

The White Closet

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Abstract: Whiteness theorists argue that whiteness has two essential features. First, whiteness colonizes, appropriates and controls the Other. Whiteness is, then, *racist*. Second, whiteness is constructed unwittingly. Whites are, it is claimed, unaware of the harms they inflict on a genocidal scale because whiteness, like the air we breathe, is “invisible” to those who construct it and are constructed by it. Whiteness is, then, *innocent*. I think defining whiteness as *innocent racism* is troubling for two reasons. First, it leaves whites unaccountable for the acts of racism they perpetuate. Second, I think that the claim that whiteness is invisible “like the air we breathe,” while a powerful and fascinating metaphor, is mistaken. I will argue that whiteness is *closeted*; and while the closet makes the acknowledgement of whiteness difficult, it does not make it impossible. Thus, though closeted, whites are morally accountable for the acts of racism they commit.

There are two separate areas of debate in race theory. The first focuses on analyzing the concept *race*. Those concerned with this issue attempt to answer such questions as: What is a race? Is it a biological notion? Is it a socially constructed notion? What is the relationship between race and ethnicity? Is whiteness a race? Is race an immutable feature of a person, or can a person’s race change, as can a person’s religion, political commitments, and nationality? The second area of debate in race theory focuses on the concept of *racism*. Those concerned with this issue attempt to answer such questions as: What is racism? Can institutions be racist, or is racism a property of an individual’s actions only? Are all racist acts intentional, or can they be unintentional? Are they motivated by negative emotions only, such as hatred or fear, or can racism be the result of good intentions as well? Although in the abstract these two sets of questions address different concerns, discussions of race often merge with discussions of racism.¹

Nowhere are the theoretical connections between race and racism more apparent than in the currently accepted analyses of whiteness. Although the details of particular accounts of whiteness differ to some degree, the similarities in the various accounts are striking.² Put briefly, whiteness theorists

argue that whiteness has two essential features. The first is that whiteness colonizes, appropriates and controls The Other. Whiteness is, they argue, essentially *racist*. The second is that whiteness is a social construction both created and perpetuated by whites unwittingly. Whites are, it is claimed, blind to the harms they inflict on a genocidal scale because whiteness, like the air we breathe, is “invisible” to those who construct it and are constructed by it. Whiteness is, then, *innocent*.

Accounts of whiteness that conceive of whiteness as innocent racism have *prima facie* appeal. First, a social constructionist account of whiteness is necessarily incompatible with a biological essentialist account of whiteness. Since whiteness is not a biological fact but a social fact it can be deconstructed (in theory at least) and, therefore, this significant source of social ills is entirely eliminable. Second, the social constructionist provides a powerful theoretical explanation of social facts such as the perpetuation of social privileges enjoyed by whites, the seemingly intractable racism that exists in this society and the racial segregation that continues to permeate this society (apparent when one considers for example the astonishingly low number of inter-racial marriages that occur each year in this society³). Third, social construction can explain the dramatically different perceptions of racism that exist in this society. Numerous studies have supported the claim that whites believe there is far less racism than do non-whites, moreover, whites believe the racism that does exist is of a less serious nature than members of other races believe it is. Whites typically claim that racist acts are isolated events, unconnected to the social reality as a whole—and certainly unconnected to themselves.⁴ The fact that whiteness and the racism it inflicts are invisible to whites (but not to The Others victimized by whiteness) goes a long way to explain these disparities in perceptions of racism.

Despite its initial appeal, I think defining whiteness as *innocent racism* is troubling for two reasons. First, it leaves whites unaccountable for the acts of racism they perpetuate. Although advocates of whiteness as innocent racism can argue that, as a form of racism, it is unjust and ought to be stopped, it is difficult to see how one can hold innocent racists morally blameworthy. If whites can honestly say, as whiteness theorists claim, that they had *no idea* that they were inflicting injustices on others—because whiteness keeps them blind to and unaware of the real nature of the social relations that exist between whites and non-whites—then they cannot be morally criticized. (Ironically, they really *are* morally innocent.) Second, I think that the claim that whiteness is invisible “like the air we breathe,” while a powerful and fascinating metaphor, is mistaken. I will argue that not only is it *not* invisible, but that it is *highly* visible and that the ordinary actions of whites betray their full awareness of the privileges of whiteness. However, because

whites have so much invested in not acknowledging whiteness to themselves or others, they are well adept at keeping such awareness hidden—especially from themselves. Given the real costs—both social and personal—of acknowledging one's whiteness, whites deny whiteness: they deny they are privileged by whiteness and they deny there is whiteness.

Rather than argue that whiteness is invisible, I will argue that it is *closeted*. Making use of discussions of the closet found in gay studies literature, I will argue that the whiteness is not innocent racism, but instead is closeted racism. Further, I will argue that whiteness is not sincerely innocent racism, but is a pretense of innocent racism. While the white closet makes it difficult for whites to acknowledge their whiteness, it does not make it impossible. Thus, though closeted, whites can and should be held morally accountable for the acts of racism they commit. Before defending these claims, I want to analyze the accounts of whiteness as innocent racism more fully.

I. Whiteness as Innocent Racism

What is whiteness? Consider the following claims made by Martha Mahoney:

Whites have difficulty perceiving whiteness, both because of its cultural prevalence and because of its cultural dominance...What we ourselves do and think does not appear to us to be "culture," but rather appears to be the definition of what is normal and neutral, like the air we breathe, transparent from our perspective. Like culture, race is something whites notice in themselves only in relation to others. Privileged identity requires reinforcement and maintenance, but protection against seeing the mechanisms that socially reproduce and maintain privilege is an important component of the privilege itself.⁵

According to Mahoney, whiteness gives whites the privilege to define themselves and to define others in terms of themselves. Whites are "normal," non-whites are the abnormal (the "exotics"). Richard Fung claims that, while blacks are burdened with the racist stereotype of being *oversexual*, Asians must deal with the racist stereotype of being *undersexual*. Only whites have a normal, "healthy" sexuality.⁶ But sexuality is not the only area in which whites get it "just right." Blacks are intellectual inferiors—they are overly emotional, lazy, thieving welfare cheats who are always looking for a handout. Asians are cunning, bookish, unemotional liars who are solely out to cut whites out of the market. (American Indians have the strange privilege of being defined as both highly spiritual and deceitful, lazy drunks. So they occupy both ends of the abnormality spectrum.) Why do whites see themselves as normal? Because, according to

Mahoney, their culture is transparent to them—“like the air we breathe.” In fact, to whites, whiteness is not a *culture* at all, but simply what *is*.

The transparency of whiteness to whites is an essential feature of whiteness—but why? What is the connection between whiteness and the inability to see oneself as being raced? The answer to that is found in Peter McLaren’s account of whiteness. He writes:

Whiteness constitutes and demarcates ideas, feelings, knowledge, social practices, cultural formations, and systems of intelligibility that are identified with or attributed to white people and that are invested in by white people as “white.” Whiteness is a refusal to acknowledge how white people are implicated in certain social relations of privilege and relations of domination and subordination. Whiteness, then, can be considered as a form of *social amnesia* associated with certain modes of subjectivity within particular social sites considered to be normative.⁷

Both whites and non-whites are continuously inundated with white images—on television, in films, in fashion. Non-whites, from the earliest age, have to resolve the tensions between their race identity and whiteness. Whites experience no such conflict. Pop culture images inform whites how it is and how it ought to be—insofar as a white person identifies with mainstream culture, that person can identify with mainstream cultural images. When whites do encounter other races, they do so only on their own terms—as non-whites are defined in television sit-coms, in movies, and in novels.⁸

Not only does whiteness keep whites from ever having to see themselves from another’s viewpoint, whites labor under the idea that others do not even think about whites. bell hooks makes this point:

Since most white people do not have to “see” black people (constantly appearing on billboards, television, movies, in magazines, etc.) and they do not need to be ever on guard, observing black people, to be “safe,” they can live as though black people are invisible and can imagine that they are also invisible to blacks. Some white people may even imagine there is no representation of whiteness in the black imagination, especially one that is based on concrete observation or mythic conjecture; they think they are seen by black folks only as they want to appear.⁹

Blacks and other non-whites could provide whites with important insight into the truth about the social relations between races and the effects of whiteness, yet because non-whites only exist in white society in ways congenial to whiteness, whites do not hear this viewpoint. Blacks, according to hooks, are not even whole individuals but instead are props occasionally sprinkled throughout white experience to give whites a sense of integration and social well-being. The existence of these blacks allows whites to reassure themselves that they are not racists. Thus blacks are

not permitted to highlight the inherent racism of whiteness, but instead are used to underscore its goodness.

Whiteness as innocent racism became vividly clear to me the first time I taught race theory. I introduced the section on racism by asking the students to identify the most common racist stereotypes for each of the non-white races. The images were pretty horrific. I then asked them to think of the racist stereotypes about whites they had heard. After giggling for a bit (they did not giggle when I asked them to describe non-white race stereotypes), they suggested: whites can't jump, can't dance, have no rhythm, are "uptight." They ran out of white racist stereotypes within a few seconds.¹⁰ When I pointed out that, given human nature, it seems implausible—if not fantastic—to suppose a person told that she and her loved ones are liars, thieves, drunks, over-sexed animals and criminally negligent parents could not come up with notions more hostile than "can't dance" or "can't jump," the white students were nonplussed. One said, "I suppose. But I never thought about it." Whiteness means never having to think about whiteness.

In sum, whiteness as a social construct has three kinds of characteristics. The first is *economic*: whiteness is economic privilege together with all the educational, medical and cultural advantages that money brings. Whites are physically safer in that they are less likely to be the victims of violent crimes or harmed by environmental hazards than are non-whites. The second is *social*: it means defining oneself and others in terms of one's own interests; having the option to ignore non-whites or experiment with non-white imagery as one wishes. One can "slum it" (by listening to rap or reggae music, using "street" slang, wearing dreadlocks) and then, at the end of the day, retreat safely into the "good" and "safe" (white) neighborhoods. The third is *moral*: whiteness is "innocence;" whites profess to abhor racism and consider the term racist a most offensive insult, they consider their parents, but not themselves, to be racists; they claim to be "color blind," saying, "I don't see colors, I just see people." But to be color blind is to fail to see one's own color and the role one's own color plays in sustaining racist ideology in this society. When the fact of racism is pointed out to whites, "social amnesia" (to use McLaren's term) kicks in: they fail to connect the racism to themselves, seeing it instead as an abstract force that works independently of their particular lives or, if they do see how they are implicated, those implications are "forgotten" later as they receive yet more social privileges from whiteness. Mahoney, McLaren and hooks all explain the prevalence and seeming intractability of whiteness in terms of its invisibility.

I think there is much to be said for this conception of whiteness. Language, religion, culture, and class are a part of whiteness only contingently,

but political and social standing are essential features of whiteness. To be white is to be privileged; to be an under-privileged white is to be “white trash”—a pejorative bestowed upon those who are white in skin color only.¹¹ However, despite the initial appeal of this account, I find conceiving of whiteness as innocent racism deeply troubling. If whites cannot see their relative privilege or conveniently “forget” the fact that social privilege necessarily comes at the expense of the under-privileged, how can they be blamed when they perpetuate whiteness, which is by definition racist and morally indefensible? In short, they cannot.

Not only is the “invisibility” metaphor dangerous, I think it misdescribes ordinary events in which whites reveal their full awareness of the existence of and their participation in whiteness. Consider this hypothetical situation Professor Hacker presents to his students: “One day you receive a phone call from the government informing you that a terrible mistake has been made: You were supposed to have been born black. It will now be necessary to rectify that mistake—a painless operation will be performed and you will be transformed into what you were always intended to be. The government is prepared, however, to compensate you for the mistake. How much is a fair price?” Professor Hacker reports that he has asked this same question over the years and that the answer remains stable—one million dollars a year.¹² This anecdote wonderfully reveals that, despite claims to the contrary, these students are *not* mindlessly unaware of their privileged social position. How else can we explain the fact that white students would consistently demand one million dollars in “compensation” for becoming black, unless they realize that to cease to be white is to be worse off? Of course, we cannot read too much into this anecdote for important details are omitted. We do not know how many students Hacker asked, or the economic background of these students. We do not know if or how much compensation black students would demand for being turned white. But the case does show that whites do not for one minute “not see skin color, but just people,” as many profess. If they really just saw people, why on earth would they demand compensation for being a person of different color? Obviously any dramatic change in one’s appearance is shocking and takes some getting used to. But I am doubtful that a change in height or hair color or eye color would *consistently* produce similar demands for a million dollars compensation.¹³ Thus I think whites are very much aware of the privileges of whiteness but are loathe to acknowledge it directly because of the personal and social inconvenience of doing so.

II. A Different Metaphor: The White Closet

Michael Eric Dyson, discussing recent work by race theorists who have critically analyzed whiteness, uses the metaphor of the closet to support his claim that whiteness studies is an increasingly popular area of study:

Whiteness has been “outed,” and as a consequence of its outing, it has to contend with its own genealogy as one ethnicity among other ethnicities, as one race among other races. We are now seeing a proliferation of ideas, articles, books, plays, and conferences that question the meanings and significations of whiteness. As part of that process, we’ve got to understand what whiteness has meant and to specify what it can or should mean in the coming century.¹⁴

Although a discussion of the future of whiteness is beyond the scope of this paper, I think the “whiteness as a closet” metaphor is worth examining further. Its value is not that it simplifies discussions of whiteness as innocent racism, but that it complicates them—in all the right ways.¹⁵

For decades gay studies theorists have used the metaphor of the closet to describe the phenomenon of homosexuals and bisexuals keeping their sexual orientation hidden. Because non-heterosexuality is so intensely reviled in this society, homosexuals and bisexuals have compelling reasons to keep their sexual desires and activities secret from disapproving heterosexuals. But the closet not only keeps heterosexuals ignorant of homosexuality, it can keep homosexuals ignorant of their own homosexuality. Thus, it is not unusual to hear people claim that someone is “so far in the closet” that he does not even realize he is homosexual. Consider the man who, married with two children, regularly criticizes anything stereotypically homosexual—men behaving effeminately, dressing in pastel clothes, being physically intimate with other men—and regularly calls insufficiently masculine men “fags” and “pansies.” This man also, unbeknownst to his wife and children, visits gay bars every Friday night and picks up or pays young men to have oral and anal sex with him. This man’s intense hatred of homosexuality coupled with his need to be acceptable—both to himself and others—gives him ample reason to live in the closet.

The metaphor of the closet is extended to include the moment when homosexuals come “out” either to themselves and/or others. To say one is out of the closet is to say that one’s sexual orientation is no longer hidden, but is on public display for others to see. Of course, this is not to say that out homosexuals are engaging in public acts of sex. Rather, it is their orientation that is public. Thus, they mention the existence of their lovers, the sex of their lovers, their dating experiences, they engage in public acts of affection; basically, they engage in all the public sexual acts that heterosexuals engage in.

Yet so far this discussion of the closet has been overly simplistic. First, as gay studies theorists have noted, it is not necessarily the case that one is entirely in the closet or entirely out of the closet. One can be “out” to oneself, but no one else. One can come out to a few friends, a few lovers or a few strangers. One can come out to all friends and family only, but not to one’s workmates or to strangers. Thus being out or in the closet admits of *degrees*.

Second, the nature of one’s relationship to the closet is not always entirely clear—either to oneself or others. Does the fact that a person has homosexual fantasies necessarily mean that that person is homosexual? What if the person has engaged in homosexual sex acts, such as our married man, mentioned earlier, who frequents gay bars but has mixed feelings about those encounters? Suppose the encounters are sexually satisfying, but not emotionally satisfying? Suppose one regularly engages in both heterosexual and homosexual sex—is one a bisexual, an experimenting heterosexual or *really* a homosexual who has not “come out” yet? Clearly there is no one right or wrong answer since the individuals and the contexts in which they find themselves are so widely varied. What is one’s relationship to the closet if one goes to a gay bar or attends a gay pride march or participates in that march or wears a gay pride t-shirt? What *exactly* is the meaning of going to a gay bar? Given that a person’s intentions for any action are complex and multiple and the meaning others attribute to those actions are complex and multiple, a person’s relationship to the homosexual closet is likewise complex and multiple.

Third, since the closet is, in part at least, created by the beliefs and attitudes of others, whether or not one is out depends on the attitudes and beliefs of others. If a person wears his pink triangle t-shirt in the middle of Smalltown, U.S.A. and no one in that town has the slightest idea what that pink triangle symbolizes, he hasn’t “come out” to anyone. On the other hand, wearing that same t-shirt on a large, urban university campus has a far larger significance. To ensure that one is out in Smalltown, U.S.A., one may have to engage in quite explicit homosexual behaviors. Otherwise, one may find oneself put back into the closet despite efforts to come out. Thus, one’s relationship to the closet is not entirely within one’s control but importantly depends on the attitudes and beliefs of others.

What is the nature of the white closet? It is to regard one’s skin color as merely biological, and having no social import or political significance. It is to deny that one is advantaged by being white. It is to deny having benefited from (and continuing to benefit from) the institution of black slavery by claiming that one’s ancestors immigrated to the States after World War I and faced economic hardships themselves.

Just as the homosexual closet is complex, the white closet is complex. First, even if whiteness is “out,” as Dyson claims, it is not necessarily the case

that it is *completely* public and *entirely* visible. One can, at one moment, realize the privileges of whiteness (perhaps after acknowledging the import of the claim that one would demand a million dollars a year compensation for being turned into a black person) yet go back into the closet when the topic of affirmative action or state assistance comes up. And, just as leaving the homosexual closet admits of degrees, leaving the white closet admits of degrees. Certainly some are far more aware of whiteness than others and, therefore, those who have left the white closet may be perceived as out by some but not others. One can be out with one's closest family and friends, but slip back in at work, when promotions and job security are at stake. It is easiest to pass as white among strangers—given the enormous social pressure to remain closeted, very few whites are *rude* enough to reject white privilege at a public event. The white closet is multiple and complex and the success of one's attempts to leave the closet depend on the beliefs of others. To the extent that others are aware of the white closet and the mechanisms of coming "out," one is better able to get and stay out.

There are many important disanalogies between the homosexual closet and the white closet but the most striking concerns the reason why the closets are constructed. The homosexual closet is constructed by heterosexuals who, for moral and religious reasons, disapprove of or disdain homosexuality. Homosexuals are closeted—both from themselves and others—to provide heterosexuals with a comfort that results from not having to tolerate that which they despise. The socially privileged are closeting the underprivileged. However, the white closet is constructed by whites *for whites*. As hooks argued, non-whites are aware of the nature of whiteness. So, again motivated by a desire to be comfortable and avoid confronting their responsibility for social injustices perpetuated by whiteness, those who are socially privileged closet themselves. Although I think we ought to tolerate a homosexual's desire to remain closeted to avoid the costs of coming out, given the relative privilege whites enjoy in this society, I am unwilling to extend this same tolerance to those who remain in the white closet.¹⁶ Of course coming out of the white closet has its costs.¹⁷ It may mean a loss of social standing and political power. It will certainly mean facing up to the moral wrongs one has committed as well as the wrongs one's ancestors have committed. It will also mean implicating fellow whites for their part in the racist ideology of this society. To borrow Noel Ignatiev and John Garvey's phrase, it will mean being a *race traitor*. But I think it is the only way whiteness as it is currently constructed can be dismantled and this facet of racism brought to an end.

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Notes

1. Excellent philosophical analyses of race and racism are numerous. Here are a few: *Race and Racism*, ed. Bernard Boxill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); *Critical Race Theory*, eds. Kimberle Crenshaw, Neil Gotanda, Gary Peller, Kendall Thomas (New York: The New Press, 1995); *Critical Race Theory*, ed. Richard Delgado (Philadelphia, Penn.: Temple University Press, 1995); *Anatomy of Racism*, ed. David Theo Goldberg (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1990); *Racist Culture*, David Theo Goldberg (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1993); *Racism*, ed. Leonard Harris (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1999); *The Invention of Race*, Tommy L. Lott (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999); *Blackness Visible*, Charles Mills (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).
2. As with discussions of race and racism, there are excellent philosophical analyses of whiteness. For just a few, see: *Whiteness*, eds. Chris Cuomo and Kim Hall (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999); *Critical White Studies*, eds. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (Philadelphia, Penn.: Temple University Press, 1997); *Displacing Whiteness*, ed. Ruth Frankenberg (Durham Virginia: Duke University Press, 1997); Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters*, (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); *Whiteness*, ed. Mike Hill (New York: New York University Press, 1997); *Race Traitor*, eds. Noel Ignatiev and John Garvey (New York: Routledge, 1996).
3. Although the United States Supreme Court declared state prohibitions on interracial marriages unconstitutional in 1967 with *Loving v. Virginia*, statistics on interracial marriages have remained relatively constant in the past three decades. As of the year 2000, only 2.9 percent of all marriages in the United States were interracial. (See *New York Times*, April 30, 2000.) A study of 107 cities in the United States conducted by the University of Michigan found that over a third of the cities had "extreme" levels of black isolation. The three primary reasons offered to explain racial segregation are housing discrimination, poverty, and self-segregation. Perhaps even more disturbing, the study revealed that the other cities studied, though less extremely segregated, were only "slightly less" segregated than in the late 1960s, when the federal government passed laws intended to eliminate housing discrimination. *Detroit News*, November 5, 1999.
4. See *Washington Post*, March 1, 1998.
5. Martha R. Mahoney, "The Social Construction of Whiteness," *Critical White Studies*, eds. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, (Philadelphia, Penn.: Temple University Press, 1997), 331.
6. Richard Fung, "Just Looking For My Penis: The Eroticized Asian in Gay Video Porn," *Asian American Sexualities*, ed. Russell Leong, (New York: Routledge, 1995), 181–198.
7. Peter McLaren, "Whiteness Is..." *White Reign: Deploying Whiteness In America*, eds. Kinchloe, Steinberg, Rodriguez and Chennault. (New York: St. Martin's, 2000), 66; emphasis added.

8. Both Jimmie Durham and Ward Churchill have written about the phenomenon of white writers and artists posing as “real Indians.” Not too surprisingly, they are hugely successful while American Indian artists remain largely unknown. See Jimmie Durham, “Cowboys and...” in *The State of Native America*, ed. M. Annette Jaimes (Boston, Mass.: South End Press, 1992) and Ward Churchill, *Fantasies of the Master Race* (San Francisco, Calif.: City Lights Books, 1998).
9. bell hooks, “Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination,” *Displacing Whiteness*, ed. Ruth Frankenberg, 168–169.
10. This class was taught in Arkansas in 1997. The students in the class self identified as either white or black. The few black students in the class were enthusiastic participants when listing non-white racist images (especially black stereotypes), but they opted out of the discussion when it turned to a discussion of whites.
11. White trash is a fascinating sub-theme of whiteness, one that is explored interestingly and intelligently in *White Trash: Race and Class in America*, eds. Matt Wray and Annalee Newitz (New York: Routledge, 1996).
12. This example originally appeared in Andrew Hacker’s *Two Nations* (1992). I discovered it in *Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror*, eds. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefaniec. (Philadelphia, Penn.: Temple University Press, 1997), 47.
13. I have no doubt whatsoever that people would demand compensation for being changed from a slender person to an obese person or from an able-bodied person to a disabled person. But that just shows that people are likewise fully aware of the disadvantages “overweight” and disabled people experience in this society.
14. Ronald E. Chennault, “Giving Whiteness a Black Eye: An Interview with Michael Eric Dyson,” *White Reign: Deploying Whiteness In America*, eds. Kinchloe, Steinberg Rodriguez, and Chennault (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), 303.
15. I am not arguing that the whiteness closet has been constructed for the same reasons as the homosexual closet has. One was constructed to keep unaccepted people hidden away, whereas the other has been constructed to protect the privileged from having to face terrible truths of their own actions. Rather, the point of the analogy is to focus on matters of authenticity and moral accountability.
16. I agree with Jim Stramel’s claim that being a closeted homosexual is not, as Richard Mohr asserts, necessarily an undignified existence and that, while we ought to (gently) encourage homosexuals to come out, we should certainly respect their (perhaps) perfectly reasonable decisions to remain in the closet. See “Coming Out, Outing and the Right to Privacy,” in *Race, Gender and Sexuality*, ed. Jami Anderson (Prentice Hall, 2002).
17. Incidents of whites who came out of the white closet and were subsequently assaulted by whites are mentioned in *Race Traitor*. The assailants were, it is supposed, threatened by actions they perceived to be direct rejections of themselves and their values.