed, when he addresses "race" in

²³ Ibid., 24.

²⁴ Ibid., 149.

²⁵ Ibid., 38.

²⁶ Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 1986).

²⁷ Gilroy, "*There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*," 38-9.

“There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack,” he avoids such terms as “cultural category” and “cultural construct.” His use of “political” instead of the more innocent-sounding “cultural” highlights the active role that the nation-state plays in the processes whereby citizens come to view each other as members of different racial groups. Although Gilroy does not, of course, view racial formations as governmental “policies” in the traditional, narrow sense, he does see racialization as part of a comprehensive political process whereby the state organizes the relations among its citizenry and sets parameters for how citizenship is defined in common parlance and thought.

In discussing the role of “race” in British Conservative nation-building after World War II (Thatcher’s era included), Gilroy argues that the scary strength and stamina of the period’s antiblack racism resided in its “capacity to link discourses of patriotism, nationalism, xenophobia, Englishness, Britishness, militarism and gender difference into a complex system which gives ‘race’ its contemporary meaning.”²⁸ For those white patriots who fantasized about an exclusively white, “true” British nation, the black presence was “a problem or threat against which a homogeneous, white, national ‘we’ could be unified,” notes Gilroy.²⁹ In this political atmosphere, race and ethnicity were equated in a way that reflected a profoundly exclusivist desire: in the popular cultural and political imagination, says Gilroy, “Britishness” was understood to be synonymous with “whiteness” and with the “Anglo-Saxon race,” from which black people were, of course, excluded. (This background explains why black British cultural analysts so severely criticize any blurring of the boundary between “race” and “ethnicity.”)

In order to make his discussion of race in postwar Britain more concrete in *“There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack,”* Gilroy investigates the racial labeling of certain types of crime in 1970s and 1980s Britain. He addresses, in particular, the genealogy of the notorious misconception that “black law-breaking is an integral element of black *culture*,” as his ironic summary puts it.³⁰ He argues that the British government’s and popular press’s promotion of the public image of black people as a high-crime group was instrumental to the era’s antiblack racism. It was not uncommon for white politicians and journalists to deploy metaphors of war and invasion when they addressed black immigration to Britain; as a case in point, Gilroy evokes the infamous anti-immigration oration delivered by the Conservative Member of Parliament Enoch Powell in

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 48.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 48; italics original.

Birmingham on April 20, 1968 (now known as the “Rivers of Blood” speech). Fomenting fear and hatred, Powell argued that black immigrants might soon organize “to consolidate their members, to agitate and campaign against their fellow citizens, and to overawe and dominate the rest with the legal weapons which the ignorant and ill-informed have provided.”³¹ Powell notoriously dramatized his address with allusions to Virgil’s prophecy of war: “As I look ahead, I am filled with foreboding. Like the Roman, I seem to see ‘the River Tiber foaming with much blood.’”³² Gilroy points out that Powell’s references to conquest and war as analogies for black immigration contributed significantly to the public image of black people as enemies and breakers of British national unity—and this image, in turn, fed and fostered the notion of black Britons as reckless law-breakers. While Gilroy freely admits that in Britain (as anywhere else) poverty has bred crime, and that black poverty has been no exception to this rule, he also emphasizes that the “possibility of a direct relationship between ethnicity, black culture and crime is an altogether different and more complex issue.”³³

On a somewhat different but closely related note, “*There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack*” also examines two branches of the antiracist movement in 1970s and 1980s Britain. One branch consisted of the formal and institutionally based action that resulted from local Labour authorities’ desire to improve “race relations” after the Brixton and Toxteth riots of 1981; Gilroy particularly focuses on the Greater London Council’s (GLC) campaigns against racism. Another branch comprised the antiracist mass movement of the late 1970s, especially Rock Against Racism (RAR) and the Anti Nazi League (ANL).³⁴ When Gilroy compares the work of such municipal authorities as the GLC with the informal bonding across the color line within such “movements of the people” as the ANL and RAR, it is clear that his sympathies are primarily with the latter. His discussion of the GLC reveals that the well-intentioned work of the organization’s bureaucrats often in practice reflected, and inadvertently supported, the very ideological, ideational, and institutional structures that the GLC was

³¹ Enoch Powell, “Rivers of Blood,” speech known as “Rivers of Blood,” delivered at the Annual General Meeting of the West Midlands Area Conservative Political Centre, Birmingham, England, April 20, 1968, *The Occidental Quarterly: Western Perspectives on Man, Culture, and Politics* 1.1 (2001): online.

³² Ibid.

³³ Gilroy, “*There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack*,” 75.

³⁴ The ANL and RAR were intertwined because many individuals were involved in both movements.

supposed to challenge and deconstruct.³⁵ However, Gilroy also detects fundamental problems in the Anti Nazi League's approach, because the ANL rather narrowly equated racism with the activities of extremist neo-fascist groups and hence ignored the routine racism inscribed in the structures of British society. The ANL's tactics thus, ironically, enabled most whites to dissociate themselves from the very critique that this movement attempted to articulate.

For Gilroy, the spirit of Rock Against Racism—the rebellious, performative, democracy-seeking, and love-yearning spirit that Isaac Julien later captured on film in *Young Soul Rebels* (1991)—is the most genuine and successful of these three antiracist enterprises. According to Gilroy, RAR not only “allowed space for youth to rant against the perceived iniquities of ‘Labour Party Capitalist Britain’”³⁶ but also provided a site for meaningful grassroots encounters and negotiations between blacks and whites.³⁷

Gilroy's references to RAR keep the reader attuned to the realm of music. Such attunement is of no minor importance, because Gilroy's discourse is powerfully informed by his experience as a listener, player, critic, and discographer of the musics of the African diaspora.³⁸ His reflections on black musical expression constitute a vital aspect of his Afrodiasporic intervention both in “*There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*” and in his later works. Indeed, although it is widely believed that Gilroy first launched his Afrodiasporic vision in *The Black Atlantic*, the concept of the black diaspora plays an important role in his first book as well—particularly in chapter 5, where he highlights music and dance as important facilitators of a shared black consciousness among the various and diverse Caribbean migrant groups that started to establish lives in Britain after World War II:

³⁵ See Gilroy, “*There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*,” 136-48.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 133.

³⁷ However, RAR's very strength—its nature as a dynamic, largely unorganized movement that did not appoint official representatives to negotiate with political authorities—may also have been its weakness in relation to structural, state-orchestrated racism. Gilroy refrains from a detailed evaluation of the exact extent to which RAR's existence and popularity alleviated racism in Britain. Besides the obvious difficulties in measuring the influence of a very loosely organized mass movement, the temporal closeness between RAR's heyday and the writing of “*There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*” may have contributed to this caution; in the mid-1980s, time may not yet have been ripe for a “final word” on RAR's success.

³⁸ Baker, 5-6.

The early [black] settlers were comparatively few in number [...] and beyond the British educations which were their colonial inheritance, they lacked a single cohesive culture which could bind them together. They set about creating it from the diverse influences which were available and which corresponded to their predicament. The dances, parties and social functions in which students, ex-service people and workers enjoyed themselves, reverberated to black musics drawn from the US and Africa as well as Latin America and the Caribbean.³⁹

Gilroy argues that this intermixture of influences facilitated a simultaneously cultural, communal, and political identity formation among the black migrants. More generally, he considers politics and expressive culture to be in constant dialogue with one another—or, inextricably enmeshed and intertwined—as they form and reform a transnational black consciousness. That is, while Gilroy refers to “race” as a *political* category whose meanings can be altered through black struggle,⁴⁰ he applauds black *culture* as a vital site where black self-worth can be affirmed in ways that are intuitive and creative as well as socially relevant. These dynamics underlie his phrase, “[b]lack expressive cultures affirm while they protest.”⁴¹ Gilroy may not be very interested in providing a conceptually exact definition of the relationship between politics and culture (or, for that matter, of the relationship between the study of politics and the study of culture) because he ultimately sees the division of the public sphere into these two allegedly separate realms as a “European” construction that “cannot be easily and straightforwardly introduced into analysis of distinctly non-European traditions of radicalism.”⁴² Yet, he frequently writes about the power of cultural expression to change people’s racialized perceptions of themselves and of “Others.” He sees this cultural effort/effect as inherently political and argues that sites of cultural consumption “provide locations in which racial politics can be erased or dispersed by lived and formed relations based on gender, age, class and locality.”⁴³ Accordingly, Gilroy studies black music clubs and the interracial dance floor, and explores the dynamics of social movements and “disorderly protest,”⁴⁴ rather than focusing exclusively, for example, on contemporary debates in the Parliament.

³⁹ Gilroy, “*There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack*,” 161.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 155.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 172.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 160.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 224.

Gilroy's commentary on the social significance of music and dance in "*There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*" aptly illustrates his claim that the development of black Britain's expressive culture is a living process characterized by "complex, dynamic patterns" of transnational "syncretism" that produce novel understandings of blackness as a result of the intermixture of "raw materials" provided by other peoples of the African diaspora.⁴⁵ It follows, argues Gilroy, that national units cannot constitute an adequate basis for examining black histories or analyzing black cultures, because "the African diaspora's consciousness of itself has been defined in and against constricting national boundaries."⁴⁶ *The Black Atlantic* continues from here, shifting the focus from black Britain to a transnationally interpreted African America as another example of how, in the study of black identity formation, "routes" constitute a more relevant focus than "roots." In *The Black Atlantic*, Gilroy tackles the double task of attacking nationalism, including its black varieties, and of promoting the argument that the political and cultural idea of transnational black connectedness can be empirically grounded in the survival of Africanisms among the expressive, especially musical, cultures of the black diaspora.

The Diasporic Visions of *The Black Atlantic*

Although Robert Farris Thompson had already used the term "black Atlantic"—in the adjectival form, as in "the black Atlantic visual tradition" and "the black Atlantic world"—in his 1983 study *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy*,⁴⁷ it was Gilroy's second book that indelibly impressed this term, suggestive of black intercultural and transnational formations, on the minds of the scholars of the African diaspora. *The Black Atlantic* seeks, as Natasha Barnes points out, to redirect not only British cultural studies but also African American studies from what Gilroy sees (or, at least, at the time saw) as their nationally and racially self-sufficient and insular modes.⁴⁸ This time, Gilroy indeed critiques not only white British cultural analysts but also their African American colleagues, implying (in a move considered controversial by many of his critics) that the latter, in reconstructing the cultural history of African Americans, have, to a degree, ignored the

⁴⁵ Ibid., 13.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 158.

⁴⁷ Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), xiii-xv.

⁴⁸ Natasha Barnes, "Black Atlantic—Black America," review of *The Black Atlantic*, by Paul Gilroy, *Research in African Literatures* 27.4 (1996): online.

necessarily hybrid and transcultural nature of its formation. In fact, a germ of this criticism was already present in "*There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*," where Gilroy briefly cautioned that black scholars too, as well as whites, "risk endorsing the explanatory frameworks and political definitions of the new right" whenever they "defin[e] 'race' and ethnicity as cultural absolutes."⁴⁹ In *The Black Atlantic*, this brief warning is expanded into one of the book's main premises.

Investigating "the history of black nationalist thought that has had to repress its own ambivalence about exile from Africa,"⁵⁰ chapter 1 of *The Black Atlantic* addresses the ways in which Martin Delany's various travels, especially his journey to Africa, introduced the African American polymath to the inner dynamics and tensions of diaspora identification. In Gilroy's analysis, Delany's life and writings appear as a site of inner contestation between the dispositions of a progressive diasporic intellectual, on the one hand, and a more conservative U.S. denizen, on the other, whose early attraction to American patriotism was rekindled by the prospect of a new, dignified future that the Civil War seemed to promise to black Americans. While chapter 2, then, discusses slavery (focusing on the master/mistress-slave relationship, which Gilroy considers "foundational to both black critiques and affirmations of modernity"),⁵¹ and chapter 3 continues the meditation of "*There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*" on black music, chapters 4 and 5 return to the figure of the African American traveler. Chapter 4 looks at the life and travels of W. E. B. Du Bois, examining the effect of his pan-Africanism and anti-imperialism on what Gilroy characterizes as Du Bois's initial belief in African American exceptionalism. Chapter 5, in turn, studies Richard Wright as a traveler and exile who, after leaving the United States, shouldered his political responsibility by connecting the predicament of African Americans with the "experiences of other colonised peoples."⁵²

The Black Atlantic's discussion of "blackness" and black transnational community calls for a comparison to the treatment of "race" in "*There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*." In his first book, Gilroy argued that "race" is a political category consisting of fluid, mutable meanings. However, his argumentation seemed to contain some inner tensions or loose ends. For example, in "*There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*" he wrote that "[i]n Britain, 'race' cannot be adequately understood if it is

⁴⁹ Gilroy, "*There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*," 13.

⁵⁰ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, ix.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, x.

⁵² *Ibid.*, x.

falsely divorced or abstracted from other social relations,”⁵³ but he then immediately added that race “cannot be reduced to the effects of these other relations.”⁵⁴ While he never returned to the latter statement, it seemed to leave the door open for strategic essentialism. However, Gilroy never really entered through that door; instead, in chapter 5—the pivotal chapter on black diasporic identity formation—he addressed the expressive *cultures* of the African diaspora, making “culture” and “politics” (rather than “race”) the key terms of his discussion of black transnational connectedness. Yet, the existence of that one isolated, underdeveloped sentence suggesting that race cannot be completely reduced to the effects of societal power relations indicated that in “*There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack*” Gilroy’s reflection on racial essentialism and anti-essentialism (he did not use this lexicon in his first book) remained a work-in-progress, to be developed further in his later works.

And indeed, in *The Black Atlantic* Gilroy returns to the issue of racial essentialism, this time explicitly and from a somewhat unexpected angle: *The Black Atlantic* is marked by a search for a “third” mode of thought that could, ideally, transcend both essentialism and anti-essentialism. While the wish to overcome essentialism is in keeping with Gilroy’s fierce critique of ethnic and national absolutisms, his avowed desire to go beyond anti-essentialism may initially seem surprising. However, Gilroy’s negative assessment of anti-essentialism becomes more understandable when we realize that he here equates anti-essentialism with the kind of pluralism that has lost any “unitary idea of black community” and can only “celebrate complex representations of a black particularity that is *internally* divided.”⁵⁵ In *The Black Atlantic* Gilroy, in other words, attacks a variety of pluralism—the variety that guards itself against any accusation of essentialism so jealously that it completely denies the relevance of “blackness” as a basis for collective identity formation:

In the face of the conspicuous differentiation and proliferation of black cultural styles and genres, a new analytic orthodoxy has begun to grow. In the name of anti-essentialism and theoretical rigour it suggests that since black particularity is socially and historically constructed, and plurality has become inescapable, the pursuit of any unifying dynamic or underlying structure of feeling in contemporary black cultures is utterly misplaced. The attempt to locate the cultural practices, motifs, or political agendas that might connect the dispersed and divided blacks of the new world and of

⁵³ Gilroy, “*There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack*,” 14.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁵⁵ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 32; italics original.