Foreseeing Identity in Blank Interstices: New-wave African Migration to the United States and a New Theory of Diaspora

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FORESEEING IDENTITY IN BLANK INTERSTICES:

new-wave African migration to the United States and a new theory of diaspora

BY

BERNARD LOMBARDI

A master’s thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in satisfaction of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
Abstract

FORESEEING IDENTITY IN BLANK INTERSTICES:
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Bernard Lombardi

Advisor: Dr. Robert F. Reid-Pharr

In this thesis, I explore the ways by which new-wave black African immigrants confront and negotiate American tropes of blackness for individual and collective identity formations. Specifically, I focus on the memory of slavery as it is used for black collectivity in the United States. I argue that, although new-wave black African immigrants do not share the same memory of slavery with the descendants of slaves, they experience the racism perpetuated from the period of slavery because of their phenotypical blackness. In addition, these immigrants bring to the United States new memories and understandings of Africa that transform the ways Americans understand Africanness and blackness. By using historical, sociological, and literary analysis, I illustrate these immigrants’ socialization into America’s racial society. Moreover, I argue for the necessity to develop an inclusive theory of diaspora that is not rooted solely in the memory of slavery and that does not assert separateness between an old (descendants of slaves) and new (contemporary African immigrants) diaspora. I present an African diaspora theory that acknowledges blackness as the product of any given moment--its meaning in constant negotiation as affected by time and space.
Acknowledgments

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There are no words for how much support I’ve received from my friends and family. Special thanks are due to Kim, Chris, Mom and Dad for putting up with me throughout this process, and for giving me the comfort and support to pursue my academic goals.

Lastly, I must acknowledge my family in Ghana. If it weren’t for you, I would not fully understand liberation, and my life would not be where it is today.
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Introduction

In 1965, the United States initiated the Immigration and Nationality Act which ended an era of selectively preferring certain immigrant groups over others. This Act ended a system that typically discriminated against ethnic and racial groups from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and South America. Since its enactment, the United States’ demography has changed significantly. During the 1950s and 1960s, African immigrants often came to the United States as diplomats from newly independent countries and as students attending historically black colleges. The post-1965 wave of African immigrants did not become remarkably noticeable, though, until the 1980s. According to data presented by Randy Capps, Kristen McCabe, and Michael Fix in “New Streams: Black African Migration to the United States,” there were approximately 1.5 million African immigrants in the United States in 2009. This number was 4% of the nation’s 38 million immigrants. Among that 1.5 million, Capps et al. reports that 1.1 million (74%) identified as black or black with another race. This 1.1 million was a 92% increase from 64,000 in 1980 (There were 184,000 in 1990 and 574,000 in 2000).¹

There exists much literature on the historical processes of assimilation and acculturation for immigrants into the American mainstream. A common theme exposed by the experiences of European immigrants of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries is “working towards whiteness.” Historians such as David R. Roediger suggest that these European immigrants, initially labeled non-white by Americans, were able to successfully assimilate into the American

mainstream by working against the polarization of blacks at the bottom of the American racial hierarchy. Similarly, non-whites, in contemporary terms (i.e. Latino, Asian, etc.), recognize the racial polarization and use it to their advantages. Although there is not significant historical and sociological evidence on the second generation experience of new-wave African immigrants due to its relative newness, considerable research has been conducted on second and third generation West Indians. Like Africans, West Indians’ phenotypical blackness is often indistinguishable from that of African Americans; therefore, this research can provide insight for future generations of new-wave Africans immigrants. The acculturation experiences of West Indians and new-wave Africans have proven more difficult than those of non-black immigrants because of American social perceptions and understandings of blackness. Research reveals that members of both [generally defined] groups attempt to distinguish themselves from African Americans. Despite this, in the case of West Indians, the second and later generations are consistently more likely to assimilate into Black America, a collective socialized into being by and/or in response to the effects of structural and interpersonal racism and economic segregation.

Paul Gilroy called the black Atlantic a site of transnational cultural construction, the contributors being those who suffer(ed) from the Atlantic slave trade. Within the range of African diaspora studies, scholars have expanded, criticized, disregarded, and developed counter-arguments for Gilroy’s theory. When scholars such as Gilroy attempt to assemble a theory of


affiliation for members of the global African diaspora, they often measure belonging by “blackness.” Formulating an identity based on a single racial character is problematic because it essentializes various peoples into a group that some may not identify with. For example, acknowledging the racial diversity in South Africa, many members of South Africa’s diaspora would not relate with a theoretical diasporic identity based on “blackness.” In my analysis of new-wave African immigration, I will refer to those persons who come from sub-Saharan Africa and who American society would discern as black regardless of one’s own relationship to any Black identity. Although Gilroy acknowledges cultural production as a constant transnational process, the constructors are limited to a fixed group. As this thesis will analyze later on, Gilroy and many other African diaspora theorists recognize an African diaspora collective consisting of and developed by descendants of those Africans forcefully removed from Africa through the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Concomitantly, an identity evolves based solely on American and European black experiences. In result, “black” becomes a homogenous identity. In *Becoming Black: Creating Identity in the African Diaspora*, Michelle Wright claims that “Blacks in the diaspora possess an intimidating array of different historical, cultural, national, ethnic, religious, and ancestral origins and influences...the attempt to offer an overarching definition for blackness looks to be a losing game.” Being a member of the “black” African diaspora is more than just being endowed with a confluent cultural identity; possessing an all-inclusive cultural confluence is thus impossible.

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5 Wright, p. 2
New waves of black immigrants in the past three decades have broadened the African diaspora in the United States. This prevents any identity fixed on a single historical experience. Despite roots in Africa, several centuries stand between evolved cultures and interactions in an African past. The United States’ imperial culture socializes new-wave African immigrants with tropes specific to American blackness, and its racial history instigates their acculturation into its black community. As indicated earlier, new-wave African immigrants are often identified with African Americans based on their perceived “blackness.” This configuration has come to identify more than just race, but a history of suffering from American injustice. This essentialization makes the immigration process that much more difficult for these new groups of Africans with various histories. New-wave African immigrants must manage assimilation, maintaining identity, and socialization with “blackness” and the stereotypes and stigmas associated with it. One may surmise that new-wave African immigrants’ sometimes critical perceptions of African Americans are in result of the social manipulations of a “colorblind”--albeit subtly racist--society. In an attempt to include new-wave African immigrants within conversations of diaspora, editors Isidore Okpewho and Nairu Nzegwu have chosen to label them as a “new” African diaspora. The necessity for new theorizing on the global black diaspora is exposed by exclusive limits in accepted understandings and dialogues based on American and Euro-centric ideas of blackness. In his introduction to *The New African Diaspora*, Okpewho suggests that we should consider the relationship between the “old” and “new” diasporas. He writes, “We might begin to understand these relations by characterizing the older diaspora as *precolonial* and the more recent one as *postcolonial*, or by using the demarcation Ali Mazrui has drawn between what he calls the
diaspora of enslavement and the diaspora of imperialism.” Discussing the dichotomy between old and new is useful because it recognizes the need for theoretical development. In addition, by labeling the two diasporas “precolonial” and “postcolonial,” Okpewho suggests that the two diasporas share a common ancestry of subjection by the West. Okpewho, though, is skeptical about the relationship between the old and new diasporas, despite alluding to an inherent connection. His skepticism is similar to that of many older first generation African immigrants who bring their families to the United States in order to achieve the “American Dream.” After a close reading of Okpewho’s essay, I suggest that his theorization of a new African diaspora purposefully seeks to accentuate the gap between new-wave African immigrants and native blacks. He writes,

I hope that in time the need for these modes of classification will cease to exist, and the U.S. government will give everyone living here two choices: you are either an American pure and simple, or you are some other nationality...But most of us, true professionals any nation would die for, are here to make an honest life for our families, not to deny anyone a chance to realize their American dream.

Academic research on new-wave African immigration provides endless sympathies for what seems to be Okpewho’s frustration with the racial barriers that affect black immigrants in the United States. The problem with research dependent on a parent first generation is that the experiences of pre-adulthood socialization, which provide a more transparent, though not yet crystal clear, understanding of acculturation, are not fully developed. Acknowledging apparent differences, the West Indian experience, as previously stated, suggests that later generations of African immigrants will almost inevitably become Black.

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7 Okpewho, p. 14
Theorizing a “new” African diaspora by distinguishing difference from an older one is not as useful as developing a “new” African diaspora that includes both old and new members. What needs to be emphasized is the power an inclusive African diaspora identity has to transform accepted understandings of American blackness. In the United States, members of both the diaspora of enslavement and the diaspora of imperialism are socialized into the same racialized category; this makes useless any attempt at rejecting solidarity for disparity. In *In My Father’s House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*, Kwame Anthony Appiah writes, “I think it remains clear that another Pan-Africanism—the project of a continental fraternity and sorority, not the project of a racialized Negro nationalism—however false or muddled its theoretical roots, can be a progressive force.” Although there is no falsity in the need to deracialize understandings of social organization, the current racial condition of the United States makes it necessary to take seriously an ideological racial solidarity among blacks. This becomes evident immediately when a new-wave African immigrant is asked to check his/her race on a form and the option he/she is provided is “Black or African American,” or when he/she becomes the victim of racial profiling. Despite endless cultural differences among all members of the African diaspora in the United States, they are all processed together under a single understanding of race.

As a starting point for this thesis, I take an understanding of blackness from Michelle Wright’s *Becoming Black*. She writes, “I frame ‘Blackness’ as a concept that cannot be (1) limited to a particular national, cultural, and linguistic border, or (2) produced in isolation from

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gender and sexuality.” At the end of her introduction she states, “I use the term ‘Black’ as a signifier for the complex negotiation between dominant and minority cultures that all peoples of African descent in the West--philosophers or not--must make in order to survive, whether physically or psychologically (and here we might include the rejection of one cultural identity over the other as a negotiation, however unsuccessful).” In order to most accurately analyze new-wave African immigrants’ experiences with American blackness, one must engage blackness as an identity that represents complexity and cross-cultural circulation. In addition, one must acknowledge the necessary social and cultural negotiations that occur throughout the endless process of acculturation. Furthermore, various cultural forms influence newcomers, and they transform typically accepted cultural tropes present in the United States prior to migration. It is the purpose of this thesis to better understand new-wave African immigrants’ encounters with and negotiations of American tropes of blackness. I seek to illustrate how new-wave African immigrants transform accepted theories of blackness and diaspora.

In section I of this thesis, I provide an overview of new-wave African immigration to the United States. Following in section II, I attempt to illustrate the historical development of African American and African literary traditions. In doing so, I show how these two histories cross paths and blur certain distinctions that separate one from the other; I argue that, by acknowledging the existence of new-wave African immigration to the United States and the emergence of literature from such immigrants that we could consider both African and American, these distinctions become even more obscured. In section III, I provide a reading of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah*. I analyze Adichie’s comprehension of race as it plays different

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9 Wright, p. 4-5
10 Wright, p. 25 -26
roles in Nigeria and the United States and how she portrays distinctively American tropes of blackness affecting the experiences of new-wave African immigrants. I will finish this analysis by focusing on how Adichie acknowledges the idea that younger generations of new-wave African immigrants acculturate differently into American society than do members of the parent first generation.

In section IV, I provide a historical overview of the memory of slavery as the root of black solidarity in the United States. I then use historical and sociological analyses to explore how structural racism persists from the period of slavery into the present moment and how this affects new-wave African immigrants’ identity formations in the United States. In section V, I provide a reading of Teju Cole’s *Open City* as a further exploration into the psychological and social impositions the memory of slavery has on new-wave African immigrants, and how this plays into their negotiations of blackness. I analyze whether memory is something that is “real” and fixed into one’s blood through ancestry, or if it is an abstract idea that can be acquired by social circumstance. I conclude this thesis by understanding blackness as relative to any given moment in time and space. As a result of the negotiations new-wave African immigrants make when confronting American tropes of blackness and the ability they have to affect the way we understand blackness in the United States, I argue that we must understand the African diaspora, not in separate terms of “old” and “new,” but as one complex ever-changing unit.
I: Contemporary African Migration to the United States: an overview

According to a 2010 World Book estimate, the United States ranks fifth among receivers of African migrants--after France, Côte d'Ivoire, South Africa, and Saudi Arabia--, though countries like France and Saudi Arabia receive mostly Muslims from North Africa and three-fourths of the Africans migrating to the United States come from Sub-Saharan Africa. Various factors contributed to the noteworthy increase in new-wave African immigration to the United States. In “Diaspora Dialogues: Engagement Between Africa and its Diasporas,” Paul Tiyambe Zeleza considers these post-1980 immigrants as the “diaspora of structural adjustment.” He states, “The diasporas of structural adjustment have been formed since the 1980s out of the migrations engendered by economic, political, and social crises and the destabilizations of [structural adjustment programs]. They include professional elites, traders, refugees, and students.”

Oftentimes, correlations can be made between social, political, and economic situations in the sending countries and different waves of migration (See Table 1). In 2009, the top five sending countries to the United States from Sub-Saharan Africa were (1) Nigeria, (2) Ethiopia, (3) Ghana, (4) Kenya, and (5) Somalia. In 2007, one-fourth of the African immigrants entered as refugees or asylees. Of the top five sending countries, Ethiopia and Somalia sent a large proportion of refugees. In 2010, 22% of legally admitted African immigrants (of all races) were refugees or asylum seekers, 24% entered on the Diversity program which provides Visas to

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11 Capps et al.
persons who meet eligibility requirements and come from countries with low immigration rates\textsuperscript{13}, 5\% entered on employment-based preferences, 6\% on family-sponsored preferences, 42\% as immediate relatives of United States citizens, and 1\% entered for other reasons.\textsuperscript{14}

Table 1:

Black African Immigrants by Country of Origin, United States, 1980 to 2008-09

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top 5 countries sending migrants to the U.S.</th>
<th>Black immigrants (thousands)</th>
<th>1980</th>
<th>1990</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2008-09</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td></td>
<td>24</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: \* Before the 2000 census, Eritreans were classified as Ethiopians, because Eritrea did not gain independence from Ethiopia until 1993.
Source: MPI analysis of 1980, 1990, and 2000 census; 2008-09 ACS.\textsuperscript{15}

New-wave black African immigrants are found mostly in urban and suburban communities where there are high concentrations of American blacks. Over half of all African immigrants in the United States are located in (1) New York, (2), California, (3) Texas, (4) Maryland, (5) Virginia, (6) New Jersey, and (7) Massachusetts.\textsuperscript{16} In addition, there are large


\textsuperscript{14} Capps et al.

\textsuperscript{15} Capps et al.

amounts of Africans in non-traditional immigrant cities such as Minneapolis and St. Paul. In “The Impact of Intersecting Dimensions of Inequality and Identity on the Racial Status of Eastern African Immigrants,” Katja M. Guenther et al. found that these cities have large populations of East Africans who come to the United States as refugees and create exclusive ethnic enclaves.\textsuperscript{17} In addition, scholars have found that refugees often receive governmental assistance which helps their upward mobility. Their exclusivity, though, often affects their acculturation.\textsuperscript{18} Contrastingly, the Asanteman Association in New York City has established an inclusive organized community for the many Ghanaian economically and academically motivated immigrants and for any other persons outside the Asante ethnic circle who are willing to live by Ghanaian moral standards.

New-wave African immigrants are often considered model minorities because of their high level of education compared with other immigrants and native born Americans. The percentage of new-wave black African immigrants with a four year college degree or more is higher than that of immigrants and black and non-black native born Americans. Those Africans coming from countries like Nigeria with higher rates of family-sponsored migrants have a significantly larger percentage of college educated persons than the national average, and education attainment for those coming as refugees and asylum seekers is significantly lower (See the table 2). Of the total population of African foreign-born workers aged 16 and over in 2010, \footnote{Katja M. Guenther, Sadie Pendaz, and Fortunata Songora Makene. "The Impact of Intersecting Dimensions of Inequality and Identity on the Racial Status of Eastern African Immigrants." \textit{Sociological Form} 26.1 (2011): 98-120, p. 101}

37.7% held jobs in management, business and science, 24.8% in service, 19.8% in sales and offices, 3.3% in construction and maintenance, and 14.4% in production and transportation.\(^{19}\)

Table 2:

Educational Attainment for Adults Aged 25 and over, Black Immigrants, and Black African Immigrants by Origin, 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>adults 25 years and older</th>
<th>Population (thousands)</th>
<th>less than high school (%)</th>
<th>high school degree (%)</th>
<th>some college or 2 year degree (%)</th>
<th>4 year degree (%)</th>
<th>post- or professional degree (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All U.S.</td>
<td>196,972</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native born blacks</td>
<td>165,754</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>immigrants</td>
<td>31,218</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>black African immigrants</td>
<td>752</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigerian Im.</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopian Im.</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghanaian Im.</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenyan Im.</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somalian Im.</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: MPI analysis of 2005-09 ACS.\(^{20}\)


\(^{20}\) Capps et al.
Immigrant experiences often vary for different Africans based on the potential for transnational communication. Guenther et al. found that many East African refugees in the midwest do not plan on returning home and consider it difficult to maintain communication with people in their home countries because of the pervasive civil unrest that ensues.\(^{21}\) The ethnic organizing that takes place among this group of East African refugees differs from that of the Asanteman Association. The Asanteman association is a transnational organization representing the larger Asante Kingdom based in Ghana. Moreover, economically and educationally motivated immigrants such as Ghanaians often come to the United States hoping to retire in their home countries. Contributing to African economies and building homes in Africa for retirement are common motivations for new-wave African immigrants to advance economically in the United States. Moreover, education seeking immigrants often wish to use their degrees for the development of their home countries.

Strained relations between new-wave Africans and native black Americans is a frequent outcome of new-wave Africans’--as well as other black immigrants--economic and academic success. African Americans often feel that black immigrants steal opportunities which they believe are rightfully theirs such as admissions slots granted blacks through Affirmative Action. According to Kevin Brown and Jeannine Bell in “Demise of the Talented Tenth,” “From the perspective of the struggle of blacks in the United States to overcome the historical racism here...the descendants of those blacks who suffered from racism in this country should receive

\(^{21}\) Guenther et al., p. 101
priority. After all, their parents did not choose to come to the United States.”

In this study, Brown et al. exposes statistical evidence that reveals how a disproportionate amount of black students attending highly selective American universities are first- and second-generation black immigrants. They argue that the descendants of slaves have a fuller commitment to reducing the racial oppressions existing in the United States, so they should have a priority in candidacy over other black ethnic groups when it comes to filling slots allocated for Affirmative Action. They propose that colleges should use separate classification categories for native and immigrant blacks on admission forms.

Oftentimes, new-wave African immigrants come to the United States with stereotypes of African Americans as lazy, poor, and violent. West Indian immigrants have responded to this by creating ethnic enclaves that lie on the borders of African American urban neighborhoods. New-wave African immigrants make similar attempts at distinguishing themselves from other blacks. Several interviews from the *Bronx African American History Project*’s study of new-wave African immigrants in the Bronx shed light to the stereotypes and common misconceptions these immigrants have of the African American community as a whole. One interviewee, Sonia Bonsu, a first generation American with Ghanaian parents, spoke about how her parents kept her and her sister from becoming friends with African-Americans. She says,

> They wanted to keep us indoors and away from whatever was going on outside on the streets...And a lot of what was on the street[s] were African-Americans and Puerto-Ricans...So by [default]...they became the rowdy ones who didn’t like to go to school. So we were the ones who were coming home and forced to focus on our studies and our

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chores and get to sleep and go to school in the morning again. And they were potentially able to pull us away from what should have been our focus.23

In this quote, Bonsu correlates her experience living in the Bronx with how she perceives African Americans. Similarly Raymond Kogolo, Jr., a Nigerian born immigrant, describes his opinion of African-Americans and what he understands as their response to educational opportunities,

If [Africans] come over here and see how African-Americans act, they are going to say they are immature, and they are going to tell them..., ‘You African-Americans here, who have the opportunity to go to school, don’t want to...If you bring an African from there to here and give him the opportunity, he is going to take it like that, he is not going to hesitate. You have a situation where you can go to school and the government can pay it for you, you don’t have it back there.24

Some new-wave African immigrants like Bonsu and Kogolo perceive the African American community as a whole with misinformed stereotypes and with their individual experiences living in poor segregated neighborhoods. Moreover, Kogolo proves himself quick to judge African Americans, yet he overlooks the disparities of America’s education system and the little opportunity it provides people living in poor segregated communities. His opinion is an example of what Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie refers to in a 2014 interview with novelist Zadie Smith. Adichie states, “I think that many Africans who come [to the United States] and buy into all of the stupid stereotypes of African Americans that America propagates and so there is often a kind


24 “Raymond Kogolo Jr.,” Interview by Ogonetojoh Okoh, (Bronx African American History Project 7 Nov. 2005).
Adichie’s statement is important because she unveils the United State’s role in perpetuating pathological understandings of the African American community. Such accepted ideas provoke many black immigrants’ desire to separate themselves from the African American community. These examples expose black immigrants’ reservations toward identifying with race and the African American community. We should understood this strained relationship as an illustration of the negotiations black immigrants undergo as part of their immigrant experiences, and not as a universal, everlasting divide. As will become evident by the end of this thesis, racial solidarity has the ability to transform the disparaging roles of race in the United States. Therefore, rather then accentuating minor hostilities, we will focus on how socialization and cultural negotiations bridge the gaps between different black ethnic groups.

As the immigrant experience continues, the difficulty of escaping racial stigmatization and oppression becomes less bearable. According to Guenther et al., police harassment on the streets is where new-wave African immigrant men experience the most racism. Women, on the other hand, experience the most racism at the workplace. New-wave African immigrants experience racism in similar social settings as do African Americans. Although Africans have migrated to the United States throughout the twentieth century, it has only been in the past few decades that they have stayed and become permanent members of the American community. Most research conducted on new-wave African immigrants emphasizes the experiences of first


26 Guenther et al., p. 108
generation immigrants and their attempts at asserting ethnicity in order to remain distinct from other black groups and to help themselves achieve economic success. It is difficult, though, to fully understand their confrontation with American blackness because we do not have the numbers yet to perform significant multigenerational research. For this reason, it is necessary to briefly analyze the experiences of West Indian immigrants, as they also face the same racial stigmatization as new-wave black African immigrants.

Many new-wave African immigrants fear that their children will acculturate into what they perceive as a pathological black America. Sociologists Mary Waters and Martin Vickerman both discuss in their research the alternative experiences of West Indians and their children and how they respond to American blackness. The children of black immigrants are confronted with pathologized blackness in most aspects of their everyday lives. Most parents grow up on their islands being the racial majority. In the United States, their children grow up as racial minorities, and this affects their psychological development. They are victims of structural racism in school, and they grow up in racially segregated neighborhoods.27 Waters also suggests that those immigrants who have less contact with whites in their homelands, and who are more irritated by images of pathological blackness in the media, do not realize their cultural capital as immigrants.28 For example, children of West Indians who grow up in more affluent families end up more effectively challenging conceptions of pathological blackness by asserting West Indian ethnicity.29 Waters argues in *Black Identities: West Indian Immigrant Dreams and American*
Realities, “Race as a master status in the United States soon overwhelms the identities of the immigrants and their children, and they are seen as black Americans.”  

For many West Indians, race cannot be avoided, and they eventually must accept their racialized selves. In result, they often align themselves with native blacks to confront their shared oppression; they recognize the ability of African Americans to respond to oppression throughout America’s racial history.  

Given the success of West Indian immigrants and their often assumed “model minority” statuses, becoming Black in America does not necessarily assume downward mobility. New-wave Africans will likely face similar obstacles in later generations, though, as is apparent in the research on the children of West Indian immigrants, they have the ability to transform American understandings of blackness.

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30 Waters, p. 8

31 Vickerman 1999, p. 139

II: Transforming Memories and Evolving Literary Traditions

New-wave African immigrant writers in the United States responding to American tropes of blackness and negotiating their identities and memories have a transformative impact on how we understand the black African diaspora. By integrating memories of slavery with memories of Africa, both real and abstract, in the form and aesthetic of their narratives, these writers draw attention to the comparable geneses of African and African American literatures and their convergent evolutions. Moreover, they make manifest the development of what we may consider African diaspora literature.

With colonialism and the institution of slavery, Western ideologies provoked global understandings of black Africans as less than human in order to justify their economic and political agendas. The West initiated a racial hierarchy with black Africans at the bottom which would persist for centuries and provoke contemporary social circumstances throughout the world. Juxtaposed against oral tradition, which was the major form of narrative story telling in Africa, the West instituted literacy as a symbol of humanity. Literacy’s humanity-factor accentuated a dichotomy between Western and African ability and intellect. In the United States, before and after independence, white slaveowners were discouraged, and often legally barred, from teaching their slaves to read and write. Moreover, colonial governments in the African colonies educated Africans so that they could best serve their needs; oral proficiency in European languages was emphasized for communication between Africans and colonists. Literacy, though, remained an indicator of humanity, and, therefore, colonial governments restricted Africans’ access.
In the United States, illiteracy affected Africans’ access to social and economic progress. Achieving literacy, then, became the focus for racial progress; rather than being an intellectual activity, writing became a commodity that slaves traded for their humanity. Asserting their ability to read and write, African slaves challenged accepted misconceptions of humanity. Literacy as a commodity of humanity quickly evolved into a platform for intellectual expression. The development of African American literacy into a literary tradition can be characterized by the artistic expression of African Americans to protest dehumanization and to assert a positive self-identity. Still, for a long time African Americans remained outside of the canon of American literature.

Like African Americans, Africans in the motherland responded forcefully to the constrains the West placed on African literacy and artistic expression. Through writing, Africans and African Americans sought to counter the ways they were portrayed in Western literature as savages without culture. According to Chinua Achebe in There was a Country, African writers of his generation had the obligation to challenge how they were caricatured through stereotypes and myths. Moreover, through writing, Africans had to unearth their past whose existence had been denied by the West. He states, “By ‘writing back’ to the West we were attempting to reshape the dialogue between the colonized and the colonizer.” Both African American and African writers used written story telling to declare the authenticity of their voices outside the Western colonial

35 Achebe, p. 55
mindset. Writing literature granted them the opportunity to have their voices heard by a broader audience.

Writing as a form of protest also influenced racial unity and the establishment of collective identities. In “Writing ‘Race’ and the Difference it Makes,” Henry Louis Gates Jr. writes, “Accused of lacking a formal and collective history, blacks published individual histories which, taken together, were intended to narrate in segments the larger yet fragmented history of blacks in Africa, now dispersed throughout a cold New World...The very face of the race was contingent upon the recording of the black voice.”

African and African American literatures influenced the establishment of “self-created” collective identities. Writers had the obligation to create a voice that would represent the broader African or African American communities. Achebe understands this duty of representation as an obligation to the poor and/or powerless. One must remember in his/her writing that the importance of the collective is its force against the colonizer; therefore, a representative literature would consider the voices of the historically unheard. Likewise, Gates argues in his introduction to the *Norton Anthology of African American Literature* that the political and social effects of literature give the African American writer the role of synecdoche, “a part standing for the ethnic whole, signifying who ‘the Negro’ was, what his or her ‘inherent’ intellectual potential might be...” As became evident, literature was the cultural representation of the socially constructed “whole”; therefore, writers were faced with the burden of seeking agency and creating identity for entire ethnic populations.

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36 Gates, p. 11

Establishing a representative voice for the oppressed population in the United States, African American intellectuals used language to will into being a natural difference from the oppressor.\textsuperscript{38} Such an emphasis on that which makes one different set in motion the commencement of a canon of the “other.” African American writers thus preserved cultural differences emphasized by the Black voice in order to give credence to this tradition based on racial difference.\textsuperscript{39} In “Unspeakable Things Unspoken: the Afro-American presence in American literature,” Toni Morrison offers an analogy between canon building and empire building; she writes, “Canon debate, whatever the terrain, nature, and range...is the clash of cultures. And all of the interests are vested...Silences are being broken, lost things have been found, and at least two generations of scholars are disentangling received knowledge from the apparatus of control”\textsuperscript{40} Therefore, by freeing African American voices from a silenced past, African American literature has shed itself from the control of the American canon. Though, like Morrison suggests, any form of canon building is the clash of cultures--with the establishment of an African American canon of literature, silences persist within the group, and certain voices are chosen as the cultural representations of the group. Despite the progress achieved by canonizing African American literature, creating a cultural identity for an entire population becomes impossible, and minorities within the oppressed group seek to break free from continued silencing.

\textsuperscript{38} Gates, p. 5

\textsuperscript{39} Gates, p. 12

V. Y. Mudimbe analyzes the paradoxical dichotomy created by the construct of African literature into a determined/ing category. In “African Literature: Myth or Reality” he writes,

It is, indeed, the view of these existing bodies--written texts and oral discourses--that accounts for much of the intellectual generosity of those who believe in Africa as well as for the purely aesthetic activity of those who simply use these texts as objects for exotic curiosity or literary and ideological demands. One could think that African Literary criticism grew up...as a consequence of a process of inventing and organizing African literature.41

As Mudimbe points out, the idea of a body of literature that we can call African is constructed in consideration with, or in response to, Western bodies of literature. Labeling African literature thus serves socio-political purposes such as being a form of protest and self-identification, as discussed by Achebe. Those who seek to arrange African literature are those who metaphysically imagine Africa. The evolution of African literature into a category resembles the canonization of African American literature. Like Morrison, Mudimbe believes that promoting constructs provokes essentialization and can distract our attention from “African” literature’s complexity and the diversity that exists within it.42 For instance, although Nigerian playwright Wole Soyinka has been a political proponent in the affairs of Nigeria and Africa, he believes that true decolonization should provide the opportunity for African writers to gain full unorthodox authority over the aesthetics of writing free from fabricated particularity.43

Notwithstanding the constructiveness of literary canonization, categorizing creative expression produces a culture for collective identity. As essentializing cultural representations


42 Mudimbe, p. 61;63

become more contended within the collective, literary critics seek out possible likenesses without perpetuating exclusive definitions. Morrison, Gates, and African literary critic Simon Gikandi all stress the importance language plays in the expression of African American and African literatures; language leaves room for complex aesthetic peculiarities and emphasizes the significance of tradition. Morrison writes,” “What makes a work ‘black’? The most valuable point of entry into the question of cultural (or racial) distinction, the one most fraught, is its language--its unpoliced, seditious, confrontational, manipulative, inventive, disruptive, masked, and unmasking language...one in which the impact of Afro-American presence on modernity becomes clear.”44 These critics emphasize a tradition where novelists use language and narrative story telling in their responses to and interpretations of humanity. In these societies, memory and change intersect and arouse continuous dialogues. The dialogues between writers and earlier generations within their traditions are often inscribed in the narrative and/or aesthetic of their writing through mimesis. As Gates points out, “‘blackness’ is a socially constructed category [and] must be learned through imitation.”45 In addition, because blackness is socially constructed, writers often attempt to resist the restriction of tradition, yet their responses tend to fall within the considerations of that tradition. Defining a socially constructed category is impossible, but labeling these categories is often perpetuated by the sociological present.

Canonizing a work as African American or African has been insistently characterized by the roots of ones tradition, though, as becomes evident in a globalized world, we are reliant on a present in which, through intersections and creolizations, both roots and routes have infinite possibilities. In *Globaletics: Theory and the Politics of Knowing*, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o argues

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44 Morrison, p. 136
45 Gates et al., p. xlv
that contemporary African cultures and identities are not rooted solely in a traditional African history; rather, globalization instigates constant creolization between African and non-African cultures. He acknowledges the influences of European literature in the works of African writers such as Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, among others, as well as his own work. About African literature he writes, “these literary products were not derivatives. They are a synthesis...whether in Africa, Asia, or Latin America, speaks to Africa, the formerly colonized, and the world.”

Ngũgĩ recognizes the interconnected nature of the contemporary world through globalization, and the significance of universal modes of communication. Moreover, with universal modes of communication, accumulating perspectives can create new possibilities. Ngũgĩ develops a “globalectic” theory for interpreting literature. He writes, “Globalectics...is the mutual containment of hereness and thereness in time and space, where time and space are also in each other...It is to read a text with the eyes of the world; it is to see the world with the eyes of the text.”

Reading a text globalectically promotes the transmission of culture in a multidirectional nature. One can read the text in his/her cultural perspective and also discover insights into worlds unknown. Although cultural exchange through readings and criticisms of literature have taken place since texts have been written, globalectic readings disregard any form of cultural hierarchy and realize the likenesses in diversity that human experience represents. It is, then, impossible to regard any text as an authentic “other.” This would disregard the multifarious influences that engender personal and collective experiences. Grouping any texts together based on socially

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47 Ngũgĩ, p. 8

48 Ngũgĩ, p. 60
constructed identities symbolizes the moment of representation and the intersections of past and future into a present condition. A canon can be useful with its response to socio-cultural tropes, but it must have oscillating borders to avoid perpetuating marginality.

Labeling the literature of the latest generation of Africans living in and writing about the United States becomes much more challenging as their African ancestry--and their ties to nationality--, their interests in American society, and the social construction of race in the United States all complicate any hope at singly defining their works. Identifying as African, responding to an African tradition, and re-presenting Africa in their novels, these authors make up a new generation of African writers who illustrate how time and space engender an evolution in global understandings of what African literature is. Leaving Africa is a reality for these authors, and this reality cannot be understood without interpreting Africa’s past, present, and future. Their motivations and excavations do not reject the obligations proposed by earlier generations, rather their responses to African life continue a dialogue on the very nature--albeit imagined in some circumstances--of Africa. Despite defining what he sees as the obligation of African writers, Achebe so eloquently expresses the idea of cultural and representative transformation that exists in Igbo tradition:

The Igbo believe that art, religion, everything, the whole of life are embodied in the art of masquerade. It is dynamic. It is not allowed to remain stationary...the Igbo people want to create these things again and again, and every generation has a chance to execute its own model of art. So there’s no undue respect for what the last generation did, because if you do that too much it means that there is no need for me to do anything, because it’s already been done.49

49 Achebe, p. 59
Achebe sees African art in constant transformation. He emphasizes the idea that creativity works hand-in-hand with change; without the diverse evolutions in creative expression through time, the raison d’être of art will end up mute and not effective.

In addition to their place in an African literary tradition, these writers enter American and Black American literary traditions by taking on and/or becoming part of the dialogue on American social conditions and cultural tropes. What this thesis seeks to better understand is new-wave black African immigrants’ confrontation with and negotiation of American tropes of blackness. As a result of the racial injustices that exist within the United States, new-wave black immigrants are forced to negotiate these tropes. The experiences of these immigrants differ from those of other immigrants in the United States in that they are often perceived in public spaces by their phenotypical likeness to African Americans; therefore, these tropes affect the way they access American space and successfully accomplish their goals for migrating, such as achieving the “American dream.” As becomes especially evident with the younger generations who are more prone to social influence, avoiding racial confrontation while being black in the United States is impossible. Such racial injustices exist as debris of the brutal system of slavery that pervaded American history. As new-wave Africans and other black immigrants are forced to respond to this social condition, and it becomes more evident in their creative expression, they synthesize with other black Americans into the African American literary tradition. It is important to note that migrating to the United States does not offer new-wave African immigrants their first encounter with Western notions of race and white supremacy. Rather, most Africans experience race in a specifically American form that differs from the already diverse experiences of race one encounters on the African continent. Moreover, many continental
Africans are aware of the role race plays in the United States without having to migrate to the United States. I suggest that being knowledgeable of how race plays out in the United States and actually living the experience is different. Therefore, regardless of prior knowledge, new-wave African immigrants are confronted with tropes of American blackness which they must negotiate when they come to the United States. In her interview, Adichie shares,

Growing up in Nigeria...I knew I was black...or that I came from a group called the Negroes...because I knew it intellectually...and I’d read *Roots* and watched the mini series in Nigeria, but it’s very different to come to the U.S....and to realize that you’re something else called black, and that there are so many assumptions made because of this something else that you are...Coming from Nigeria it’s quite different. Nigerian people will say “sista,” but they don’t mean it racially. So, I think it’s the understanding that it’s racial that really for me, and I think for many immigrants from West Africa, it’s a little off-putting and disorienting because you just don’t quite get it.50

Adichie’s insight into her experience as a Nigerian living in the United States is important because it shows us how race takes on a new form in the United States that it does not in Nigeria. In the United States, blackness takes on the form of collective identity rooted in a shared experience; one may refer to Adichie as a “sista” suggesting an inherent connection based on race, but, in Nigeria, “sista” suggests other forms of kinship such as familial, ethnic, or national, among others. Although they are aware of race, it does not have the same unifying force that it does in the United States.

I want to look briefly at race and identity in South Africa. South Africa has a racist history similar in structure to that of the United States, and race solidarity became an obvious route to overthrowing its apartheid government. Despite similar experiences of race, black South Africans and other black Africans living in South Africa often emphasize ethnic identities that pre-date racial identity. Many African societies recognize various black ethnic identities in ways

50 Adichie
that mainstream America does not. In the United States, we see the common trope of forced removal from Africa and the memory of slavery as the driving force for black collectivity that correlates with race in the way America understands black identity. Despite understandings of white supremacy in South Africa, various collectivities are united based on cultural elements that predate modern understandings of race. The purpose of this discussion is to claim that, although new-wave Africans are aware of race and white supremacy prior to migration, they are confronted with and must negotiate tropes specific to American blackness in the United States which affect their identity formations as immigrants.

As a socially constructed idea, there is no one way to define blackness. As made evident by the evolution of literary canons, time and space create the social and cultural framework for which ideas and labels evolve, but the same concepts of time and space generate constant transformation. African American and African identities are rooted in memories. With the constant movement and interactions of peoples, these memories persist, but often as abstractions. Although memory is considered historically “real” and situated in the past, it is never absent from the present. Therefore, memory can be deemed pliable; its existence in the present makes it subject to human use and manipulation. African diaspora theory tells us to look at roots and routes, emphasizing the creolization that occurs with intersecting routes. With new-wave African immigrants in the United States, we must reconsider how we understand diaspora by honoring creolization and acknowledging a transforming past--we should look at diaspora in the present by negotiating accepted understandings of the past and the past’s effect on the present. The novels that will be addressed in this thesis are symbolic of abstracted memories and endless possibilities--can we call them pieces of African diaspora literature?
III: Understanding Different Generational Experiences for Black Immigrants in

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah*

Throughout the previous pages, I drew from an interview of Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Since moving to the United States at the age of nineteen to attend university, Adichie splits her time between Nigeria and the United States. Regarding her own identity she states, “I’m not Nigerian-American. I’m a Nigerian who likes America.” Like many persons from various national origins who migrate to the United States during adulthood, Adichie’s self-identification portrays to us how individual consciousness is shaped significantly prior to adulthood. Moreover, Adichie’s consciousness reflects that of those new-wave African immigrants who come to the United States without the intent of staying permanently. My analysis is not meant to deny the fact that many immigrants from various national origins come to the United States with the aim of assimilating into American society. If we look at previous waves of migration, specifically in the early twentieth century, assimilation was considered synonymous with success in American society. Since that earlier wave of migration, the United States has become more prone to embracing diversity and more willing to highlight the new cultural elements immigrants bring with them which affect the framework of American society. What I would like to do in the following pages is offer a reading of Adichie’s *Americanah* with the intent of highlighting how, despite not becoming American in the literal sense, migrants like her are affected by how they occupy time and space in the development of transnational identities. Adichie, as a novelist, is important to our consideration of literary genre; her previous

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51 Adichie
works fit into an African tradition, yet we can consider *Americanah* both truly African and truly American. As we see in the trajectory of her work, and we will notice in the development of her female protagonist, Ifemelu, throughout the novel, the cultural elements of one's identity and his/her consciousness are never truly fixed despite national affiliation and identity’s framework. Adichie shares at the start of the novel, “Nigeria became where she was supposed to be, the only place she could sink her roots in without the constant urge to tug them out and shake off the soil.” She asserts from the beginning that the story that will follow is one of temporary migration. Though as the story tells, Ifemelu’s time spent in the United States affects her understanding of self, and the role blackness plays in her examination of self and society allows us to better understand Adichie’s consideration of a global African diasporic community. Equally important to our reading of Ifemelu is that we acknowledge the story of Dike, Ifemelu’s nephew who is born out of wedlock in Nigeria and moves to the United States with his mother at a very young age. By writing Dike’s story into the narrative structure of the novel, Adichie reveals an understanding of the new-wave African immigrant experience outside her own lived experience. Through Dike, Adichie captures the chaos of growing up with immigrant parents and the opposing cultural elements which affect the foundational development of one’s identity. By analyzing Dike’s struggles we can better understand the experiences of younger generations of black immigrants, the role race plays in their transition into American life, and the concomitant necessity to conceptualize an inclusive theory of African diaspora.

Ifemelu experiences race in a new way when she migrates to the United States. Intrigued by race’s form as it occupies American society, she begins writing a blog called *Raceteenth* or

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Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes). Throughout her blogging, Ifemelu takes on her craft as an anthropologist, but consistently goes back and forth between being an outsider looking into something that is separate from herself and realizing the political nature of her own physicality and its embedment in the subject of her work. At a party hosted by Shan, the sister of her African American boyfriend at the time, Blaine, a conversation occurs among a group including the two women:

‘You know why Ifemelu can write that blog, by the way?’ Shan said. ‘Because she’s African. She’s writing from the outside. She doesn’t really feel all the stuff she’s writing about. It’s all quaint and curious to her. So she can write it and get all these accolades and get invited to give talks. If she were African American, she’d just be labeled angry and shunned’...

...‘I think that’s fair enough,’ Ifemelu said, disliking Shan, and herself, too, for bending to Shan’s spell. It was true that race was not embroidered in the fabric of her history; it had not been etched on her soul.53

In this conversation, we see Shan’s lingering animosity towards Ifemelu for her ability to analyze race and be black without it carrying the same weight that it does for herself. Adichies recognizes a commonly understood reaction society has towards new-wave African women who openly discuss racial issues. She writes this conversation between the two women into the narrative to expose a tension that occasionally occurs between African American and new-wave African immigrants. As we see in other parts of the novel, Shan’s argument cannot be considered one-hundred percent accurate as Ifemelu does receive criticism from people responding to her blog posts. More importantly, Ifemelu’s reaction to Shan’s statement exemplifies the chaos presented to individual new-wave African immigrants in the United States when negotiating their identities. Although Ifemelu experiences the effects of American racism, she presents herself, via her blog, as an outsider looking in. Moreover, she is deemed an outsider by African Americans

53 Adichie, p. 337-38
like Shan because “race was not embroidered in the fabric of her history.” There’s a complexity in the analysis of Ifemelu’s consciousness, because how she feels—as an outsider—when Shan undermines her credibility from the dialogue on race does not correlate with the way she feels in the moments when she writes her blog as an outsider looking in on race in America. As we will see later on in this analysis, this chaos becomes detrimental to her relationship with Blaine.

Earlier in the novel when Ifemelu is still attending classes, we are exposed to a woman who, though has prior intellectual knowledge on race, has not yet spent enough time in the United States to have had the experiences to fully grasp American racism. Therefore, we, as readers, can see opposing understandings of blackness and race, and how being shaped by and living with specific histories and memories affect the way race plays into a person’s life. In one of Ifemelu’s classes a screening of *Roots* is played in which the word “nigger” is bleeped out. This sparks the following dialogue:

A firm, female voice from the back of the class, with a non-American accent asked, ‘Why was ‘nigger’ bleeped out?’

And a collective sigh, like a small wind, swept through the class.

‘Well, this was a recording from network television and one of the things I wanted us to talk about is how we represent history in popular culture and the use of the N-word is certainly an important part of that,’ Professor Moore said.

‘It makes no sense to me,’ the firm voice said...

‘I mean, ‘nigger’ is a word that exists. People use it. It is part of America. It has caused a lot of pain to people and I think it is insulting to bleep it out.’

‘Well,’ Professor Moore said, looking around, as though for help.

‘Well, it’s because of the pain that word has caused that you shouldn’t use it!’ Shouldn’t sailed astringently into the air, the speaker an African-American girl wearing bamboo hoop earrings.

‘Thing is, each time you say it, the word hurts African Americans,’ a pale, shaggy-haired boy in front said.

Ifemelu raised her hand; Faulkner’s *Light in August*, which she had just read, was on her mind. ‘I don’t think it’s always hurtful. I think it depends on the intent and also on who is using it.’

A girl next to her, face flushing bright red, burst out, ‘No! The word is the same for whoever says it.’
‘That is nonsense.’ The firm voice again. A voice unafraid. ‘If my mother hits me with a stick and a stranger hits me with a stick, it’s not the same thing.’

Ifemelu looked at Professor Moore...a vague terror was freezing her features into a smirk-smile.

‘I agree it’s different when African Americans say it, but I don’t think it should be used in films because that way people who shouldn’t use it can use it and hurt other people’s feelings,’ a light-skinned African-American girl said, the last of the four black people in class, her sweater an unsettling shade of fuchsia.

‘But it’s like being in denial. If it was used like that, then it should be represented like that. Hiding it doesn’t make it go away.’ The firm voice.

‘Well, if you all hadn’t sold us, we wouldn’t be talking about any of this,’” the gravelly-voiced African-American girl said, in a lowered tone that was, nonetheless, audible.54

In this dialogue, Adichie uses token characters to portray the ways by which new-wave Africans and African Americans experience and, therefore, understand race. We are given African American characters who are made uncomfortable by the use of “nigger.” These are African Americans whose consciousnesses have been shaped by the memory of pain and suffering correlated with the history of slavery and the persistence of racial oppression and discrimination throughout time. Despite its seriousness, Adichie infuses parody into the conversation by having the professor and white characters respond uncomfortably to the dialogue and by simplifying “nigger’s” effect on African Americans with hurt feelings; these moments can come off comically to the reader. Although in reality some African Americans would agree with the argument of the new-wave Africans, Adichie presents polarized opinions between the American students and the foreign students. Despite her use of parody, this conversation is important for Adichie because it represents a blind spot that new-wave Africans face when entering American society. Adichie has an astute understanding of race in America, and she recognizes the American audience she is writing for. Although she presents the “firm, female voice” who we later find out

54 Adichie, p. 138-39
is Kenyan as a forthright and confident in the way she presents her opinion, the joke is on the Kenyan because she speaks without fully grasping the way these African Americans feel, and she is black herself. In addition, by adding the line, “If my mother hits me with a stick and a stranger hits me with a stick, it’s not the same thing,” she portrays the way many new-wave Africans enter American society with certain African cultural tropes that do not exist in the United States, further complicating the way they navigate through their immigrant experiences. Although this comment makes sense for the Kenyan student in the context of her hometown, it does not reach the rest of the class in the same sense, therefore emphasizing the obstacles these immigrants must face. Towards the end of the dialogue, the African American girl suggests that the topic would not be in discussion if it were not for the Africans who sold other Africans to the European slave traders. Here Adichie offers another cliché to further emphasize the hostility aroused from the different interpretations of history and race between various persons.

Later in the novel, Ifemelu writes a blog post that offers, if not a full understanding, an acknowledgment of her blackness in American society. She writes,

Dear Non-American Black, when you make the choice to come to America, you become black. Stop arguing. Stop saying I’m Jamaican or I’m Ghanaian. America doesn’t care. So what if you weren’t ‘black’ in your country? You’re in American now. We all have our moments of initiation into the Society of Former Negroes. Mine was in a class in undergrad when I was asked to give the black perspective, only I had no idea what that was. So I just made something up. And admit it--you say ‘I’m not black’ only because you know black is at the bottom of America’s race ladder...You must nod back when a black person nods at you in a heavily white area. It is called the black nod. It is a way for black people to say ‘You are not alone, I am here too.’

The remainder of the blog post reads like a how-to guide for non-American Blacks to successfully navigate American society with the proper understandings of racial tropes and how

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55 Adichie, p. 222
they are supposed to respond to various persons black and white when confronted with an issue regarding race. Although we have seen ways by which Ifemelu is confused by the various differences the concept of race assumes in the United States and Africa, and how hostilities can arise between new-wave African immigrants and African Americans as a result of misunderstandings and differing consciousnesses regarding race, she acknowledges the ways by which these black immigrants are forced to deal with American tropes of blackness due to their phenotypical likeness to black Americans and how they are perceived in society because of this. Adichie does not provide a character who, as Ifemelu puts it, becomes black. Ifemelu’s claim to becoming black in the United States is more as a conscious performance in order to help her navigate society. As we will see soon, becoming black has a different meaning for her nephew Dike. Ifemelu understands that she is affected by being a black woman in the United States, yet she continues to identify herself as Nigerian.

Ifemelu shows emotions of racial solidarity in a blog post where she discusses online dating. She states, “So here’s the thing. In that category where you choose the ethnicity you are interested in? White men tick white women, and the braver ones tick Asian and Hispanic. Hispanic men tick white and Hispanic. Black men are the only men likely to tick ‘all,’ but some don’t even tick Black.”56 In this blog post, Ifemelu exposes her knowledge of how she is affected by the structural racism that is embedded in American society. She offers a therapeutic online space for blacks to share their stories in a forum entitled “Open Thread: For All the Zipped-Up Negroes.” In it she writes, “This is for all the Zipped-Up Negroes, the upwardly mobile American and Non-American Blacks who don’t talk about Life Experiences That Have to Do

56 Adichie, p. 308
Exclusively with Being Black. Because they want to keep everyone comfortable. Tell your story here. Unzip yourself. This is a safe space.” Ifemelu, as a black Nigerian woman living in the United States, acknowledges the relatedness between herself and other blacks whose life opportunities are affected by stereotypes and social stigma. Even in the most simplistic matter—an online dating sight--, chance at love is affected by racial preference. Such predilections are often influenced by mainstream attitudes and perceptions. In result, Ifemelu is affected by the way society perceives black women. Moreover, she acknowledges the stigma associated with being black and how many who consider themselves, or want themselves to be, upwardly mobile refuse to openly discuss their blackness as not to draw in the stigmas of what they believe prevent them from succeeding in society.

Throughout a portion of the novel, Ifemelu dates an African American man named Blaine; they are linked by a common interest and passion for race in the United States. Blaine teaches and is politically active within the black community, and Ifemelu writes a blog on race. Moreover, both are black and are motivated by the social and political role race plays in American society. Despite fighting, towards the end of their relationship, Adichie writes, “But they had survived that fight, mostly because of Barack Obama, bonding anew over their shared passion.” Although they share an interest in the circumstances of blacks living in the United States, Ifemelu is reminded throughout the novel of their historical differences. As she tells Blaine, “The fried chicken you eat is not the fried chicken I eat...For you...fried chicken is battered. For me, fried chicken has no batter.” Blaine acknowledges this as a metaphor

57 Adichie, p. 308
58 Adichie, p. 7
59 Adichie, p. 331
emphasizing that, despite their racial similarities, they have different histories which have shaped different consciousnesses. For him, race is battered in memories of oppression and sorrow, and, although Ifemelu understands this, her racial consciousness is not battered in this same history. After Ifemelu decides not to attend a protest Blaine organized, he becomes upset with her and “she recognized, in his tone, a subtle accusation, not merely about her laziness, her lack of zeal and conviction, but also about her Africanness; she was not sufficiently furious because she was African, not African American.”

Although they attempt to connect on the level of shared passion, Blaine believes, and Ifemelu realizes, that her passion for the subject of race in the United States is as an outsider looking in, and, for him, this passion in ingrained in his soul. Ifemelu recognizes this as a result of her being African. By choosing to write Ifemelu’s disconnect and lack of fury as a result of her Africanness, Adichie accentuates the idea that, in Africa, race is something that people are aware of, but it does not affect their day to day lives the way it affects African Americans. As we discussed earlier in this thesis, saying that her lack of fury is due to her Africanness might be a misgiving. Many Africans, such as those in South Africa, would share this fury towards white supremacy. What I believe Adichie means to do is exemplify how many new-wave Africans’ fury is not soulfully connected to a specifically American struggle.

As we know from the beginning of the novel, Ifemelu ends up returning to Nigeria to start anew. Like many who have left their homelands for a long period of time, she is confronted with disappointments when she returns to Nigeria. Ifemelu recognizes ways that both she and Nigeria had changed. She is disappointed when she realizes that she looks at Nigeria with

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60 Adichie, p. 347
American eyes. Adichie writes, “[Ifemelu] had grown up knowing all the bus stops and the side streets, understanding the cryptic codes of conductors and the body language of street hawkers. Now, she struggled to grasp the unspoken. When had shopkeepers become so rude? Had buildings in Lagos always had this patina of decay? And when did it become a city of people quick to beg and too enamored of free things?”61 Although Ifemelu’s heart never left Nigeria, distance in time and space separated them in unexpected ways. Her time in the United States ingrained in her a particular set of preferences and expectations such that, when she returns to Lagos, she realizes how much she had grown accustomed to certain comforts. In an attempt at easing her transition, she attends a group called the *Nigerpolitan Club*. She describes it as,

> a small cluster of people drinking champagne in paper cups, at the poolside of a home in Osborne Estate, chic people, all dripping with savoir faire, each nursing a self-styled quirkiness...They were the sanctified, the returnees, back home with an extra gleaming layer...all encircled by a familiarity, because they could reach so easily for the same references...they were laughing and listing the things they missed about America.62

Ifemelu realizes that she has become an “Americanah,” a Nigerian whose time away had given her certain attributes that make her a foreigner in her own land. Though, as her friend Ranyinudo points out, “you are not even a real Americanah. At least if you had an American accent we would tolerate your complaining!”63

Ifemelu adjusts to her new life in Lagos. Despite her transformed identity, she accepts Nigeria back into her life while continuing her cosmopolitan lifestyle. She starts a new blog, but when she calls her white ex-boyfriend in the United States to catch up and he asks if the topic is still race, she replies, “No, just about life. Race doesn’t really work here. I feel like I got off the

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61 Adichie, p. 385
62 Adichie, p. 407-08
63 Adichie, p. 385
plane in Lagos and stopped being black." For Ifemelu, blackness was something she witnessed, and at times experienced, in the United States, but, because of the different meaning it has in Nigeria, she is able to leave the American context of race in the United States. This is not to say that the idea of race does not stay in her mind, but the phenomenon of American blackness is not relevant in the context of her new life. Black in the United States has become a cultural identity; in Nigeria, black is the color of one’s skin. This color does have historical meaning in Nigeria, but not in the way that American history and memory is ingrained into a specific Black identity.

Adichie writes a narrative centered on a transnational character who is confronted with and forced to negotiate American blackness while living in the United States. Despite these negotiations, she never truly becomes Black--she never fully takes on an American Black identity that is imbued with the historical memory of slavery and African American cultural elements. Adichie, though, is cognizant of the experience of younger new-wave African immigrants whose consciousnesses are affected differently than their parents and older immigrants because they are shaped at an early age by American society and they experience race at a more foundational level. With the character of Dike, Adichie illustrates the pliability of identity over multiple generations. She deems that new-wave African immigrant identities can gradually transition at a more inherent level into the larger American black collective. Although Ifemelu does not become Black, I argue that her nephew Dike does. I do not deny the retainment of Nigerian cultural elements in his character, and the transfer of such elements into how we understand blackness in the United States. Rather, I emphasize the way multiple conflicting

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64 Adichie, p. 475
cultural elements affect his identity and instigate his transformation into becoming a Black American.

Much of Dike’s conflicted identity is the result of the cultural barriers between his mother Uju and American reality. In regards to an essay Dike wrote about identity for school, Uju tells Ifemelu, “How can he say he does not know what he is? Since when is he conflicted? And even that his name is difficult?...I think he wrote that because that is the kind of thing they teach them here. Everybody is conflicted, identity this, identity that.”

Throughout the novel, Dike’s experience growing up as a new-wave African immigrant in the United States is challenged with many conflicting cultural elements. Such cultural frictions are often presented by his mother and her ignorance of how American social issues affect him. Uju marries another Nigerian immigrant, and together their minds never leave Nigeria. Dike leaves Nigeria at such a young age that, for him, it becomes a distant memory. Therefore, his identity is significantly shaped by his experiences growing up in the United States. She accuses Dike’s conflicted identity with being an American an issue specific to American culture, and she does not recognize the ways by which her attitude clashes with the social framework of American society to cause his conflicted identity. Uju considers Dike a Nigerian like herself, yet she removes aspects of Nigerian culture from the foundation of Dike’s identity and replaces them with American cultural elements. She does this without realizing the consequences of how this may or may not affect his identity formation. For example, at one point she tells Ifemelu to only speak to Dike in English, because she believes that using two languages would confuse him. At another point she reprimands him; Adichie writes, “‘I will send you back to Nigeria if you do that again!’ speaking Igbo as she did

\[65\] Adichie, p. 219
to him only when she was angry, and Ifemelu worried that it would become for him the language of strife.” Although Uju expects that Dike embrace a Nigerian identity, she presents Nigeria to him in a negative way. In order for him to succeed in America, she believes he must use English. She only uses Igbo with him when he is in trouble; moreover, she uses Nigeria as a negative threat against bad behavior. In one hand, Dike is supposed to understand his position as a Nigerian living in the United States with Nigerian relatives. On the other hand, Nigeria is the place that he will be forced to go to if he does not succeed, and Igbo becomes the language of punishment. Although Uju does not understand why Dike would have a conflicted identity, her attitude and inability to relate to American life in the same way that he must significantly influences this conflict.

Another discordant element of Dike’s identity is his blackness. Dike does not experience race in the same ways that Ifemelu does. Instead of integrating Dike into a black community, Adichie places him within an upper middle class community that is predominantly white. Being a single black person within a school of mostly whites, Dike is expected to play a token role. This role is not imbedded in the history of his ancestors but socialized into it based on his racial individuality within the community and the expectations this implies. One day, Uju receives a phone call from his school explaining that Dike had hacked into the school’s computer system. Dike explains to Uju and Ifemelu that he does not even know how to hack a computer. He tells Ifemelu, “You have to blame the black kid first.” Adichie then writes,

Later, he told her how his friends would say, ‘Hey, Dike, got some weed?’ and how funny it was. He told her about the pastor at church, a white woman, who had said hello to all the other kids but when she came to him, she said, ‘What’s up, bro?’ I feel like I have

66 Adichie, p. 173
vegetables instead of ears, like large broccoli sticking out of my head,’ he said, laughing. ‘So of course it had to be me that hacked into the school network.’\textsuperscript{67}

Part of Dike’s acculturation into American society means that he must negotiate the implications of his black skin. He differs from the other new-wave African immigrants in the novel because of his position as a young person who occupies certain aspects of public space that are not optional for him. Moreover, his identity is not developed at the time of migration; therefore, aspects of American culture affect the way he develops as a human being. In result of his position as one of few black persons in his school, he is expected to fulfill a certain token character. Although he is not this character in reality--he did not hack the computer, he does not smoke weed, etc--, he faces these stereotypes and prejudices. After Obama is elected as president of the United States, he texts Ifemelu, “I can’t believe it. My president is black like me.”\textsuperscript{68} Due to his pliability as an adolescent, he accepts his identity as a black person in the United States. He correlates his position in the United States with the ways by which he has been socialized by a history that recognizes him for his skin color. Moreover, as discussed earlier, he loses aspects of his Nigerian identity that might have made him stand outside of an American Black social framework in ways that Ifemelu was able to. Dike really becomes American, and, therefore, his understandings of race are American. This affects the way he perceives his own identity.

Towards the end of the novel Dike overdoses on pills. It is understood that this is the result of his struggle coming of age as a new-wave black immigrant in the United States. Still, Uju has a difficult time coming to terms with his identity crisis. Adichie provides us with the following dialogue between Uju and Ifemelu:

\textsuperscript{67} Adichie, p. 350

\textsuperscript{68} Adichie, p. 361
‘Do you remember when Dike was telling you something and he said ‘we black folk’ and you told him ‘you are not black’?” [Ifemelu] asked Aunty Uju...You should not have done that.’

‘You know what I meant. I didn’t want him to start behaving like these people and thinking that everything that happens to him is because he’s black.’

‘You told him what he wasn’t but you didn’t tell him what he was...you never reassured him.’

‘Ifemelu, his suicide was from depression,’ Aunty Uju said gently, quietly.

‘It’s a clinical disease. Many teenagers suffer from it.’

‘Do people just wake up and become depressed?’

‘Yes, they do.’

‘Not in Dike’s case...His depression is because of his experience, Aunty!’

Ifemelu said...69

Ifemelu points out to Uju that Dike’s identity crisis is the result of his not knowing who or what he is. Uju tells him that he is not black, but the people at school treat him as if he is black. His mother, her husband, and Ifemelu are Nigerian, but he is told not to speak Igbo, and Nigeria is presented to him as punishment for failure. Moreover, Uju motivates him to succeed within America, but the context of his race in America provides him with obstacles that neither his relatives nor his white classmates relate to. Adichie’s insight into the development of younger new-wave African immigrants and future generations is important to the way we conceptualize and theorize the African diaspora. Rather than understanding new-wave African immigrants as a “new” African diaspora consisting of persons with different understandings of race than African Americans and different cultural identities, those who have developed such theories must consider new-wave immigrant acculturation outside of their lived experiences. They should focus on the younger generations whose identities are more pliable and who must take on American and American Black identities in a more complex manner. Adichie’s approach to this

69 Adichie, p. 380
subject really legitimizes her novel *Americanah* as a momentous force within the literature on the African diaspora and new-wave African immigration.
IV: The Memory of Slavery and the Persistence of Institutionalized Racism in the United States

Much of contemporary black collectivity in the United States descends from earlier responses to racial disparities institutionalized during slavery. According to Michael A. Gomez in *Exchanging Our Country’s Marks*, Africans brought to the West via the trans-Atlantic slave trade negotiated different social and cultural elements presented to them from both within and without the diverse African cultural forms confined within the slave ship; such processes of negotiation influenced the development of an African American collective identity based on the slaves’ shared condition and the perception of their condition by non-Africans. Gomez writes, “Depending upon the specific location, captives from more than one ethnicity may have found themselves hold up in the same barracoon, thus initiating the message that the one thing they all shared was their blackness, a message that became even clearer upon considering the contrast with their European captors.” Gomez acknowledges the heterogeneity of African culture and identity that predates the Western conquest of Africa. He argues that Africans’ initiation into slavery via their experiences in the barracoons is a pivotal moment in the transition from asserting ethnic distinction to emphasizing racial solidarity in America. By highlighting the significance of ethnic identity in Africa, Gomez asserts the little, if any, importance race played in collective identity formation prior to imperialism and slavery. This is not meant to create the illusion that Africans


71 Gomez, p. 155
were not aware of their black skin and racial variances prior to their experiences in the barracoons, rather it illustrates how racial solidarity became a main factor for collective formation in response to the conditions and perceptions implanted on blacks by the institution of slavery.

Although the social construction of race predates the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the institutionalization of slavery is considered the moment of inception for black American identity formation. Despite varying exceptions, slavery initiated the polarization of blacks and whites in the social stratification of the United States. In *Black Marxism*, Cedric Robinson argues that such racialism predates the moment of slavery in the Americas. He writes,

> The comprehension of the particular configuration of racist ideology and Western culture has to be pursued historically through successive eras of violent domination and social extraction that directly involves European peoples during the better part of the two millennia. Racialism insinuated not only medieval, feudal, and capitalist social structures, forms of property, and modes of production, but as well the very values and traditions of consciousness through which the peoples of these ages came to understand their worlds and their experiences...In the medieval and feudal social orders of the European hinterland and the Mediterranean, racialism was substantiated by specific sets of exploitation through which particular caste or classes exploited and expropriated disparate peoples.72

Robinson believes that, rather than regarding the racial stratification instituted by slavery as the genesis of the racialism that exists in contemporary American society and the way this history has shaped contemporary consciousness, we need to consider how such a racialism has existed within European societies predating this moment. He furthers his argument by emphasizing how prior systems of racialism affected how people understood their own consciousnesses and identities and their positions in society. Moreover, as he states, the period of slavery is not the

first time race dialogue has been used to exploit an entire people. Although Robinson provides an excellent analysis of the evolution of global racialism, I argue that the period of slavery in the United States is the root of a specific form of racialism that, since inception, became an attitude that outlasted its foundational structure and that developed into an identity with specific cultural tropes and forms that respond to that specific moment.

After emancipation, blacks organized in order to assert their humanity against their disparagement by whites. As a collective of opposition against the racial subjugation of whites, blacks united on their shared, though in varying shades, phenotype—the characteristic which separated them from their adversaries and united them in opposition of slavery. Although the United States government abolished slavery in 1865, blacks’ subjugation in American society persists through the present moment. The persistence of racial marginalization in the United States which was instituted during the period of slavery can be considered the living memory of slavery. More specifically, the memory of slavery can refer to trauma affecting both the individual and society as a whole generated by slavery and passed down generations. In the first half of this section, I will explore how the trauma of slavery and the historically persistent discrimination outlasting its institutionalized form affects black success and has historically motivated black collectivity and organization against oppression.

With the influx of new-wave black African immigrants to the United States, accepted theories and understandings of blackness are complicated. This newly arrived group of blacks is faced with similar discrimination as those faced by American born blacks, but they are not, in fact, descendants of American slaves. Although they face American racist attitudes head on, they do not share the same traumatic memory that has historically united black Americans as an
oppositional force against racial subjugation. As I have discussed earlier in this thesis, most Africans are well aware of white supremacy and western understandings of race. Moreover, many coastal Africans do have some form of memory that regards trans-Atlantic slavery. The traumatic memory of slavery which I refer to is one embedded in the way Blackness as a cultural form in the United States has advanced in history. The foundational structure of Black identity in the United States is this memory. Although many new-wave African immigrants--say Ghanaians from Cape Coast--are a part of the history of trans-Atlantic slavery, their version of slave history has different meanings and plays a different role for how it affects their identities. Therefore, as new-wave African immigrants negotiate their blackness in the United States, they must also negotiate the way this specific memory of slavery affects how their racial identity is perceived.

Despite progress towards deessentializing American understandings of blackness in an ever-evolving society, many contemporary theories of blackness and diaspora hold onto the memory of slavery as the link among a diverse people. In *The Black Atlantic*, Paul Gilroy deemphasizes the significance of roots in Africa and ideas of ethnic absolutism, and he stresses the process of constant cultural creolization that takes place as the African diaspora expands, and its members take various routes which cross cultural, ethnic, racial, and national boundaries. One aspect by which Gilroy fails is that he does not consider the presence of new-wave black African immigrants who migrate into the Western world. Despite being published 128 years after the end of slavery in the United States, Gilroy’s consideration of blackness as a political matter highlights his dependence on the memory of slavery as the link to solidarity. He writes, “The best way to create the new metacultural identity which the new black citizenship demands was provided by the abject condition of the slaves and ironically facilitated by the transnational
Despite hundreds of years of separation between African Americans and Africans, contemporary black Africans who migrate to the United States face the racial discrimination and the remains of slavery which pervade American society. Although they do not possess the memory of slavery--their ancestors did not face the trauma of American slavery--, they often must negotiate their individual identities with American tropes of blackness because of the persistence of racial disparity that exists in the communities they enter and the larger American community in general. Oftentimes, they choose to seek solidarity with native born blacks and other black immigrants because of their shared experiences.

In the first half of this section, I will explore the ways by which post-emancipation black collectivity has assembled itself with the memory of slavery as its driving force. I will then look at how the memory of slavery affects contemporary black Americans through the persistence of institutionalized and structural racism in the present moment. I will provide sociological insight into how contemporary black immigrants are affected by the racial disparities that have endured beyond American slavery. Despite some economic and societal advantages, these black immigrants face racial discrimination when they are recognized by American society for their phenotypical blackness. These immigrants are affected by racial prejudices and racial segregation, especially members of the younger generations who are more vulnerable because they attend school and socialize outside the ethnic niches that their families and immigrant communities have created. One must note that racial subjugation does not undoubtedly bar access to opportunity and eventual success for black immigrants; I am concerned, for the purpose of this thesis, with how race affects immigrant identity formation. In section V, I will provide a

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reading of Teju Cole’s *Open City* with two main objectives: (a) to illuminate memory as an abstraction rather than something that is real, and, therefore, something that can also be forgotten, fabricated, or even relocated, and (b) to illustrate the ways by which Cole’s protagonist, Julius, negotiates his own identity as a black immigrant in contemporary New York City in response to the persistence of racial disparities and his own inter-personal encounters. By analyzing both the historical and sociological evidence offered on new-wave African immigration in the United States and Cole’s narrative, I seek to present blackness and African diaspora identity as a result of any given moment--something that is not solely rooted in the past or dependent on the future, but rather conditioned by the context of the present.

In *Jim Crow Wisdom*, Jonathan Scott Holloway argues, “even though the technological changes of the last seventy years have made sharing a personal story with a consuming public significantly easier for an individual, thus suggesting the formation of new collective memories and identities, the stories’ themes, especially when they pertain to black life in America, have not changed dramatically.”74 Shortly after he writes, “Violence, or the threat of it, is critical to understanding the formation of a black identity through memory.”75 Holloway illustrates throughout *Jim Crow Wisdom* how memory--through the acts of remembering, forgetting, and fabricating--shapes black Americans’ experiences, consciousness, and collective identities. He recognizes the changing ways people share and create memories, but, more importantly, he highlights black memory’s rootedness in the trauma caused by slavery, and how these memories are carried on through generations and shape the way present-day blacks recognize individual

74 Jonathan Scott Holloway. *Jim Crow Wisdom: Memory and Identity in Black America since 1940*. [Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina. 2013], p. 4

75 Holloway, p. 5
and collective identities. Although the threat of violence caused by racial disparities in the United States has changed in the way it is presented to and by American society, it is a violence perpetuated by the evils of slavery. American blacks hold onto these memories for both awareness and unity in order to fight against oppression. The continued significance the memory of slavery plays in black collectivity in contemporary America makes it necessary to analyze the ways by which new-wave black African immigrants confront it. Before I enter this analysis, I will briefly explore the ways by which black activists throughout history have used the memory of slavery to bring together a collectivity. Specifically, I will look at W.E.B. DuBois’s *The Souls of Black Folk* and Marcus Garvey’s speeches. Despite taking different approaches to black social improvement in a racist society, each leader emphasizes the power memory has to bring together a black collective. I will then briefly look at how this memory has become a form of American cultural imperialism and how Africans have engaged with the commodification of this memory. I will then highlight the ways by which contemporary African Americans face perpetuated racial violence and how racism in the United States provokes black immigrants to negotiate this memory.

W.E.B. DuBois in *The Souls of Black Folk* makes the reader aware of the conundrum presented to the free black population. He writes, “The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife,—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self.”76 The problem for DuBois is double-consciousness; according to him, blacks are forced to see themselves through the eyes of the society they live in. The continued control society has over the black person’s ability to maneuver his/her own consciousness and

identity perpetuates a sense of enslavement, albeit a mental form, rather than the physical constraint imposed by the shackle. DuBois so eloquently asserts, “To be a poor man is hard, but to be a poor race in a land of dollars is the very bottom of hardships. He felt the weight of his ignorance,--not simply of letters, but of life, of business, of the humanities; the accumulated sloth and shirking and awkwardness of decades and centuries shackled his hands and feet.” DuBois believes that the black population must get society to acknowledge black persons’ humanity not via opposition, but by influencing society to conform to the proclaimed ideals of the United States. His aim for the United States is to create an environment where black and white races can live together and can contribute to each other’s gains and improvements. The ideals of American society at the moment of his writing, though, are polluted by racial prejudice and the continued dehumanization of blacks by legal barriers that restricted them from becoming full American citizens. He refers to the problem affecting black people as a form of economic slavery instigated by an American color line that polarizes blacks and whites in a system of racial stratification.

The economic and mental forms of enslavement explained by DuBois are rooted in the institution of slavery that foreshadowed the dilemma facing DuBois and his generation. In *The Souls of Black Folk*, DuBois aesthetically entwines his sociological and historical analyses with what he refers to as “Sorrow Songs.” He believes that the Sorrow Songs sung by his ancestors during slavery live in the Negro heart; therefore, the memory of slavery passed down generations serves as the driving force for black collective uplift. DuBois writes,

They that walked in darkness sang songs in the olden days--Sorrow Songs--for they were weary at heart. And so before each thought that I have written in this book I have set a
phrase, a haunting echo of these weird old songs in which the soul of the black slave spoke to men. Ever since I was a child these songs have stirred me strangely. They came out of the South unknown to me, one by one, and yet at once I knew them as of me and of mine.\footnote{DuBois, p. 378}

By interweaving his analysis on the societal problems facing blacks with the aesthetic purity of the Sorrow Songs, DuBois gives prominence to the infusion of the memory of slavery into the context of his present condition. Despite his position as a northern black and the origins of these songs in the south, they speak to him of his situation and his inherent connection to his ancestors who sang them. DuBois’s use of the memory of slavery via the Sorrow Songs successfully binds his argument to the past by which his contemporary circumstance is rooted in and drives black intellectual thought into a collective force to overcome the hardships instigated by this memory. This infusion of memory and political protest is representative of the tradition by which this thesis attempts to illuminate.

Marcus Garvey was one of the early fathers of the global Pan-African movement. Garvey believed that by organizing--in particular via his Universal Negro Improvement Association--blacks throughout the world could fully emancipate themselves from the conditions created by universal prejudice by which they live as well as redeem the African continent in the form of a single nation, home to the black race. Like DuBois, Garvey thought that, in order to be fully liberated, and, in order to fully free Africa, blacks must free their minds. During a speech at the Third Annual International Convention of the Negro Peoples of the World in 1922, Garvey states, “To free Africa, we must free ourselves mentally, spiritually, and politically. So long as we remain the religious slaves of another race, so long as we remain educationally the slaves of another race, so long as we remain politically the slaves of another race, so long shall other men
trample on us and call us an inferior people...The new Negro desires Nationhood.”\(^7\) Garvey was convinced that, in order to fully free black consciousness, the global black collective needed to return to Africa and claim it as its own. He believed in a conditional difference between blacks and whites; according to him, separation with the establishment of black nationhood was the only route towards full liberation. For Garvey, racial unity is necessary because of what he considers to be the oppression of peoples of African ancestry throughout the entire globe.

In 1923, Garvey says in the closing address at his trial in New York City, “I didn’t bring myself into this Western world. You know the history of my race. I was brought here; I was sold to some slave master in the island of Jamaica...So, if I was born in Jamaica, it was no fault of mine. It was because that slave ship which took me to Jamaica did not come to American ports. That is how some Negroes of America were not born in the West Indies.”\(^8\) The period of slavery is the source that conditions Garvey’s belief in Pan-Africanism. For Garvey, the trauma and the memory of suffering caused by the trans-Atlantic slave trade were the necessary inspiration to bring together the black population in opposition to racial supremacy.\(^9\) The second part of the quote above addressing Garvey’s upbringing in Jamaica which was decided by the coincidence of his ancestors’ enslavement alludes to a particular problematic claim that he makes throughout his career as a political activist. Garvey often took on opposition by both black and white American political figures, and he often suggested that this had to do with a national prejudice. Such reasoning offers an explanation for why he would talk about the coincidence of his


\(^8\) Garvey, p. 11

\(^9\) Garvey, p. 47-48
upbringing in Jamaica. Garvey fought to take advantage of the resources in the United States because he considered American blacks to have an advantage over other global black communities. In “West Indies in the Mirror of Truth” he writes, “I have traveled a good deal through many countries, and from my observations and study I unhesitatingly and unreservedly say that the American Negro is the peer of all Negroes, the most progressive and the foremost unit in the expansive chain of scattered Ethiopia.”\textsuperscript{82} Garvey recognized exceptionalism in the American black community that he did not see anywhere else in the world, and, therefore, considered American blacks as role models for the global black collective. The privilege he gave to American blacks’ influence on Pan-Africanism emphasizes what would continue to be an American cultural imperialism over global understandings of blackness and diaspora. Apart from honoring black exceptionalism in the United States, Garvey also alludes to a social obligation that Western blacks--the descendants of slaves--have to free the continent of Africa. In a 1922 speech he preaches, “No better gift can I give in honor of the memory of the love of my foreparents for me, and in gratitude of the sufferings they endured that I might be free; no grander gift can I bear to the sacred memory of the generation past than a free and a redeemed Africa--a monument for all eternity--for all times.”\textsuperscript{83} Garvey’s words are important for this analysis for two reasons. First, he portrays again how the memory of slavery served as a driving force for black political organization in opposition to racial subjugation. Second, he exposes how this memory can be used as a form of cultural imperialism. Garvey understands Africa’s liberation to be in the hands of an international black movement; he suggests that achieving Africa’s freedom is the obligation of the descendants of slavery and that they must pursue this

\textsuperscript{82} Garvey, p. 14

\textsuperscript{83} Garvey, p. 55
feat to pay homage to their enslaved ancestors. Such an argument assumes the memory of slavery’s significance for all persons of African descent--in the diaspora and in the motherland. As will become evident in the following paragraphs, Garvey’s claim to Africa for the diaspora foreshadows future essentializations in understandings of black identity and future misconceptions of Africa and Africans’ roles in remembering slavery.

For many black Americans, the memory of slavery elicits a desire to return home. Although most black Americans do not actually ever journey back to the African continent, many take on tropes of Africanness in order to extract an agency from African history as a cultural foundation. They seek African agency as opposed to relying on understandings of self that are restricted to the racial renderings of Western imperialism. Molefe Kete Asante is a proponent of recognizing an essential nature of African ontology that blacks living throughout the diaspora inherit from their ancestors and carry with them through the present moment. In *An Afrocentric Manifesto*, he writes, “Afrocentricity is a paradigmatic intellectual perspective that privileges African agency within the context of African history and culture transcontinentally and trans-generationally.”

With an Afrocentric perspective, some black Americans attempt to look back beyond their slave past and extract a glorified--sometimes mythic--African history that disproves the western manipulated idea that Africa has no history prior to colonization. Cedric Robinson discusses this reconnection with African roots in *Black Marxism*. He claims that African ontological systems were carried by the Africans transported to the Americas via the trans-

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Atlantic slave trade. In his discussion of the foundation of Black radicalism in the diaspora, he writes,

[slavery] was merely the condition for Black radicalism--its immediate reason for and object of being--but not the foundation for its nature or character. Black radicalism, consequently cannot be understood within the particular context of its genesis. It is not a variant of Western radicalism whose proponents happen to be Black. Rather, it is a specifically African response to an oppression emergent from the immediate determinants of European development in the modern era and framed by orders of human exploitation woven into the interstices of European social life from the inception of Western civilization...

According to Robinson, Black radicalism formed in result of racial oppression and discrimination, but its ontological basis is specifically African. Both Asante and Robinson’s intellectual pursuits transition the focus of black consciousness and being from its understanding as a variant within western ontology to one specifically descending from an African ideological basis. Through Asante and Robinson’s analyses, we can see how certain black collectives throughout the diaspora seek to accentuate an ontological foundation from the African continent within their identities.

Some black Americans seek refuge beyond the excavation of an ideological consciousness rooted in Africa and take the physical journey home in search of a greater sense of belonging. Saidiya Hartman writes in *Lose Your Mother*, “When the path home disappeared, when misfortune wore a white face, when dark skin guaranteed perpetual servitude, the prison house of a race was born. And so too was the yearning for the black promised land and the ten million trees that would repel the enemy’s advance and stand in for all of those gone and

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85 Robinson, p. 122

86 Robinson, p. 73
forgotten.” Similar to Garvey’s motivation to reclaim Africa for the memory of his enslaved ancestors, some contemporary black Americans like Hartman believe in an inherent necessity to return to Africa--the motherland--in order to compensate for the forced removal of their ancestors. Hartman is among a number of Americans who take the return route across the Atlantic back to Africa to visit the sites of their ancestors’ removal--the slave castles. The castles offer to these black returnees an experience by which they can honor the lives of their ancestors. Oftentimes, though, they are surprised by how the memory of slavery is experienced by their African cousins. As Hartman’s experience at the slave castles in Ghana narrates, many Africans view the slave trade as the beginning of modernity in Africa.

The trans-Atlantic slave trade plays a minor role in the day to day lives of coastal West Africans such as those in Cape Coast, Ghana. Hartman writes,

Most of Elmina’s residents, with the recent exception of schoolchildren, had never set foot inside the castle, despite its status as a World Heritage Monument, or in any of the other forts scattered along Ghana’s coast...No one volunteered any stories about the slaves sold across the water.

They were baffled that what had happened more than a century ago could still hurt me...Ghanaians wondered what kind of people boasted of slave ancestry. Or made such a big show of emotions.

...“We don’t have time to ponder and worry about slavery,” they explained with exasperation to another rich American.

For many of these Africans, slavery is a part of the past; as time goes on the memory takes on different social and cultural meanings with them than it does with African Americans. With hundreds of years between Africans and African Americans, memory and circumstance have

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88 Hartman, p. 54
89 Hartman, p. 71
provoked diverse experiences. As a result of the trauma of slavery in the United States, black Americans remain engaged with, and are still affected by, its memory. For many Africans who were not forcefully removed from the continent, this memory has taken on a different form.

Contemporary Africans systematically embrace the memory of slavery for economic advantage—the memory of slavery takes on a commodity form. According to Hartman, “peddlers, swindlers, and ingenious adolescents were the only ones in Elmina brazen enough to espouse the love of slaves.”\(^90\) Jonathan Holloway suggests in Jim Crow Wisdom, “In the end—and, for some, ‘the end’ clearly meant a capitulation to the almighty American tourist dollar—Ghanaian curators, cultural figures, and politicians embraced the UNESCO\(^91\) designation and went to work developing a new narrative for an age of return, rediscovery, and reimagination.”\(^92\)

Moreover, in 2012, the African Union, the South African government, and the Pan-African parliament decided to host a Global African Diaspora Summit in order to court those Africans and descendants of Africans living outside of the continent. The African Union defines the Diaspora as “consisting of peoples of African origin living outside the continent, irrespective of their citizenship and nationality and who are willing to contribute to the development of the continent and the building of the African Union.”\(^93\) All three of these examples illustrate the commodification of the memory of slavery. This commodification takes place throughout the United States as well as in the form of movies, historical monuments, theme parks, and DNA testing. Black American cultural interventions in African societies reiterate American cultural

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\(^90\) Hartman, p. 88

\(^91\) United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization

\(^92\) Holloway, p. 221

imperialist expectations and interests regardless or not of the capitalist advantages their cultural imperialism provides African societies. It is important to note, though, that financial motives are not the only forces bringing together Africa and its diaspora. Many Africans seek solidarity with African Americans with the aim of restoring humanity to historically oppressed groups.

Regardless of the role the memory of slavery plays on the African continent, newly immigrated Africans in the United States today are exposed to it in a new light. The pages to follow will focus on the ways by which new-wave black African immigrants experience and negotiate the memory of slavery.

As it has been made evident throughout this section, the memory of slavery has served to inspire the formation of black collectivity and political organization. Furthermore, we have been exposed to ways by which the memory of slavery has been used as an essentializing form of cultural imperialism and commodification. Beyond this memory’s location within the human soul, slavery’s legacy is infused throughout contemporary American society. Notwithstanding the significant progress the United States has made towards developing a legally inclusive and prejudice free environment, perceptions of racial difference that perpetuate inequality stemming from the slave past continue to pervade society and affect access to equal opportunity for members of the black community. The present moment in the United States provides us the opportunity to expand our thinking about the memory of slavery and how its traumatic effects permeate into the experiences and identities of those who do not have an ancestry rooted in slavery; in this case, new-wave African immigrants.
In her highly acclaimed book *The New Jim Crow*, Michelle Alexander argues that the mass incarceration of black men in the United States is a new form of Jim Crow. This system of incarceration preserves black stigmatizations in the United States, and this is detrimental to many blacks’ access to equal opportunity. Alexander explains that, like Jim Crow, the mass incarceration of blacks in the United States is a subtle way of keeping them restricted from full legal participation; this impedes access to full citizenship. Alexander writes,

> Arguably the most important parallel between mass incarceration and Jim Crow is that both have served to define the meaning and significance of race in America. Indeed, a primary function of any racial caste system is to define the meaning of race in its time...Today mass incarceration defines the meaning of blackness in America: black people, especially black men, are criminals. That is what it means to be black.\(^\text{94}\)

The mass incarceration of African Americans in the United States instigates perceptions of blackness which permeate throughout society. Alexander argues that the racial stigma created by the mass incarceration of blacks is different from the stigmas affecting white criminals. Contrasting with white criminals, the stigmas affecting black criminals are transplanted onto the black community as a whole. This establishes a racial understanding of criminality that affects the day to day interactions of all blacks, not just those who are incarcerated. In *Jim Crow Wisdom*, Jonathan Holloway shares an experience he had when he was a graduate student at Yale. One day, he decides to kill time before class by browsing through a clothing store. He recounts how the storekeeper follows him around watching his every move without offering assistance or providing any of the common courtesies expected by a salesperson. While speaking to this experience and similar ones affecting other blacks, Holloway writes, “Like mine, their encounters were individual in nature. However, in their retelling they were typically repackaged...”

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as representative of the daily challenges that all blacks faced when navigating their United States.” As Holloway illustrates, the experiences of blacks in everyday America are affected by the racial stigmatizations and misconceptions perpetuated by what Alexander considers to be the still pervasive structural racism instigated by the American government and maintained by society. The shame correlated with black criminality, especially as it affects young black men, has evolved into a racial stigmatization that is pungent throughout the entire black community. It creates perceptions of black pathology and deviance that are diffused throughout America via mainstream representations in news accounts, fictitious narratives in movies and television, and music. Such representations, Alexander claims, “tend to confirm and reinforce the prevailing public consensus that we need not care about ‘those people’; they deserve what they get.”

Animosity towards blacks as instigated by their representations in the media affects the ways many new-wave African immigrants confront racial identification in the United States. Oftentimes, portrayals of black American urban life reach Africans prior to their migration, and these images influence the way they perceive race in the United States. In addition, upon arrival, they are often concerned with navigating around racial barriers by distancing themselves from native black communities. As has already been made evident earlier in this section, although many new-wave African immigrants are able to remain heavily concentrated in ethnic enclaves with limited participation and interactions outside their own ethnic communities, younger generations are more easily exposed to the struggles correlated with racial stigma because it is more necessary for them to engage American society outside of the ethnic niches in which they live. In “Immigrants and the American System of Justice: Perspectives of African and Caribbean

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95 Holloway, p. 42
96 Alexander, p. 183
Blacks,” John A. Arthur evinces the insecurity and mistrust towards African American criminality that new-wave African immigrants feel as a result of their exposure to public representations and their own experiences in segregated black communities. Such immigrants understand the criminal justice system as a positive influence in a community affected by African American criminality. Arthur then shares how the younger immigrant populations have a less favorable perception of the criminal justice system, especially of the police. Feelings of mistrust towards police officers is often engendered by the ways they are treated in public spheres because of their phenotypical blackness. Arthur concludes about black immigrant youth,

Youth relationship to this system is marked by mistrust, fear, anger, and suspicion...They perceive that they are under constant surveillance by the police. Whether they live in urban or suburban areas, the youth feel the police target them more than they do their white counterparts. Culturally, they think that in the eyes of agents of the criminal justice system, black teenagers are perceived as ‘trouble-makers,’ ‘aggressive,’ gang-prone, and a law enforcement problem which every effort must be made to contain...Frequently, they indicated being stopped and frisked and having search-and-seizure methods applied to them by the police.97

Despite having different historical roots and often different economic and educational family backgrounds, black immigrants are not exempt from the effects of racial stigmatization that pervade American society. The youth in Arthur’s study are affected by the same criminal misconceptions that affect African Americans in Alexander’s study. Several other studies found similar effects on black immigrant youth trying to navigate the American public sphere (Kasinitz, et al.: 2008; Vickerman: 1999; Waters: 1999). Like African Americans, black immigrant youth experience racial discrimination on the streets and with interpersonal experiences in public venues such as at school, in stores, and with the criminal justice system.

Although many black immigrant groups have been able to successfully create ethnic enclaves within metropolitan cities, and they often have high rates of academic achievement compared with native born blacks, both groups continue to experience similar racial discriminations. Moreover, despite achievement, sociological research has found that black immigrants integrate into de-segregated communities at a much slower pace than other immigrant groups because of their racial characteristics.\(^98\) In “Growing up West Indian and African American,” Mary C. Waters found that many black immigrants often become disinvested in educational and occupational achievement because of government failures to improve institutions such as education in segregated, low-income neighborhoods.\(^99\) In *Inheriting the City*, Philip Kasinitz, et al. discovered that many black immigrants who are confined to the educational opportunities provided in their lower income neighborhoods often send their children back home for better educations.\(^100\) The opportunity to send their children to their home countries illustrates an advantage that immigrants have over those native born blacks who are confined to the poor-quality opportunities provided in segregated, low-income communities.

It has not been the purpose of this analysis to portray black immigrants as having the same experiences of native born blacks, rather it has been meant to illustrate how black immigrants have to negotiate the stigmatizations of blackness in the United States as opposed to


\(^{100}\) Philip Kasinitz, John H. Mollenkopf, Mary C. Waters, and Jennifer Holdaway. *Inheriting the City: The Children of Immigrants Come of Age*. [New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation. 2010], p. 32
other immigrant groups who have overall easier access to becoming upwardly mobile. Kasinitz et al. provides significant insight into the possible evolution of black immigrant identities, “Although the first generation parents see themselves as distinct from native blacks, the distinction has a ‘now you see it, now you don’t’ quality within the second generation, as young Caribbean Americans insist that they are both African American and West Indian.” In result of their increased exposure to America’s racial disparities, the second generation immigrants in Kasinitz, et al.’s study begin to view their own identities as they are affected by the social construction of race, and less by their national origins. Despite new-wave African immigrants’ distance from the memory of slavery, they have to navigate around racist structures that are rooted in it. As new-wave African immigrants become more entrenched in the political, social, and cultural aspects of race in the United States, the role this memory plays becomes more imbedded in their consciousnesses, especially as the boundaries separating various black groups become blurred over time. The memory of slavery has played a significant role in inspiring black collectivity in the United States since the inception of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. With ever evolving theories and understandings of blackness and diaspora, the memory of slavery’s role continues to be of significant importance. I will now call into question the nature of memory. Is memory something that is real or abstract? Throughout time and space humans have remembered, forgotten, and even fabricated memories in order to serve specific purposes. What interests me, and what I will examine in the pages to come, is how memory can be relocated through the process of cultural fusion. Moreover, does black identity formation and collective

101 Kasinitz, et al., p. 32
organization need to rely on the memory of slavery, or can blackness be defined as a present condition, affected by, but not bound to, the past?
V: Real and Abstract Memory in Teju Cole’s *Open City*

How do time and memory affect one’s identity? By now we have come to the agreement that the memory of slavery has persisted throughout history, though its nature at any given moment is subject to the context of that moment—political organizers have illuminated this memory for inspiring action against disparity; some blacks have attempted to forget this memory for the protection of their families; the memory has been commodified, and it has entrenched itself into the social structures of our nation as a scar on the plaque of an upright nation; moreover, the persistence of the memory of slavery has even ingrained itself into the experiences of many who come from a place outside the affected territory in which this memory evolved. I want to refocus our attention back on this last group of people I am referring to—new-wave black African immigrants. These persons rooted in the African continent cross the Atlantic ocean with black bodies resembling earlier migrants from Africa to the United States. In these current instances, though, most come by their own will. The ones who may not want to leave are not forced out of their countries, but, rather, they flee as refugees. Some theorists of the African diaspora distinguish between these two groups of people as old and new diasporas—or diasporas of enslavement and imperialism, the former created by forced migration and the latter largely representing people who migrate on their own will. Despite these differences, the experiences of the first diaspora, migrating several hundred years ago, have so significantly affected the foundation of the United States that cultural, social, and political elements created by the period of slavery are ingrained in its present society. Despite being a social construction created several centuries ago, understandings of race have endured despite its transforming shape through
history. As a result of the persistence of race, members of the new African diaspora must consider the meaning of their black skin in the context of this new environment. These immigrants must negotiate the memory of slavery as it persists in American society and attaches on to their black skin; for this reason, I argue that we must understand the African diaspora as one single complex unit and not as divided into two separate entities. Although they understand their phenotypical difference and the way it has been marginalized at a global level, the context of the United States and the memory of slavery affect their experiences as immigrants--and later as citizens--of the United States. By looking at the fictional account of Julius, the protagonist in Nigerian-American Teju Cole’s *Open City*, we will be able to understand the complexity of memory and time and their roles in identity formation. Furthermore, we will end this analysis with a better grasp of the meaning of blackness and African diaspora identity in the United States.

Cole illustrates throughout *Open City* ways by which new experiences and memories work their way into Julius’s life. Julius is a philosopher, and he spends his nights after work roaming Manhattan. His thoughts and destinations become consequences of their unconscious simultaneousness. This synchrony affects his assimilation into and separation from New York City. At the beginning of the novel, Julius narrates,

> These walks, a counterpoint to my busy day at the hospital, steadily lengthened, taking me farther and farther afield each time, so that I often found myself at quite a distance from home late at night, and was compelled to return home by subway. In this way, at the beginning of the final year of my psychiatry fellowship, New York City worked itself into my life at walking pace.\(^\text{102}\)

Although “home” literally refers to Julius’s apartment in upper Manhattan, it also alludes to his “home” in Nigeria. This seems like a fitting metaphor for immigrant literature. Many people migrate to the United States because of what it offers: opportunity for education, financial opportunity, etc. Yet, many have a dreamers’ perception of America and are alarmed by the difficulties of living in the United States, especially New York City, where one often becomes overwhelmed with solitude. Cole alludes to this throughout the novel; for example, “no one on the train spoke and no one, it seemed, knew anyone else...I found myself all alone...”\(^{103}\) So, when Julius says “and [I] was compelled to return home by subway” in the quotation above, one can justifiably comprehend that, because of solitude and his detachment from America’s differentness, he would get the impulse to return “home” to Nigeria as fast as he could; therefore the idea of traveling by subway seems more appealing than walking. Moreover, as Julius’s walks take him further and further away from “home,” his experiences in New York City work themselves into his understanding of self.

Throughout the novel, Julius envisions moments in history in the form of hallucinations. As he becomes more entrenched in his surroundings, moments of America’s past make their way into his present. At one moment in the novel, Julius tells the reader,

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\text{That afternoon, during which I flitted in and out of myself, when time became elastic and voices cut out of the past into the present, the heart of the city was gripped by what seemed to be a commotion from an earlier time...} \\
\text{There was some kind of scuffle some two hundred yards down the street, again strangely noiseless, and a huddled knot of men opened up to reveal two brawlers being separated and pulled away from their fight. What I saw next gave me a fright: in the farther distance, beyond the listless crowd, the body of a lynched man dangling from a tree. The figure was slender, dressed from head to toe in}
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\(^{103}\) Cole, p. 45
black, reflecting no light. It soon resolved itself however, into a less ominous thing: dark canvas sheeting on a construction scaffold, twirling in the wind.\textsuperscript{104}

With this experience, Julius recognizes the way by which past memories live within the present. As he, someone from outside the context of this history, becomes part of this society, the memory works its way into his mind, and it becomes a part of his own experience which he must negotiate.

Like any person who travels across time and space, new encounters provide for various experiences and the constant negotiations of ones own identity. Memory is not something that is fixed; with new experiences and understandings of the world, the way one remembers or envisions the past can change. While considering the experiences of various people he has encountered, Julius states,

I looked outside the window, and in my mind’s eye, I began to rove into the landscape, recalling my overnight conversation with Dr. Maillotte. I saw her at fifteen, in September 1944, sitting on a rampart in the Brussels sun, delirious with happiness at the invaders’ retreat. I saw Junichiro Saito on the same day, aged thirty-one or thirty-two, unhappy, in internment, in an arid room in a fenced compound in Idaho, far away from his books. Out there on that day, also, were all four of my own grandparents: the Nigerians, the Germans. Three were now gone, for sure. But what of the fourth, my oma? I saw them all, even the ones I had never seen in real life, saw all of them in the middle of that day in September sixty-two years ago, with their eyes open as if shut, mercifully seeing nothing of the brutal half century ahead and, better yet, hardly anything at all that was happening in their world, the corpse-filled cities, camps, beaches, and fields, the unspeakable worldwide disorder of that very moment.\textsuperscript{105}

This juxtaposition of different experiences at one given moment of time illustrates the complexity of history and remembering. Different people remember certain aspects of a shared past, but, because of individual experiences, people’s memories exist outside the scope of others’

\textsuperscript{104} Cole, p. 74-75
\textsuperscript{105} Cole, p. 96
experiences at that moment of time. Moreover, as Julius in the present engages with different memories and experiences, his understanding of the past is complicated. This idea detracts us from the understanding that time moves in a straight trajectory. Continuities and discontinuities and disruptions and renegotiations exist in memory and can bring us from the present down different paths in the past. Cultural and historical flux is not just forward moving; elements of memory undergo flux in backward motion as well.

Despite the significance Cole places on memory and the past’s presence in a person’s identity, he suggests that identity formation cannot take place if we continuously live outside the present moment. He illustrates this through Julius’s experience in Brussels. Although Julius decides to travel for holiday in Brussels as he considers reconnecting with his maternal grandmother, his “oma,” it is never clear throughout his trip whether he actually intends to find her. He says, “I began to wonder if Brussels hadn’t somehow drawn me to itself for reasons more opaque than I suspected, that the paths I mindlessly followed through the city followed a logic irrelevant to my family history.”¹⁰⁶ By venturing to reconnect with his oma, Julius considers how he may be able to understand himself through his German ancestry. This attempt would align Julius with his blood kin. In the quote above, he realizes that Brussels served a grander purpose than trying to locate within him something that has been disconnected. With the interactions and experiences he encounters in Brussels, Julius learns more about his own identity by understanding his context in the present than he would have by resurfacing his oma’s memories. After having several long conversations with Farouq, a Moroccan worker at an internet and telephone shop in Brussels--conversations which we will explore in detail later--Julius is

¹⁰⁶ Cole, p. 115-16
reminded of his blackness in the context of the West. He tells us, “My presentation—the dark, unsmiling, solitary stranger—made me a target for the inchoate rage of the defenders of Vlaanderan...And so, after that conversation, as a precaution, I cut down on the length of my late-night walks in Etterbeek. I resolved also, to no longer visit all-white bars or family restaurants in the quieter neighborhoods.”

By recognizing his darker skin and his concomitant outsider status, Julius acknowledges the consequences of the present context of society and the ways this informs who he is in the eyes of others and how he responds with caution. He realizes through his conversations with Farouq that his experience in Brussels presents him with an understanding of how his direct contact with society’s socially constructed ideas and the memories of others shapes his identity beyond the distant realness of blood kinship.

Julius further experiences the reality of race throughout his wanderings in New York City. As he immerses himself more and more into the city, he discovers the extreme realities of race in American society and better understands how this reality affects his own identity formation. During one of his walks, he finds himself in the mezzanine of a Wall Street subway station. He states of his experience,

My original impression of the grandeur of the space...quickly changed as I walked through the hall...men sat...playing backgammon...there were five pairs of players now, under the nave aisle to the right in this evening scene, all of them black. On the other side of the hall, under the other long nave aisle, there was another pair of men, both white...I moved back into the center of the nave, which was almost free of human presence...

The discordance of this scene challenges Julius’s multi-racial, multi-cultural identity. For him, this scene represents the racial divide that exists in American society. As a bi-racial African

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107 Cole, p. 106
108 Cole, p. 46-47
immigrant, he feels stuck in the middle: what he inherited from his father on one side and from
his mother on the other. Moreover, it embodies the polarization of blacks and whites in the
United States which persists from the period of slavery. In the middle there is barely any other
human presence; therefore, he is confronted with an obligation to negotiate between his cultural
influences. In addition, the memory of slavery as it persists through time confronts him as a
reality that he has to take on in consequence of the physical reality of his blackness. Memory
presents itself to Julius as something that must be negotiated. In another instance, Julius tells the
reader about his friend who wants to teach him about jazz, a musical genre that he does not
prefer and has no connection to. He says, “[my friend] often said that he would sit down at a
piano someday and show me how jazz worked, and that when I finally understood blue notes and
swung notes, the heavens would part and my life would be transformed.” Being an African
American cultural element, jazz music here symbolizes a specific tradition and memory, one that
Julius claims at this early point in the novel not to feel any emotional connection to. His friend
suggests that, if Julius learns how to understand the various forms of this cultural element, his
life would be transformed. As Julius becomes more accustomed to the realities of race in the
United States throughout the narrative, his identity evolves. In the same sense that jazz has the
ability to alter his life, his identity can transform if he takes on the context of his present situation
and understands how he must negotiate the social elements affecting his identity. Moreover, we
can see how the memory of slavery via race in the present figures into the negotiation of his
identity.

109 Cole, p. 24
Julius’s black skin takes on a larger role in the formation of his identity in New York City as he encounters instances of racial stereotyping instigated by structural racism as discussed by Michelle Alexander and analyzed in the previous section. Towards the beginning of the novel, Julius shares an experience as he has waiting for the subway. Two young children whose race is assumed non-black address him, “Are you a gangster, mister? Are you a gangster? They both flashed gang signs, or their idea of gang signs. I looked at them. It was midnight, and I didn’t feel like giving public lectures. He’s black, said the girl, but he’s not dressed like a gangster, her brother said, I bet he is. Hey mister, are you a gangster?”110 These two children exemplify society’s oppression to race consciousness. They assume Julius is a thug because he is black. Not only do they identify him by his race, but they understand “blackness” as deviant. Such misperceptions plague much of America’s understanding of blackness. Moreover, such understandings of blackness are perpetuated by the government and media’s portrayal of blacks as criminals, thugs, and well-fare dependent burdens to American society. Despite Julius’s status as a Nigerian immigrant, and his distance from tropes of African American culture, his phenotype instigates misunderstandings of his identity and socializes him into racial stereotypes.

Throughout the novel, Julius encounters various people of African decent who all feel connected to him because of some aspect of his African identity. Towards the beginning of the novel, he is frazzled when he enters a taxi cab, so he does not greet the driver. This insults the driver because Julius rejects their shared blackness. He says to Julius, “the way you came into my car without saying hello, that was bad. Hey, I’m African just like you...”111 There are several instances throughout the novel where Julius is bothered by other blacks claiming solidarity with

110 Cole, p. 32
111 Cole, p. 40
him. He shares this detestation with the reader. At one point, a post office worker says to him, “Say, brother, where are you from? ‘Cause, see, I could tell you were from the Motherland. And you brothers have something that is vital, you understand me. You have something that is vital for the health of those of us raised on this side of the ocean. Let me tell you something: I am raising my daughters as Africans.”\textsuperscript{112} In the conversation that follows, the man presents the need of black collectivity for racial uplift. This bothers Julius and he shares with the reader, “I made a mental note to avoid that particular post office in the future.”\textsuperscript{113} These two passages illustrate Julius’s struggle with blackness. Upon arrival to the United States, new-wave African immigrants like him are forced into a black community by not only the perceptions and stereotypes of whites, but by black communityists. The post office worker represents Afrocentricity in the United States. He tells Julius that he wants to raise his daughters as Africans, therefore disposing an African American or American identity and likely taking on a mythic African identity. As portrayed in the lyrics to a poem he recites for Julius, he believes they can use Afrocentric ideology to rise above the sorrow instilled in African American history. For the post-office worker, Julius symbolizes Africa; he is enamored by Julius’s rootedness in Africa and disconnect from slavery. For Julius, assimilating into American society pressures him to become a part of the black collectivity. As portrayed by the post-office worker, his being is symbolic of African authenticity and is necessary for the larger black community to assert its racial political agenda against white hegemony. Julius encounters several different black people throughout the novel who make claim to a shared racial identity. These persons all have come from different backgrounds and from different parts of the world. By placing them in the novel and having them

\textsuperscript{112} Cole, p. 186
\textsuperscript{113} Cole, p. 188
confront Julius on his identity, Cole exemplifies the ways blacks from different backgrounds deal with racial reality in the United States. Although they all acknowledge race, they do not all understand race, nor do they exert their identities, in the same way. For example, Pierre, a Haitian shoe shiner tells Julius about his undying loyalty to the white man he worked for; even Julius, who at times tries to defy racial identity, cannot fully grasp such a patronizing relationship.

Julius is embraced by blacks for his Africanness in several of the encounters previously discussed. These instances acknowledge his usefulness as an African for black solidarity. Contrastingly, the following quotation illustrates how his friend Moji, a fellow Nigerian, exploits separateness between African Americans and African immigrants by acknowledging the idea that Africans do not possess the memory of slavery and are, therefore, not affected by hardship the same ways as African Americans. Cole writes, “I suppose, Moji said at length, that the things black people have had to deal with in this country--and I don’t mean me or Julius, I mean people like you, who have been here for generations--the things you’ve had to deal with are definitely enough to drive anyone over the edge. The racist structure of this country is crazy-making.”

Unlike the post-office worker who wills to erase that memory, Moji acknowledges their unnamed African American friend’s ability to overcome the difficult consequences of slavery by receiving a PhD and teaching at an Ivy League school. She infers that new-wave African immigrants like herself and Julius do not have to deal with the same hardships. Moji recognizes that, in order to prosper, their friend had to face the hardships engendered by slavery. Not much later into the novel, though, Julius has a conversation with his neighbor who acknowledges Julius as black and

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114 Cole, p. 203
nothing more or less. Julius says, “and Mr. F. Said, with sudden emotion to his voice, Doctor, I just want to tell you how proud I am to come here, and see a young black man like yourself in that white coat, because things haven’t ever been easy for us, and no one has ever given us nothing without a struggle.” For Mr. F., Julius’s success represents all blacks in the United States who have struggled. Is Julius a part of the black struggle in the United States as suggested by Mr. F., or does his status as a Nigerian immigrant take him out of that collective struggle as argued by Moji? Being a psychiatrist, Julius fills the mold of the high-achieving model minority. Moji claims that, because of his immigrant outsider status, Julius did not have to struggle the way their African American friend did to overcome disparity. Most certainly, he is not a descendant of slaves, and he does not live with the trauma of slavery as its descendants do, but, as has been thoroughly discussed throughout the course of this thesis, his identity and his experiences in the United States have been affected by this memory. As he realizes in Brussels, he has to consider this memory because of his black skin, especially with his interactions in the public sphere where young black males regardless of ethnic or national origin are stigmatized by society. Despite the reality of how understandings of race engage with the development of his identity, Cole makes the reader wonder whether or not racial solidarity and embracing the struggle can be avoided.

Cole presents analyses of diversity within society as both a juxtaposition to and a metaphor for the internal conflict Julius experiences negotiating various cultural elements for his identity. Two figures with contrasting opinions presented to Julius during his travels in Brussels are Farouq and Dr. Maillotte, a Belgian woman living in the United States whom he meets on the

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115 Cole, p. 210
airplane. During their conversations at the internet and telephone shop, Farouq shares with Julius his desire to figure out how people of extreme difference can live together, therefore promoting a theory of unity in diversity. He shows admiration for Malcolm X who he says, “recognized that difference contains its own value, and that the struggle must be to advance that value.”\textsuperscript{116} In opposition is Dr. Maillotte’s opinion that a person should not place his/herself into another society with the desire to assert his or her differences. Her opinion symbolizes the idea of mainstream assimilation, and represents the power the west has used throughout history to marginalize the “other.” Julius later relates the paradox presented by Farouq to his position as a psychiatrist. He states, “In my duties as a medical school graduate and psychiatric resident, I was licensed to be the healer, and nudged those who were less normal toward some imaginary statistical mean of normalcy. I had the costume and the degree to prove it, and I had the DSM-IV at my side. My task...was to cure the mad.”\textsuperscript{117} This comparison alludes to the idea that those persons in power throughout history have manipulated mainstream conceptions of the marginalized other. They established a certain set of norms to be followed by society, and those who do not fit within these norms are labeled crazy or outside the accepted ideal. With this concept of understanding what the norm is, Julius, as a psychiatrist, has the responsibility, as granted by the state, to do what he can to move the “other,” or the one outside the norm, as close as possible to society’s ideal state. During one conversation, Farouq claims, “There’s always the expectation that the victimized Other is the one that covers the distance...”\textsuperscript{118} Farouq suggests a more give-and-take relationship between opposing forces, but Julius recognizes a blind spot in

\textsuperscript{116} Cole, p. 105
\textsuperscript{117} Cole, p. 205
\textsuperscript{118} Cole, p. 105
his claim. Julius is overwhelmed throughout the novel with the negotiation of clashing forces, and he sometimes sees them as a kind of violence like that exhibited by extremist religious groups. While considering his conversation with Farouq, Julius ponders on the individual’s position amongst the violence of clashing differences, “It seemed as if the only way this lure of violence could be avoided was by having no causes, by being magnificently isolated from all loyalties. But was that not an ethical lapse graver than rage itself?”\^{119} Recognizing such pondering as a metaphor for the clashing forces that affect identity and its negotiation with time and space, we should look at how Julius responds to his own inner conflict.

Shortly after Julius is praised by Mr. F. for representing the black struggle with his personal success, he walks down 124th Street in Harlem and past two young black men. He acknowledges their shared blackness,

There had earlier been, it occurred to me, only the most tenuous of connections between us, looks on a street corner by strangers, a gesture of mutual respect based on our being young, black, male; based, in other words, on our being ‘brothers’...It was a little way of saying, I know something of what life is like for you out here.\^{120}

Julius feels a sense of solidarity with being black in America and part of “the struggle.” Moments later, though, the two men who invoke within him an emotional connection with black solidarity jump and beat him. When Julius first encounters the men, he feels as if he understands them and their struggle. Maybe Moji was correct when she said that the two of them, as Nigerians, had not experienced and cannot understand African American hardship. Cole presents Julius as foolish for assuming an inherent connection to these black men. The black men beat Julius in order to give him his fair share of the hardship they believe he has not experienced in consequence of his

\^{119} Cole, p. 107

\^{120} Cole, p. 212
skin color. If Julius had not already taken on the memory of slavery as abstractly his own, the
violence of these men and their perfect portrayal of the stereotypically deviant young black male
demonstrate for him the reality of the persistence of this memory in contemporary America. It
also proves to Julius that he is an outsider—he is an outsider in the United States because of his
racial self, and he is an outsider within the black community because he has not experienced the
struggle. Moreover, this conflict problematizes the idea of unity, in general. Where does one go
from here? Julius is stigmatized by mainstream society for his skin color; little white children in
the subway look at him as a “gangster.” Certain blacks claim him for the purpose of unity, but
others like the young men who beat him share no brotherhood with him.

At the beginning of *Open City*, Julius says, “New York City worked itself into my life at
walking pace.”¹²¹ Until the moment when Julius is beaten by black men on 124th Street, it seems
like his journey through New York, as well as his time spent in Belgium, is carrying him closer
and closer towards the black collective. At the end of the novel, though, New York City works its
way into Julius’s life in an alternative way. In the last chapter, he shares with the reader that he
has moved to West Twenty-first Street from his previous home in upper Manhattan. He
describes, “The view there isn’t good, but it is a desirable neighborhood (as the realtor reminded
me ad infinitum) and I am within walking distance of the office.”¹²² For Julius, the immigrant
experience for new-wave Africans in the United States is complicated in that it forces constant
negotiations of conflicting cultural elements. In result, Julius chooses solitude. After being
defeated by his own psychological struggle, his solution is to move to lower Manhattan, a
wealthier area symbolic of American consumerism, from the ethnic diversity of Harlem and

¹²¹ Cole, p. 3
¹²² Cole, p. 247
Washington Heights. Julius chooses solitude in an “open city”--his solitude among the chaos is a self-chosen neutral zone where he can carry out his life without the violence of opposing differences.

Although Julius finds comfort in the security of his solitude, his race’s obviousness within the white community sets him apart. At the end of the novel, Julius goes to a concert at Carnegie Hall. He explains,

Almost everyone, as almost always at such concerts, was white. It is something I can’t help noticing; I notice it each time, and try to see past it. Part of that is a quick, complex series of negotiations: chiding myself for even seeing it, lamenting the reminders of how divided our life still remains, being annoyed that these thoughts can be counted on to pass through my mind at some point in the evening…it never ceases to surprise me how easy it is to leave the hybridity of the city, and enter into all-white spaces, the homogeneity of which, as far as I can tell, causes no discomfort to the whites in them. The only thing odd, to some of them, is seeing me, young and black, in my seat or at the concession stand. At times, standing in line for the bathroom during intermission, I get looks that make me feel like Ota Benga, the Mbuti man who was put on display in the Monkey House at the Bronx Zoo in 1906.123

Despite this, Julius continues, “But Mahler’s music is not white, or black, not old or young, and whether it is even specifically human, rather than in accord with more universal vibration, is open to question.”124 Julius considers the universality of music several times throughout the novel, and this time is no different. Despite his stand-out differences from the rest of the audience, every person in the hall loses his/herself in the music while it is being orchestrated. The concert is the perfect representation of what Farouq desires; the universality of sound and music is able to bring people together--people with different histories and memories all together as a collective in this one moment of time and shared space. The exhilaration of this moment

123 Cole, p. 251-252
124 Cole, p. 252
does end, and with it, the reality of the present strikes a cord. When the concert finishes, Julius accidentally uses the emergency exit and finds himself on a fire escape on the outside of the building. He says, “My fellow concertgoers went about their lives oblivious to my plight...Now, I faced solitude of a rare purity.”\textsuperscript{125} When the music ends, life continues. Despite the hundreds of memories that existed in the room, the present became a reality when silence struck.

\textsuperscript{125} Cole, p. 255
Conclusion

Isidore Okpewho and Nkiru Nzegwu conclude their anthology *The New African Diaspora* with an essay entitled “The Ontological Imperative for the New African Diaspora” by Adeolu Ademoyo. In this essay, Ademoyo challenges Gilroy’s “Black Atlanticist” perspective by arguing that diaspora theory should be engaged with an ontological foundation.126 Similar to the arguments of Robinson and Asante considered earlier in this thesis, Ademoyo writes, “where people of African descent integrate into the diaspora environment from an ontological location, the result is a single consciousness, an African and black consciousness from which the African and black subject can relate to and embrace non-African, non-black diaspora cultures as others do.”127 He argues that contemporary Africans who leave the continent and enter the diaspora do so with an African consciousness imbued in their being, and, from this perspective, they are able to negotiate Western cultural elements. Although I will not argue against the idea that there do exist ontological consciousnesses outside the frame of Western being, I will say that such Afrocentric perspectives deny the vast diversity and ways of being that exist on the African continent, and it rejects a certain agency to those people occupying Africa’s past. By essentializing African ontology, we ignore Africa’s ancestors constant migrations, intentional global interactions, and cultural negotiations.

127 Ademoyo, p. 517
Ademoyo takes his argument steps away from those of Robinson and Asante when he writes,

My argument recognizes the twin holocaust of colonialism and slavery. In doing so, it nonetheless acknowledges the different historical situations of the earlier African diaspora and the more contemporary African diaspora even when the two are cousins. A recognition of this historical difference is essential. While enslavement in a completely strange spiritual and physical environment offered very limited space for ontological resistance against hegemony, the new African diaspora could hardly be seen in these terms; a state of consciousness for the new immigrants would be entirely self-inflicted and self-imposed, and hardly an inevitable choice.\textsuperscript{128}

First, Ademoyo suggests that the period of slavery made it less possible for the “old” African diaspora to resist a double-consciousness and maintain a pure African ontology. This argument makes visible the problematic nature of unearthing a black ontology rooted in Africa. For Ademoyo, an ontology for members of the “old” African diaspora seems in its most tangible manifestation a form of therapy; Asante admits to the therapeutic nature of Afrocentricity in his \textit{Manifesto}. The second part of this argument that Ademoyo makes regards the members of the “new” African diaspora and their undeniable African ontological essence. Aside from the problems of essentializing African being already discussed, I argue that Ademoyo’s ontological theory is also a form of therapy--though one that he and many other first generation new-wave African immigrants are not conscious of. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie so eloquently makes us aware of the experiences of younger and future generations of new-wave African immigrants navigating American and black American social and cultural elements with her portrayal of Dike. I conclude this thesis urging African diaspora theorists to consider these younger immigrants before they begin to dissect the diaspora into separate entities. The reality of the situation is that the descendants of new-wave African immigrants will have to negotiate African, Western, and

\textsuperscript{128} Ademoyo, p. 517-18
other cultural elements when negotiating their identities in the United States. Moreover, as long as the racial fabric of American inequality prevails, all members of the African diaspora’s old and new waves living in the United States will be affected by race, and this will inherently impact the development of black youth consciousness.

There is much intellectual work still to be done on new-wave African immigration to the United States. This thesis largely focused on new-wave African immigrants as a whole and how they negotiate race in the United States. In literary study alone, there is ample room to develop analyses outside the constrictions of race and understand the ways by which various elements of identity affect individual and collective experiences and development. In *Americanah* and in her recently enormous presence in the media, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has become an outspoken feminist symbolizing certain African perspectives, while also highlighting female solidarity that bridges gaps between Africa and its diaspora and among women all over the globe. Ethiopian Dinaw Mengestu offers a different standpoint coming from a part of Africa with a very unique history. Moreover, he migrated to the United States with his family at a very young age, so Africa worked its way into his identity from a distance; his perspective is apparent in the way his protagonist exposes Africa via memory in *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears*. I end this foresight into intellectual possibility by mentioning Chris Abani. Abani is a biracial Nigerian who, in his novel *The Virgin of Flames* offers a Spanish speaking protagonist who is half Nigerian and half Ecuadorian, is infatuated with a transgender stripper, and is indecisive of his own sexual preferences. The possibilities for diverse intellectual explorations into new-wave African immigration continue...
I end this thesis with one of the last passages of Teju Cole’s *Open City*. Looking into the night, Julius shares with the reader,

Wonderful stars, a distant cloud of fireflies: but I felt in my body what my eyes could not grasp, which was that their true nature was the persisting visual echo of something that was already in the past. In the unfathomable ages it took for light to cross such distances, the light source itself had in some cases been long extinguished, its dark remains stretched away from us at ever greater speeds.

But in the dark spaces between the dead, shining stars were stars I could not see, stars that still existed, and were giving out light but present only as blank interstices. Their light would arrive on earth eventually, long after I and my whole generation and the generation after me had slipped out of time, perhaps long after the human race itself was extinguished. To look into those dark spaces was to have a direct glimpse of the future.

...I wished I could meet the unseen starlight halfway, starlight that was unreachable because my entire being was caught up in a blind spot, starlight that was coming as fast as it could, covering almost seven hundred million miles every hour. It would arrive in due time, and cast its illumination on other humans, or perhaps on other configurations of our world, after unimaginable catastrophes had altered it beyond recognition.\(^\text{129}\)

For Cole, much of what is visible in the present is a shadow of the past or the remnants of past memories; many components affecting one’s place in society are perpetuations of those that came before. These things that are visible in the present because they come from the past often outshine that which is still to come, but, as humans on earth, we are stuck in the present and forced to negotiate that which has proceeded us and that which is still to come. Being and identity are products of these negotiations; identity, then, is determined by the negotiations of space and time. The spaces between stars coming and stars going which Julius refers to as marking the point of identity’s negotiation resemble Brent Hayes Edwards’s theory of décalage—the space between joints that is both the point of separation and the point of linkage. Edwards states in “The Uses of Diaspora,” “it is exactly such a haunting gap or discrepancy that allows the African diaspora to ‘step’ and ‘move’ in various articulations. Articulation is always a strange

\(^{129}\) Cole, p. 256-57
and ambivalent gesture, because finally, in the body, it is *only* difference--the separation between bones or members--that allows movement.”\(^{130}\) Edwards’s décalage is similar to the juncture of past and future: the present. This, I argue, is the defining moment of identity. In this regard, blackness can only be defined in the present moment and in any context by which the presence, or even absence, of blackness forces one to consider a racial identity.

Cole likens the fading out and in of stars to the negotiation of aspects of identity such as Americanness and blackness. Being a black immigrant from contemporary Africa, his protagonist, Julius, is not rooted in the same memory of slavery that affects blacks in contemporary American society; therefore, black identity cannot be thought of as an essence. Considering time and space, black identity is a product of these negotiations and are relative to a person’s situation in the present moment. Cole sees black and American opposing cultural elements as products of social fabrications. These social fabrications are ingrained into Julius’s present because of the institutionalization of slavery that predates his membership into black American society. In order to understand blackness or the African diaspora by its context in the present moment, it is crucial to analyze the significance of the memory of slavery because of its perpetuation in the racial structures of American society. Despite its significance, we have come to realize that memory is abstract--we remember, forget, fabricate, and reassign memories to serve social purposes. Julius looks at the blank interstices as signs of hope for a time when the forces inflicted on his identity, and on the identities of people in the future, are not polluted by similar racist elements. Although the memory of slavery is present in American society, no memory is fixed; Julius envisions a different future, and this future will be a product of its

present, not the present of Julius’s context. Considering blackness and African diaspora identity as resembling the context of a person’s present, we can anticipate different representations of cultural forms in the future. Although Julius fails the reader by departing from the complexity and violences of diversity and chooses solitude and invisibility amongst the chaos, Cole foreshadows hope in blank interstices. The presence of new shades of blackness such as new-wave African immigrants in the diaspora is likely to dramatically change how America thinks of blackness.
Bibliography


"Tweaking a Monolith: The West Indian Immigrant Encounter with "Blackness"


