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HOW WHITES PLAY THEIR RACE CARD: DRYLONGSO STORIES REVEAL "THE GAME"

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ABSTRACT: This article analyzes the "self-portrait" rendered through interviews with blacks in John Langston Gwaltney's *Drylongso* to highlight a theory of whiteness and race from the standpoint of "drylongso"—meaning ordinary—blacks. The game metaphor that emerges in Gwaltney's ethnography is extended in this analysis to further our understanding of the privileged position of whites and the strategies undertaken by diverse "players" to defend it. The "game" begins with the assignment of a race card to whites, one that grants them access to a life that is different from that of blacks, who are dealt a low card that consigns them to the role of a "losing player." Gwaltney's ethnography and this game metaphor provide a means for ongoing analyses of continuity and change among blacks, of "whiteness," of white privilege, and of white racism.

I'd be a fool if I thought that army was our army. If it's my army and guard and navy and all that, will you tell me why it was shooting at me here a few years ago? If anybody can be the President, why all them dudes look like they do? If you could see the money, you see that there just are none of us on it! It's their money, jus like it's their country and their damned army and their damned post office and their damned everything else. Ain't nothing ours but us and they tried to say we didn't even own ourself. . . . We all know how it is, so why do we have to pretend all this home-of-the-brave and land-of-the-free bullshit? . . . *It's all a bullshit game, but I can't figure out why they have to play it all the time.*

—John Langston Gwaltney, *Drylongso* (1981)

This article calls attention to John Langston Gwaltney's recently reissued *Drylongso: A Self-Portrait of Black America*, a collection of interviews with "drylongso"—black English for "ordinary"—blacks. Gwaltney argues that "[f]rom these narratives . . . it is evident that black people are building theory on every conceivable level." What emerges is an overarching theory anchored in the life stories told by blacks who consider themselves drylongso representatives of what Gwaltney calls "core black culture," which has a profound "sense of nationhood . . . not rooted in territoriality so much as . . . in a profound belief in [its] fitness . . . and in the solidarity

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born of a transgenerational detestation of subordination" (1981:xxvii). A central feature in these stories is black subordination by whites and the meanings black subjects ascribe to their interactions with whites, often described through the metaphor of a game. They know the "bullshit game" John Oliver describes above in the epigraph, and their stories reveal myriad practices that sustain it. Blacks hold, by virtue of a low card, what Fanon (1967) described as "a losing hand." They are born into a game already under way, one that promotes white supremacy and white privilege through the oppression of blacks. They have been forced into societal membership, ironically, as excluded members. Gwaltney (1981:xxix) argues that it is this irony that promotes their "double consciousness," a concept developed by Du Bois (1903) to convey the dual sense of belonging and not belonging that pervades black lives.

The game metaphor that emerges in this collection furthers our understanding of the privileged position of whites and their strategies for defending it. It renders white privilege as a set of rights attached to whiteness and maintained through the deployment of white racism under a set of rules that shift according to the whims of whites in power. Thus it is not black people who play a rAce card to their advantage, as is commonly inferred in dominant discourses. In these *Drylongso* accounts, the game is rigged so that blacks are the guaranteed losers; it is whites who hold a rAce card that trumps all cards dealt to blacks by conferring privileged access to power, freedom, and rights.

Gwaltney's ethnography and the game metaphor I draw from it have significance in two major ways. First, the ethnography is unique because its portrait of core black culture in a particular region and period gives value to that culture, situates it in a tradition of resistance and self-determination extending back to slavery, and establishes the importance of the biographies of drylongso people. As such, it forms an important benchmark for contemporary critical ethnographies, by providing a means for analyzing continuity and change in black culture, identity, and ethos in diverse qualitative studies. Second, Gwaltney's thematic use of the game metaphor provides a useful means to assess "whiteness studies," and the sociology of race and racism, and to do so from the standpoint of people who grapple daily with racial hegemony in the United States.

SITUATING GWALTNEY: "NATIVE" ETHNOGRAPHY AND CORE BLACK CULTURE

Gwaltney conducted a series of group interviews and gathered individual life histories in homes and barbershops and taverns and churches of urban black communities in the Northeast during the Watergate era. He did so as a self-described "native anthropologist," based on Fanon's definition of "native" as "subordinate, dark and poor" (Gwaltney 1981:xxx). Thus he situated himself within the same cultural traditions described in *Drylongso* and linked his work to the anticolonialism of black and Third World liberation movements. His goal was to counter traditional "standard social science" misrepresentations of blacks by presenting a "self-portrait of core black culture" (p. xxii), that is, among working blacks with stable families, that was lacking in what he called "street-corner exotica." He

sought to be the vehicle for the transmission of images of ordinary black people who adhered to the standards of core black culture.

Most of the women and men whom Gwaltney interviewed considered themselves poor, but their occupations ranged from domestics to factory workers to teachers. Gwaltney describes a receptive stance toward his project based on familiarity (some subjects had known him all his life) and/or on racial solidarity. However, this stance was coupled with suspicion of studies in the social sciences because of "the actual function they serve, not . . . their intrinsic value" (p. xxix). These were people who felt that the problem of race and racism should be at the center, not at the margins, of social science. Suspicion, as described in the interviews in this collection, is also a general stance blacks take toward white social institutions, in keeping with the values of core black culture. Despite this, Gwaltney's ethnographic work was furthered by the women who hosted him and his interviewees with homemade meals in the comfort of their homes. He also mentions that, as a blind man, people were inclined to view him sympathetically.

Gwaltney's ethnography was heralded by some scholars for his restraint in interpreting the words of his subjects and for letting their words take center stage, but this praise was accompanied by the desire for fuller analysis (Kennedy 1982; Stewart 1982). In fact, his analysis of the interviews is confined to a nine-page introduction. Gwaltney's work was also viewed as part of a current that was generating new forms of ethnography opposed to colonial modes of research (Messerschmidt 1981). Moreover, Gwaltney's presentation was viewed as a significant step beyond "romanticized presentations" of black street life and toward explications of core black culture as the province of mainstream blacks (Hall 1983:92). The work of this black anthropologist in his own community and taking a purposefully political stance toward his research was part of the movement among scholars of color to contest the traditional methods of "white" social science practice and its guise of value neutrality. They advocated research that reflected people's diverse perspectives on their own experiences, instead of refracting them through the lens of a white social science that too often produced blacks and their social institutions as pathological or explained blacks' social conditions as the product of group deficits.

These scholars, influenced by movement ideologies, thus contested mainstream approaches to research on blacks and suggested alternatives in a discourse framed by those liberation movements. For example, in her anthology, *The Death of White Sociology*, Ladner (1972:xxvi) argued that "black sociologists must act as advocates of the demands the masses are making for freedom, justice and the right to determine their destinies." Furthermore, she charged black sociologists with the task developing theory to end race and class oppression (1972:xxvii). In this anthology black and white scholars made clear connections among identity politics, self-determination, liberation, and the development of an anticolonial sociology based on advocacy, not on reproducing the status quo.

Similar developments occurred among feminist scholars. For example, Smith (1979) called for researchers to engage women's standpoints in the context of their "everyday lives" to reveal the "relations of ruling" located therein. The concept of standpoint has since been further adapted to more general usage, for considerations

of how social locations in a system of unequal power relations and group positions correspond with common sets of experiences, creating a common standpoint (Collins 1998). Gwaltney's portraits of the everyday lives of blacks, in which white racism is the centerpiece, share important philosophical and political concerns with this approach.

Gwaltney's ethnographic collection, then, is striking for being the work of a "native" researcher who shares a group position, culture, and standpoint with his subjects. However, it is also important as a rare collection of portraits of a diverse group of black people who consider themselves "ordinary." This work is part of a black scholarly tradition that extends back to Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* ([1903] 1997) and that asserts connections to a black history, group position, and cultural legacy based on resistance and the quest for self-determination.

DRYLONGSO AND WHITENESS STUDIES

In the 1970s and early 1980s, women of color, particularly black women, challenged the whiteness of feminist scholarship and liberation models and called for a more diverse reading of gender across the boundaries of race, culture, sexuality, and class (hooks 1981; Hull, Bell Scott, and Smith 1982; Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981). They offered new readings of gender as a structure that was itself raced and classed to counter tendencies toward universalism in feminist studies based primarily on the experiences of white, heterosexual, middle-class women. A related aspect of this movement was the call for scholars to understand that *everyone* has a race (designation), class (designation), gender (designation), and sexuality (designation). Furthermore, if processes of race, class, and gender construction are fundamental to reproducing oppression, we need to examine the production of privilege.

This development attacked colonial practices among mainstream social science researchers that led them to view the victims of oppression as harbingers of social problems, so that when race and racism were investigated, it was in terms of the deficits of racial minorities. When sexism was investigated, it focused on the deficits of women; and when classism was investigated, it focused on the deficits of poor people. The new scholarship called for an investigation of privilege and the practices that maintained and reproduced it to the disadvantage of Others. This mirrored the challenge radical activists of color in the 1960s and 1970s gave their white supporters: to explore their own communities, from the boardrooms to the suburbs, and forgo the practice of solely examining "victims" of oppression.

One white academic who responded to this call was Peggy McIntosh, a professor of women's studies, with her celebrated article, "Unpacking the Knapsack of White Privilege" (1988). By the late 1990s, a "new" scholarship on "whiteness" was proclaimed. It proposed to study whiteness "critically" and, by so doing, to redeem whiteness, to destabilize it, or even to abolish it.

Now white scholars and racial justice activists are collectively responding to the call. Several conferences have been organized to address "whiteness" since 1996: at the Center for the Study of Whiteness and White American Culture in New Jersey in fall 1996 (and annually since then); at the University of California, Berkeley, in spring 1997; at the Claremont Colleges in spring 1998; and at the University of

California, Riverside, in spring 1998. Yet this “whiteness” work is quite varied and does not always situate whiteness in the production of privilege and exploitation through a system of oppression. In fact, as a black attendee at a white whiteness conference (on the white Berkeley campus), I was struck by the absence of people of color on a panel of experts and noted publicly, “It concerns me that, you know, we have a white panel of white scholars using white standards to investigate whiteness” (CNN 1997). It concerned me that white scholars were already promoted as expert knowers of a phenomenon—whiteness—that I had been forced to navigate around and through since I boarded the school bus for kindergarten in New England amid taunts of “nigger.” As Fanon (1967:109) notes in the opening lines of his chapter, “The Fact of Blackness”—“‘Dirty nigger!’ Or simply, ‘Look, a Negro!’”—it did not seem to me that whites had ever been forced to see the gaze returned.

Despite these suspicions about whites’ studies of whiteness born of a black cultural tradition, it is important to note that since the denial of racism, or total silencing of any derivative of the “r” word, is pivotal to white culture, that some white scholars have begun to end this denial by engaging in whiteness studies is still a significant turn of events. At the same time, these studies must be consistently assessed from the standpoint of the oppressed for their contribution to the elimination of racism. As Apple argues in the foreword to *White Reign*: “We must be on our guard to ensure that a focus on whiteness doesn’t become one more excuse to recenter dominant voices and to ignore the voices and testimony of those groups of people whose dreams, hopes, lives, and very bodies are shattered by current relations of exploitation and domination” (Kincheloe et al. 1998:xi).

Whiteness, of course, had been theorized already by a range of black scholars. For example, Du Bois theorized whiteness in terms of material and ideological forms of racial oppression (see *The Philadelphia Negro* on class and race; and *The Souls of Black Folks* on notions of double consciousness and the veil). Fanon (1963, 1967) theorized racism as produced by colonial processes that construct a dual society of white colonizers and “colored” natives, wherein colonial thinking and practices precluded assimilation of the “native,” who seldom longed for it anyway. Instead of assimilation, he argued, only decolonization would bring liberation from oppression. Following Fanon, Carmichael and Hamilton (1967:4) furthered the analyses of racism by distinguishing individual and institutional racism. While noting that both were “destructive of human life,” they define individual racism as overt, whereas institutional racism “originates in the operation of established and respected forces in the society, and thus receives far less public condemnation than the first type” (p. 4). Again, the work of these black scholars can be located in a group position, legacy, and culture that resist domination. (Of course, there has also existed a parallel tradition among black scholars ranging from Booker T. Washington to Shelby Steele who argue that blacks need to change themselves to gain social acceptance and mobility.)

Literary scholars, perhaps less confined by rules of their discipline, had attacked the issue head-on—from Langston Hughes’s biting collection of short stories, *The Ways of White Folks* (1969), to Toni Morrison’s *Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992), which asserts the significance of white identity in American

culture, defined in contrast to and rejection of blackness. David Roediger, known for his work establishing the historical significance of white racial identity to the working-class people granted it, *The Wages of Whiteness* (1991), heralds the contributions of black scholars to the understanding of "what it means to be white" in his anthology of works in this tradition, *Black on White* (1998). Roediger agrees (1998:4) that "few Americans have ever considered the idea that African-Americans are extremely knowledgeable about whites and whiteness" (but he might have said "few *white* Americans" to aid the deconstruction of "American" as synonymous with "white").

The study of whiteness, as Roediger (1998) asserts, is central to black studies and incorporates an understanding of oppression and privilege, a history of violence and repression, and a long-standing struggle against these by blacks. Nevertheless, there is a coherent body of work that is increasingly recognized as "whiteness studies," and some aspects of this work, along with work in the tradition of antiracist and anticolonial studies, support the theoretical analyses rendered through the *Drylongso* stories. In particular, studies that equate white identity and classification with power and privilege correspond to the game that emerges from the *Drylongso* accounts. These reveal the ways that government practices produced wealth for whites while denying access to blacks (Oliver and Shapiro 1997; Sachs 2003), creating the rationale for a "possessive investment in whiteness" (Lipsitz 1998) and allowing maligned ethnics to earn "the wages of whiteness" by positioning themselves as not black, not servants, and to protect against fears of dependency by using a racial standard for each wave of immigrants, who would in turn have to earn the "wages of whiteness" by becoming white and adhering to an ideology of white supremacy (Roediger 1991). They reveal the ways in which race has structured social institutions to create processes for racial categorization under the law (Haney López 1996) wherein whiteness becomes a form of property (Harris 1998) that is denied to those defined as *not* white (Haney López 1996).

While these works trace the historical developments of the racial structuring of societal resources from property to identity, it is work on white racism, the means for maintaining this arrangement, that provides the most significant parallel to the *Drylongso* stories. In his *Portraits of White Racism* (1993), David Wellman provides support for the argument that considerations of white racism must be central to any understanding of the construction of whiteness. He defines white racism as "culturally sanctioned beliefs, which, regardless of the intentions involved, defend the advantages whites have because of the subordinated position of racial minorities" (p. xi). Like Gwaltney, Wellman engages in an ethnographic presentation of portraits. He is critical of research that does not locate racism in the arrangements of social institutions that produce racial privilege. The portraits drawn from his earlier book are updated in the second edition with focus groups composed of white middle-class students at Berkeley and white working-class youth in Bensonhurst. He finds that both sets of interviewees use "culturally sanctioned" ideologies such as meritocracy, among the college students, and neighborhood protection—through violence against blacks—among some of those in Bensonhurst, to defend the racial privilege that grants them access to scarce resources.

Similarly, Hacker (1992:22) says that "most white people prefer not to perceive

their nation and its major institutions as 'white' and consequently racist." However, when white students were presented with a parable in which a late-night visitor tells them that "at midnight tonight, [they] will become black" and with the question, "[How] much recompense would you request?" most students responded "that it would not be out of place to ask for \$50 million, or \$1 million for each coming black year" (Hacker 1992:32). This exercise suggests that whites are indeed aware of their privilege—their rAce card—and that their denial of privilege is, as *Drylongso* speakers note, a game strategy for maintaining white supremacy and the privilege system. This strategy falls under the rubric of white racism because it is deployed to maintain the social and material advantages of the rAce card whites hold, as presented in Wellman's (1993) studies and definition of white racism.

THE "GAME," ITS PLAYERS, AND THEIR STRATEGIES

In *Drylongso* interviewees often refer to the things whites do and the ways they behave in social interactions as a game. This metaphor has been noted as useful by other scholars. For example, Goffman suggested a game metaphor. In Manning's (1992:64–65) account of this, Goffman's "fieldwork persuaded him that everyday interaction has all the making of a zero-sum game." However, his later work on game metaphors moved to games that were based on trust, not zero-sum games. He suggested a casino analogy for understanding social interactions through "chance-taking" to get rewards. This was extended to other forms of games that could be played through a variety of "moves" by a variety of players seeking a variety of outcomes (Manning 1992:66–69).

Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) has also made use of the game metaphor, linking this to his notions of habitus and field, which refer to sets of relations. The field is "a set of objective, historical relations between positions anchored in forms of power (or capital) and habitus refers to "a set of historical relations 'deposited' within individual bodies in the form of mental and corporeal schemata of perception, appreciation and action" (p. 16). The field is both a "space of play" and a place of conflict analogous to a game:

We can indeed, with caution, compare a field to a game (*jeu*) although, unlike the latter a field is not the product of a deliberate act of creation, and it follows rules or, better regularities, that are not explicit and codified. Thus we have *stakes*[,] . . . the product of the competition between players[, and] . . . an *investment in the game* . . . to the extent that they concur in their belief in the game and its stakes. . . . Players agree, by the mere fact of playing . . . that the game is worth playing . . . and this collusion is the very basis of their competition. We also have *trump cards*, that is, master cards whose force varies depending on the game. . . . [T]heir relative value as trump cards is determined by each field and even by successive states of the same field. . . . [P]layers can play to increase or to conserve their capital . . . in conformity with the tacit rules of the game and the prerequisites of the reproduction of the game. (Pp. 98–100)

The game metaphor I develop here is drawn from an analysis of the interviews presented in *Drylongso*, cast here as a card game in which the structure of race in

society determines the cards one is dealt. Being granted what Harris (1998) describes as "the property of whiteness," I equate with being dealt a rAce card that acts as the Ace in the field of play—here I privilege race as central to the social arrangement. Since race is not the only form of capital (to borrow from Bourdieu), other high cards dealt symbolize class and gender, but these can always be trumped by the rAce card. The deuce is antithetical to the Ace and the lowest card in the deck; it dooms one to losing status automatically. Those given the rAce card also get a wild card that they can play against those dealt the deuce; this represents the right to engage in violence.

This is the game in U.S. society, and the point of play is to perpetuate white privilege and the lie that sustains it—the myth of white supremacy that accompanies the myth of meritocracy. The game began with play for material exploitation through violence, or as Hannah Nelson, one of Gwaltney's informants, says, "White greed and cruelty" (Gwaltney 1981:8). Jackson Jordan Jr. concurs that "the rifle and the dollar keep this game going" (p. 100). The game begins with the construction of difference through the dealing of different cards to different players. As defined in *Drylongso*, the key players include "big whites," the "average (poor) white man," the white woman—both "madam" and coworker, white children, "foreigners," and antiracist whites. In *Drylongso* accounts, white players are just playing a game. They hold the rAce card and the wild card, but they do not have to play them. The mode of play (racism) consists of declaring their skill in playing the game as the basis for their consistent pattern of winning. Big whites only lose to other big whites. Average (poor) whites think some day they will get other high cards (but they are deluded). White women know they have lower cards so they team up with white men to have a better hand than they would have alone. Blacks are forced into the game (the racialized society) with no high cards and handed a deuce. The ace is the most important card, so those blacks who get a high card (class or gender) may delude themselves that they are better than other blacks, but they will still lose out because they cannot win against someone who holds the rAce card and the deuce card dooms them.

In many of the *Drylongso* accounts, whites do not have to be adept players; they can be dumb about the game, but blacks have to know what's happening and pretend to be dumb, or go dumb. Bernard Vanderstell says that Whites "inherit a position of command" (Gwaltney 1981:116); this is the rAce card they all hold, their whiteness. The rhetorical strategy *Drylongso* speakers report whites using, denying their privilege either by never speaking of it or by verbal negation of it, lets them assert their skill as the basis for their superior social positions. This can be analyzed as a defense of privilege that is culturally sanctioned (Wellman 1993). Their rAce card, accompanied by a wild card, sanctions absolute barbarism, which, though seldom reported by whites, is central to the reported experiences of blacks in this collection of interviews. Whites see themselves as "knowers" and blacks as ignorant, but blacks see whites as ignorant and themselves as "knowers." One of the things blacks are clear on is that whites are holding a better hand that was dealt to them because they are white; they didn't have to earn it or play for it. They use the concept of "playing" as a metaphor for denying relations of power. Alberta Roberts says:

When it comes to playing, your white man wrote the book. Look at this Watergate mess. Now, that is nothing but men playing and not being able to see that that is precisely what they are doing. . . . Play is pretending that what's out here is not really out here. If you are black you just cannot make it like that because we can't buy our way out of things or make somebody say that square is round. (Gwaltney 1981:105–6)

In my game metaphor, the cards dealt also dictate forms of play. You have to hold the rAce card to be able to define reality for others. The high-powered presentations of “weapons of mass destruction” that were used to define a social reality of urgency and defend the drive to war are contemporary examples of the “Watergate mess” to which Alberta Roberts refers.

Jackson Jordan Jr. suggests that there is nothing essential about the players, but it is the cards they are dealt that dictate the forms of play they will engage:

White men are different from us because they have had to live different kinds of lives. If we had to live their lives, then we would be the kind of people they are. If they were living our lives, then they would have to be careful what they say. They would have to depend upon themselves. They would have to be ready to do three or four or more things, depending on how we felt. . . . I cannot swear that we wouldn't have been just as weak and selfish if power had been ours. (Gwaltney 1981:100–101)

Ruth Shays likens the production of racial difference to that of gender so that we understand that gender cards also affect the forms of play:

Like I told you, it is life that makes all these differences, not nature. . . . [L]ife gets hold you soon as you leave your mother. That is what makes the difference between the whites and the blacks, just like it separates the men and the women. (Gwaltney 1981:33, 36)

Only a few, such as Howard Roundtree, base racial difference on biology, and when they do, they tend to mix racist notions of whiteness with a sense of it as socially created. Thus Roundtree links the “whitefolks'” inability to do right to “their blood,” but sees this inability originating with the European conquest of North America:

Whitefolks can't do right even if there was one who wanted to. I think it must have something to do with their blood too. They are so damn greedy and cheap that it even hurts them to try to do right! And they didn't just get that way, either. They have been that way ever since they have been here. (Gwaltney 1981:59)

In a similar vein, Erica Allen presents her uncle's essentialist notion of whites and the contradiction with the fact that he is a black who “looks white”:

My uncle is a preacher and he says that white people are born evil. . . . [W]hen you say “the wicked,” you have said “the white race.” He cannot stand white people and although he is a man with good common sense most of the time, you cannot make him see reason about this race thing. He looks as white as any white person, but you'd better not tell him that unless you are ready to go to war. (Gwaltney 1981:73–74)

Most common among *Drylongso* participants are analyses that render whiteness as negative and in opposition to blackness but base these associations of whiteness on the differences resulting from the hands people are dealt in the "game" of racial privilege. While they decry white supremacy, they sometimes refuse to participate in a comparable racialist analysis, as seen in the following words of Clifford Yancy:

Your white man might be a little weaker, but that's just because they generally have easier work. I think they are probably as smart as we are because I have seen them doing any kind of work that any of us can do. (Gwaltney 1981:158)

Central to the production of racial difference is the granting of the rAce card to those counted as white in society. Whiteness has been linked to freedom and adulthood, says Ruth Shays, allowing players holding the rAce card latitude in their styles of play:

They say, "I'm free, white and twenty-one." They used to say that thing at the dropping of any old hat. Now, to them that mean that they could say or do anything they might want to do and it was all right. Now blackfolks don' have no such saying as that. (Gwaltney 1981:37)

To *Drylongso* speakers, when the game grants someone the rAce card it carries with it the freedom to do what you want; in contrast, blackness is the pawn with the deuce who must do what white people dictate. As Sims Patricks puts it, "You and me are supposed to do what they say do and they are supposed to do what they feel like doing. That's how this country, and the world too, really runs" (Gwaltney 1981:110). Possession of the rAce card is also equated with American identity (p. 6): "White people think of themselves as just a part of a great nation and a tradition. There is a feeling among whites that the police and the President and the governor and the priest and hundreds of other people and things are upholding them." This bespeaks an investment in the game, expressed as loyalty to others who share a group position based on racial privilege. Melvin Gabriel Wilmot notes that blacks do not have this: "Your white man think he is part of his country and they help each other in that. . . . [Y]our black man know that he is the only country that he has. . . . [H]e got to help hisself" (pp. 128–29). Those who got handed a deuce don't feel invested in the game. In other words, those granted subordinate status are more likely to be suspicious when new rules or ends are introduced into the game.

"To Bluff It out as Rulers": White Supremacy

The attachment of whiteness to greatness is revealed in the way history is traditionally retold in the United States. The whiteness of all the leading characters in "American history" need not be mentioned; it is simply the fact of their accomplishments, not their whiteness, that is celebrated, right? *Drylongso* speakers see a lie here and contest the idea of black inferiority inferred by white supremacy. Nancy White, for example, calls attention to the truth behind the lie: "Did you ever think that all these beautiful old houses was built by these slaves that wasn't

supposed to know doolesqua? Now how did they do that? Well, they must have known more than their masters tell us that they knew" (Gwaltney 1981:145).

When John Oliver discusses the myth of white supremacy, he does so in terms of white and black capabilities and asserts black superiority:

I can do anything that any white man can do. . . . I can do almost anything I can think of better than most white men I know. And if you think about it, you know that when it comes to most things, we are really better than they are. They think so too; that's why they have to go through so many changes to see that we don't get that even break. . . . [W]hite people are ordinary. . . . [N]o "twang." (Pp. 15–16)

Despite what blacks claim to "know," that their capacities are equal to (or greater than) those of whites, they say a mighty lie persists and drives the game. The lie is that the game is fair, that players do well depending on their own talents and skills, and that a meritocratic arrangement exists. In the context of such a lie, if whites are on top, it is by virtue of their superiority. This is white supremacy, broadly defined. It is used to justify the disproportionate prevalence of whites in leadership in politics, the economy, education, the courts, and the media. White supremacy shapes the way players conduct themselves: it allows whites to play with boldness, certain they will win over blacks; it buys the "big whites" loyalty from average and poor whites by giving them some Others to feel bigger than; it fosters an alliance between white men and women even though white women without access to the power and the "pocketbook" of white men are not considered any better off than blacks. The mythic character of white supremacy is the "truth" blacks don't mention to whites, the truth that whites never admit. Jackson Jordan Jr. argues:

One set of people have got to bluff it out as rulers and the others have got to keep ahead of these rulers, who are always unsure of themselves. That brings me to another very important difference between white and black people: white people are very unsure of themselves. . . . Every white person likes to think that he is . . . "a self-made man." . . . Now, the reason they were able to better themselves was that there was no huge weight of color prejudice holding them down. But we were supposed to think that it was their natural gifts which made them great. Now, back then, great meant rich. . . . We were supposed to look up to the Mellons and the Morgans. . . . [W]hite people, I think, did, but we didn't, or we didn't in the same way they did. For one thing, we knew that we would not be able to be the kind of rich men that they were. We also knew that no matter how much money we had, we would still have to be careful. (P. 99)

Bernard Vanderstell believes that white men buy into this myth to protect their privilege:

White men have inherited a position of command and that means that they cannot admit that anything is beyond them, so they must pretend to capabilities they do not possess. The more one pretends to know, the more one must do to convince oneself and others that these capacities are really there. (P. 116)

To maintain the notion that their privileged position was earned, whites keep themselves up by keeping others down; the idea of white supremacy that justifies

whites' actions to establish and maintain racial privilege must itself be served by action. Janet McCrae says the idea must be *made* "true" by actions that push whites up and blacks down:

People hate to admit that they don't know something, but that's not the worst thing. People like to think that nobody else can learn what they have learned. Now, that's just not true, but you can make it true by making it hard for people who don't know how to do a thing to learn how that thing is done. . . . More men are like that than women, I think. I think most white men are like that. (P. 125)

According to Howard Roundtree, a principal difference is that whites are "playing" and blacks cannot afford to play. White advantage is compounded by racial solidarity in defense of privileged access to social resources:

We can't play no games out here because we have to make it twenty times as well just to hang in. I have to do my job. I can't expect no check if I don't. I can't call up the man that owns the joint and cop no kind of plea. I didn't get this little shit slave because I was the friend of the friend of the man. But they don't say, "I got this or that because of who I know." That dude lies to me and him and tells me he's over me because of what he knows. (P. 60)

"Big White Men": Running the Game

Power relations can be understood as both embedded in and played through the hierarchy of players. *Drylongso* speakers say the game is run by "big white men" who control the other players with "the rifle and the dollar"—through force at all levels of society and through economic might. Big white men have the "sayso" and the "mojo": they have decision-making and speaking power. Thus, in addition to their rAce card, their "play" maintains their top position because they have other high cards—gender and class privilege—that trump the cards of lower classes of whites and of white women. What they decide is what happens, what they say goes. The rules of the game—the laws of society—are set up by them for them. Gordon Etheridge says, "Success in this world and all them others means digging that the rules are for honkies! It is the sign of power and the trick that gits it every time!" (Gwaltney 1981:231). The big whites are also privileged above poor whites because they fix the laws to benefit and maintain their class and race privilege, as Sims Patrick notes: "There are two kinds of whitefolks. A few live like they want to and the rest try to live like their big boss leaders. . . . [T]hey make believe that they made these laws and bibles for everybody, but they really just made them for the poor crackuh and the blacks" (p. 110).

These rules can change as whites dictate, according to John Oliver (pp. 15–16), who says "they keep changing the rules," and Ruth Shays, who says:

Just like the law don't mean what-I-won't-say to the President, it don't signify much to the rest of these big white men and their friends. I understand that. If you got the sayso you want to keep it whether you are right or wrong. That's why they have to keep changing the laws—so they don't unbenefit any of these big white men. All my life I have seen them do that. The law is whatever they feel like saying it should be. The law don't signify much to these big white

men. . . . They have the little punishments for the big men and the heavy chastisement for the poor. (P. 30)

The recent telecasts of Enron employees joking as they manipulated energy costs to the detriment of the customers and the failure, so far, to criminalize these actions provide both a stark contrast to California's Three Strikes law, which has led to locking up primarily blacks and Chicanos, and support for the continuing relevance of these statements.

As Avis Briar notes, the meanings of the rules whites create are fluid: "In life white men change things to suit them, so there is never a rule which means anything in itself. Those rules mean whatever the person making them up wants them to mean at any particular time" (Gwaltney 1981:192). In her discussion of how these rules affect blacks, Hannah Nelson stoically gauges their negative effects in the context of the inevitability of death: "If the whites were not killing everybody inch by inch a day at a time with their laws and their papers and their machines and their childishness, aches, age and foolishness would still carry us away" (p. 7).

Jonathan Melton offers a historical analysis of the sharecropping system that was accompanied by the development of Jim Crow practices. Here there was no need for formal lawmaking, only for a white man's word:

There was no need for courts because if the man said that you owed him, then the man's sheriff then and there proceeded to take you to jail, and that was just it. There was no court, you didn't have any lawyer. If he said you did this and you denied it, you got even more time. (P. 273)

Carolyn Chase's story illustrates the power of the white man's word:

[My father] bought and paid for that piano. He bought it from a white man and we had it for three weeks. . . . [T]he sheriff came and took legal possession of the piano and made my father and some other men move it back to the white man who had sold it. We never got our money back or any piano, either! My father always hated that, but he couldn't get his brothers to help him against the sheriff, and although he had risked death about the piano at least three times before, he was helpless the last time. (P. 57)

Some of the speakers in *Drylongso* take great care to establish the arbitrary assignment of meaning to the words of the white man. Clifford Yancy says whites insist on their innocence with respect to racism, but blacks' experiences suggest otherwise:

Almost all the white people I talk to tell me they haven't got anything against my color. Well then, a few whitefolks must be raising a lot of hell because it seems to me that I am catching a lot of hell, but none of these white people out here will admit that they have anything to do with this tough time I'm getting. Trouble is not just out there in the air, somebody has to start it. I'm not crazy! I don't just think I'm catching hell. Now, that is one big difference between us. . . . When I say something to you there is no need to break it down. Now, that's the kind of people we are. Except for some educated fools and some jacklegs out here, when we talk to each other we talk so that we can be understood. We say "shit" when we mean "shit." White people have all these ways

of saying something else when they really mean shit. They wouldn't tell you, "You can't vote," but they would say, "You can't recite the Constitution backwards," but that means you can't vote. They don't say, "You can't have this job," they just say that they don't have any openings and it just goes on like that. (Pp. 158–59)

Sims Patrick refers to the big whites who run the game as knowers of the game:

They pretend that they can do more than anybody else can. Now, they know that's a lie—I mean, the big shots know that's a lie. Now, that big white man don't deny hisself a damn thing. . . . He has been taught that wrong is all right as long as he don't do it to a white man. . . . He done been like this for so long that he is too greedy and scared to be any other way. But he'll kill you if you tell him that. (P. 113)

Contemporary examples of arbitrary and discretionary rule making are abundant in the criminal justice system. Problems of selective prosecution resulting in the diversion of whites into lesser punishments and of Chicanos and blacks into severe punishments are difficult to address because of the power, granted by laws crafted largely by white, male lawmakers, given to prosecutorial authorities, most of whom are also white and male (Cole 1999).

Big whites control all aspects of life, but *Drylongso* narratives especially point to education and "welfare" (Aid to Families with Dependent Children [AFDC]), reflecting a concern for gaining a share of material resources and the means to social mobility. Historically, blacks' educational opportunities took a back seat to their role as agricultural labor for the white man. Grant Smith says:

The education of black children in much of rural Georgia was really dictated by the whims and agricultural needs of the whites who control our schools. They closed our wretched schools whenever it suited their purposes and I am ashamed that I often regard this privation as a blessing because I used to prefer field labor to school. (Gwaltney 1981:49)

Nancy White's experience was similar:

Now I spent four, almost five years in school. . . . [T]hey thought much more of the white man's crops than they did of keeping the schools open. You didn't go to no school if they needed you in the fields. . . . [T]he white man . . . decided all about that. (P. 145)

Jonathan Melton highlights the racialization of education and youth wherein black children were viewed as labor units, again demonstrating the fact of white privilege and black deprivation. He contrasts schooling for blacks and whites:

The school was frequently closed very early in the spring because they had to get the young black kids out there to help get the crops ready. The white schools were never closed because of that, only the Negro schools. The Negro schools opened late and closed early to make sure that the white man's crop was planted. (P. 273)

Although such direct control of education is noted as a thing of the past, the repercussions can be seen when *Drylongso* speakers discuss the blocked opportunities

and unmet aspirations caused by the fact of their poverty and racial oppression. Grant Smith says that he is “worth more” than he gets and that he “could have been a doctor” (p. 40). Ruth Shays had a dream of being a doctor or an architect but feels her status made such dreams truly impossible, “that was just something to let run through your mind and forget if you were black and poor” (p. 34). The connection between “big white man rule” and their conditions leads *Drylongso* speakers such as Hannah Nelson to contest the promise of social mobility that accompanies the characterization of U.S. society as meritocratic. Nelson sees little change in the circumstances of her life and those of her great grandmother: “I was born into this world with some talent. But I have done the work that my grandmother’s mother did” (p. 7).

Even when *Drylongso* speakers were able to complete high school, their goals were directed by whites in gatekeeper positions who play the game by suppressing black aspirations, as described by Ellen Turner Surry:

I was told by my adviser in high school when I wanted to take the secretarial course, “You cannot take it. Who’s going to employ you? You people don’t have any businessmen who are going to employ you and the white businesses are not going to employ you. You’re a nice girl, but this is not the course for you. You’re not going to be able to go to college an there’s just no future in it for you.” (P. 236)

Surry sees blacks as “the manure to grow somebody else’s peaches,” “the horse shit of the earth” (p. 255). Their predicament is linked to white privilege; it produces privileged conditions for whites, as “horse shit” “grows peaches.” It is decided by those whites who make up the rules of the game and the gatekeepers who maintain it. Though education seems an important means for blacks to attempt social mobility, John Oliver cautions against relying on it:

Education is still the way to make it. But I can’t see just getting into books, because that’s the kind of thing these white folks are going to take all for themselves when old need starts to nudge ‘em. . . . Let em learn a little napfrying or dietician’s work too to go along with that high-class diploma so they can help themselves when times get tight as Dick’s hatband again. (P. 17)

Times *are* tight again. Financial aid for college students has steadily decreased while tuition costs are soaring across the nation. Whites are resorting to racism, defending their access to education by ending affirmative action programs that were crafted to even the playing field in admissions and retention. In California’s post-affirmative action reality, there are no longer programs that target students of color for recruitment, and for those students who are admitted, there are no race-based academic support services to assist them in their progress toward the degree. Furthermore, by the time they complete high school, racial differences in eligibility are cemented by, as *Drylongso* interviews would suggest, “the lives they lead,” not by inherent abilities. According to a recent report by the California Postsecondary Education Commission:

Eligibility rates for African American and Latino graduates have improved since 1996, but are still well below the rates for Whites and Asians. The UC [University of California] eligibility rate for African American graduates rose

from 2.8% in 1996 to 6.2% in 2003. The rate for Latinos increased from 3.8% to 6.5%. In comparison, 31% of Asian graduates and 16% of White graduates were eligible for UC in 2003. For CSU [California State University], the eligibility rates for African American and Latinos also increased, showing a similar pattern. (California Postsecondary Education Commission 2004:n.p.)

Drylongso blacks decry the way the welfare system is run. John Oliver says, "This man runs welfare like he runs everything. . . . [H]e don't really want to do it, so . . . like he fix everything else. He gon' do it and not do it at the same time. . . . This man is actually using welfare to put the people down even lower" (Gwaltney 1981:7). Ruth Shays says the "big white folks" are not in the business of giving: "I have been poor enough to be on any kind of welfare they have out here but I know you have got to be a better person than most of these big white folks to really give me some money" (p. 38). Melvin Gabriel Wilmot agrees that blacks cannot trust any gift from "whitefolks":

If whitefolks do give you something you do want or can use, they makes sure to take it back. If they don't take it back, they fix it so they get more out of helpin' you than you get helped. . . . [W]hitefolks take back fifty cent out of every quarter they run you down to lay on you because they can't get up off nothin. (P. 128)

The recent changes articulated as "welfare reform" in the switch from AFDC to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) clearly represent a play to "take it back." More recent proposals by the Bush administration to cut social services are aimed at Headstart and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), programs that provide education to preschool children and nutritional support to promote healthy babies and counter high infant mortality rates.

The big whites have their agents too. Like gatekeepers in education who direct students of color away from honors classes and, often, toward vocational education or—worse—special education, the gatekeepers in social service are characterized as repressing black people. Janet McCrae says, "I've seen these kids with their Mr. Clean degrees and several thousand dollars to spend on themselves alone telling a family of five or more that they should be able to make it on less than workers have for themselves" (Gwaltney 1981:126). Just as some *Drylongso* blacks urge others not to rely on education from the big white man, Hattie Lanarck argues against welfare dependency, or any form of dependency on "the white man":

I thank God that I don't need anything from the white man. Nothing he has will do us any good and if you take anything from him, then you will be as sorry as he is. White people were not always so, but they have made themselves so by living sorry lives and now they are making us the same way. But I will say that they don't put a gun to your head and make you take this welfare. (P. 130)

There are some constraints on the way big whites play the game: they cannot do what they have defined as "wrong" to a "white man." But some of the people whose voices are recorded in *Drylongso* note an important difference between "two kinds of whitefolk"—big whites and average poor whites. Big white men

("big shots") know the game is a "game" (as do black folks), but this knowledge does not extend to whites who are average, poor, or female and who play the game as though they can win even though it is set up by and for the big white men. It is as though the "average poor" and female whites think their rAce will let them win the game; they see themselves as being in a club that holds the rAce card and forget about the other high cards—class and gender—that keep the big white men in control, on top of the game.

"As Long as They Can Give Me a Hard Time": "Average Poor White Folks"

"Average poor white folks" have swallowed the lie of meritocracy that sustains white supremacy and the game. Ruth Shays explains that they do so in exchange for getting someone to be "big" over, a way to play their rAce card: "Their big men keep telling them that they can be big too if they keeps us little enough, and that's all they need to hear" (Gwaltney 1981:36). It is as though the rAce card makes them think they have a chance to get the class card too. Shays thinks this shows how race trumps class, since the "big whitefolks" appear as "liars to blacks" but as "their man" to "other whitefolks" (p. 36). The basis for this bond is that whiteness carries the hope of mobility, as Jordan Jackson Jr. says:

They will stand for leaders who are obviously lying to them and cheating them. They hope that their sons might rise to such a place of wealth, and they know that their power comes from deceit and force and know that it can only be maintained by massive reliance upon deception and force. . . . You see, this country is basically an immoral enterprise. (P. 97)

Jackson sees whites as more dependent on such big men for leadership than blacks are, and less able to use "ordinary common sense":

White men look up to their leaders more than we do and they are not much good without their leaders. White people don't really know how they feel about anything until they consult their leaders or a book. . . . They don't depend on mother wit and ordinary common sense like we do. (P. 99)

The average white man is described as a poor man who has a limited view of his circumstances because he sees only his whiteness. His rAce card is all he gets from segregation, according to Clifford Yancy, at least in comparison to what the "big shots" get, along with the right to give Blacks a hard time—his someone to be "big" over:

That big shot is steady sticking it to these average poor white folks, but they act like they love it just as long as they can give me a hard time. Now, will you tell me what good it's going to do me if I'm poor to keep you poor? I could see it if they got what the big shots get out of keeping everybody poor, but I can't see what they get out of this segregation thing. (P. 163)

Since all the average poor white gets out of the game is a rAce card, Yancy sees such a person as more apt to play it. For example, the specter of the black brute in pursuit of the white woman is raised by the big shot to get the average poor white to play their rAce instead of seeing through the game:

Your ordinary, average poor white person is always harder on black people than the big shots. See, a big shot don't have to worry about nothing in this world. But these little ordinary white people got the same things to worry about that we do, but, you see, they don't know that. Those big shots treat them just like little children. You know how you get a child to think about something else if something is going down that you don't want him to see? Well, that's just how the man treats old Chahlie. . . . Whenever he wants to hit on the poor dude, he tells him, "Look! Look over there! I believe that nigger is after your grandmother!" (P. 163)

While *Drylongso* speakers refer to the "average" white as poor, they also see a person of such status as better off than them. Even the "average" poor white who has experienced the worst the system has to offer will come out better than blacks, as Kenneth Simmons says: "White people will look out for their own people before they would do anything for me or you. A white man coming out of prison will be accepted quicker than the black man when it comes to making a living" (pp. 134–35).

Average whites are seen as closer to blacks in terms of material circumstances than are big shots, and they play their rAce against blacks' deuce to confirm their superiority and blacks' inferiority. Possession of the rAce card is accompanied by the freedom to play a wild card: they may engage in sexual, physical, and emotional repression of blacks, as Jonathan Melton asserts:

I guess the white people didn't want the black people to have anything that showed prosperity because a lot of them didn't have it themselves. They had the best of what was available for themselves and their kids, but still they wanted someone to lord it over. I guess they wanted to keep them down. They wanted to be able to say that they still controlled the black man completely, even though he was supposed to be a free person. If the white man wanted this particular girl or woman, he would give you the message that you supposed to stay away, and if you didn't you might end up dead. Segregation just is a way to see that the white man gets whatever he might want. (P. 275)

Mabel Lincoln says that her white male coworker would purposely upset her and then invoke his rAce card by asserting black inferiority and, implicitly, his white supremacy:

He used to do things that he thought would bother me. . . . He would say, "Mabel, I'm glad you liked the beef stew, but I just spit in it." Well that would make me sick and he would laugh and say how foolish blackfolks were to him. (P. 65)

The rAce card and the wild card affirm both white supremacy and male supremacy, linking them by conferring the right to abuse Others viewed as less than white men. Melton explains:

The white man came and said, "I want my cantaloupes hoed." My friend told the white man, "I'm hoeing, so I can't get to it right now and my wife is sick." The white man told him, "Damn your wife. You tell her to get out of that bed and go to the field. I want my cantaloupes hoed!" And, you know, that white man took a stick and whipped that woman to the field and the colored man did nothing about it! He should have killed him! (P. 279)

Drylongso stories demonstrate how the bodies of black children, women, and men become an arena for the deployment of the wild card, for asserting power through the threat or the use of violence against those defined outside whiteness. Forms of abuse have been varied, though often sexual, and are a common thread in the fabric of black experience in the United States. Hannah Nelson was never formally a slave, but her experience sounds alarmingly similar: "I have been abused. . . . The whites took my mother's mother's milk by force, and I have lived to hear a human creature of my sex try to force me by threat of hunger to give my milk to an able man" (p. 7).

In contemporary society we associate such forms of coercion and abuse with the period of African enslavement, but *Drylongso* stories contest this. Accounts of abuse include white men's sexual control and exploitation of the biological children born to them by black mothers and assigned a deuce—the status of Blackness. Grant Smith tells one such story:

They would impregnate black women in his cabins or his fields or his big house. All his black children could look forward to was a little credit in his store and an incestuous attention if they were pretty or just happened to strike his fancy. . . . My father never talked to me without trying to manipulate me. . . . The only real conversations we ever had were about sexual things. I was always afraid I would say something I shouldn't, so I generally didn't do anything but grin or giggle. . . . He would joke with me about some gals, as he called them. All black women were some kind of "gal" or other—you know, little black gals, fresh-assed little black gals, fine, big-tiddied little black gals. He would say, "I bet you git'n some of that!" I would just laugh. (Pp. 41, 44–45)

Smith's story of corruption is not unique. Black children were not shielded from such obscenity, as revealed in Carolyn Chase's story of the rape of her mother:

When I was a little girl a white man came to our house and made love to my mother. I saw that! I was in the same bed! . . . She asked him to stop, but she did not strike him or push him. . . . I remember every detail of that morning. My mother didn't have to ask me not to tell my father. Whenever the white man came it was always the same. (P. 57)

The myth of the black rapist was cemented in U.S. popular culture and white minds by films such as D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915), and some scholars assert the persistence of this myth as a means of social control over blacks (e.g., Davis 1983). In contrast, *Drylongso* stories suggest that white male sexual aggression and/or assault has been a common experience for black women whenever their life circumstances bring them in contact with white men. Nancy White's account describes her own and others' experiences at the hands of white men, as well as the hierarchy of power that shapes the play among different players:

White men were always messing with black girls. Sometime a black woman would have to move to someplace way away from there just so some white man or boy couldn't get his hands on her. Now, the white women saw this and they didn't like it, but they knew better than to stand up in Old Cracker's face and tell him that he was wrong. Now, he wasn't simple, so he knew that he wasn't right, but he figured like this: "If I want to do it and you can't stop me,

well then, sad on you!" . . . I saw these things happen and they happened to me. One of my best girl friends got sick. . . . [T]he doctor that was supposed to cure her gave her a baby. . . . I have worked for some nice people and some rotten ones. I've had to ask some hands off me and I've had to just give up some jobs if they got too hot behind me. Now, I have lost some money that way, but that's all right. When you lose control of your body, you just about lost all you have in this world. (Gwaltney 1981:146-47)

Clifford Yancy also reports that such experiences are common for black women. His story also shows these experiences were associated with whiteness but not exclusively with men:

In my home white men were always running after colored girls. Many times a family would just have to send their daughter up here to keep her away from those crackers. But you have never heard of a white girl being sent away from her home to keep some black men off of her! Down in my home a lot of white women would slip around and chase young black boys and men. But you don't hear much about that, do you? (P. 159)

Although it appears that the most common response among victims of racialized sexual violence is to move away, some practice self-defense and lose their lives for it, as Celia Delaney recounts: "My mother was very pretty, and I am told that she and her brother, my reverend Uncle Isaiah, died in a fight with some white men who were bent on raping my mother" (p. 83).

Howard Roundtree sees these forms of violence, whether in the context of labor exploitation, sexual assault, robbery or general repression, as sharing a common feature. When white men commit these acts against blacks, they do not face societal repercussions:

I have seen a grown man beat a woman who was just about to birth a child because she wouldn't get out there in his damn fields and work. . . . I couldn't count on my two hands the white men that have killed people and burned people out and robbed them and raped little girls . . . done all these rotten things and they have not done a day in jail for doing them! (P. 61)

At their most extreme, such acts end in death, the usual route out of the "game." The wild card can be played even by white youths, as Mabel Lincoln's story shows: "My father was a blind man. . . . A carload of young crackers from somewhere ran him down in front of our house. They were just playing with him, but when he didn't run, the one at the wheel got mad and ran right over him" (p. 65). However, it is not only white men or youths who participate in blacks' repression, particularly in the sexualization of black women. In a story of white-woman-as-pimp, Alberta Brooks says that several of her white female employers have tried to exploit her sexuality:

White people who should know better will ask you for anything you have that they want. . . . Three white women I have worked for have had the nerve to ask me to go to bed with their sons, and one, bless God, even had the nerve to ask me to take off my clothes for her husband. These were all fully grown women with children of their own. . . . To white people your feelings just don't count for nothing. Nothing counts to them except what they want. (P. 107)

Lincoln says such encounters are regular occurrences for black women at work: "If you are a woman slinging somebody else's hash and busting somebody else's suds or doing whatsoever you might do to keep yourself from being a tramp or a willing slave, you will be called out of your name and asked out of your clothes" (p. 68). Just as not all white perpetrators are men, not all black victims are women. Clifford Yancy tells of the sexualization of black men and boys at the hands of white women, ironically following the myths of black male hypersexuality told by white men: "When these white cats tell their sisters and wives and daughters and mothers too that we are hung like Brahma bulls, the first thing a lot of people that heard these lies will do is to try to get themselves under one of these tough studs as soon as possible!" (p. 160).

At times, the entire white family participates in playing the wild card, though they may do so as silent witnesses. As Avis Briar recounts his uncle's childhood experience of violence at the hands of white adults, we may recall historic pictures of lynchings that depict black men hanging from a tree in the midst of smiling white men and women spectators—and their children:

My uncle was born in Mississippi and he used to tell us how white people would do to black people many of these things you read about Nazis doing to prisoners. He told us that he and four other boys were swimming and some white men came and shot at them and wouldn't let them get out of the water. They hit two of the black boys and all of them almost drowned because those white men wouldn't let them come out of the water. . . . My father's best friend drowned and people who were having a picnic just let that boy drown. They were white and he was black so they just rowed away from him when he got cramps and let him drown. In plain sight of dozens of families, he drowned. Now, that's the kind of thing I would call unnatural. I don't want to be that hard. If I had a child who was going to grow up like that, I would kill him myself because that is not human. (P. 191)

Indiscriminate brutality against black children, women, and men at the hands of whites is part of the game. All white players get a wild card along with an rAce card; it has historically entitled them to engage in brutality against those who are not white, without negative social sanctions. They play this card at work and in their leisure activities. Though it is mostly white men who use this card, it is available to white women and youths as well. In the absence of material wealth, the right to control Others confers a sense of privilege on "average poor whites" and binds them to the "big shots" with access to "mojo" and "sayso" over Others. In a manner of "play," the rAce card binds white women to white men and blinds them to the absence of other high cards—class and gender—in their hand. For white women, access to the high cards in the white man's hand and her own rAce card is, too often, enough.

White Women Are Not Free Either

The most crucial aspect of white women's status is that they, like blacks, are not free. Since, in black discourse, the most powerful metaphor for the absence of freedom is slave status, it is significant that Bernard Vanderstell describes a gender

system in which white women are the house slaves of white men: "We used to be the white men's slaves. Now some men make their wives their slaves. . . . White men have their wives for house slaves. . . . [T]hey have the habit of having someone to serve them and they do not feel comfortable without this or the hope of it" (Gwaltney 1981:115–16).

White women are described as differing primarily from black women in the economic ties to white men that foster their alliance. As Oliver puts it, "No matter what Chahlie do, he want his mama to pat him on the head and tell him how cute he is. Well maybe his mama will do that because she gets part of what he gets" (p. 19). Like the "average poor white man," the white woman is bought off by the big white man who holds a class card and a gender card in addition to his rAce. According to Nancy White;

I am a black woman and I am not free and I don't know any black woman that is, nor any black man, either. White women are not free, either, but most of them think they are and that is because that white man pats them wherever he feels like patting them and throws all that moonlight boogie-joogle on them and they eat it up! It's killing them, but they eat it up and beg their doctor for a prescription so they can get some more! . . . At the bottom of most of the trouble in this world is that white man. Now, he makes living anywhere as near hell as the devil wants to get. . . . If that man was bringing me pretty hats and nice shoes and getting somebody like me to look after his children, now, if he was doing all those things and I was too lazy to get up off my do-nothing-stool and content myself with what I could do for myself and my children, well, if that was the kind of person I was, I'd just bite my lip and shut my mouth. Now, that is your white woman. She can come into that kitchen and tell me to do twice as much work as she ever dreamed of doing in a bad dream. (Pp. 143–44)

Based on her work as a servant, Hannah Nelson concurs that white women lead a life of comparative ease: "She [Nelson's employer] was just burdened down with making the things she had to do fill the time she had to do them in" (p. 4). But in Mabel Johns's view, this comes at the price of the white woman's personhood, because she has to lower herself to the status of a child to get what she will from white men:

My madam and—well, as I might say, the woman I work for sometimes has to act like a child to get her husband to do anything for her. He'll do mostly anything she'll ask him to do, but she has to act like a child to get him to do these things. . . . It's like she's too weak to use her strength. (P. 168)

Gloria Melton offers a similar conclusion: "Usually white women don't even go to the bathroom without their husband's permission—most of them I know, anyway" (p. 157). Nancy White explains gender as raced this way:

White women just think they are free. Black women know they ain't free. Now, that is the most important difference between the two. White men are free to tell everybody else what to do. My mother used to say that the black woman is the white man's mule and the white woman is his dog. Now, she said that to say this: we do the heavy work and get beat whether we do well or not. But the white woman is closer to the master and he pats them on the head and lets

them sleep in the house, but he ain' gon' treat neither one like he was dealing with a person. Now, if you was to tell a white woman that, the first thing she would do is to call you a nigger and then she'd be real nice to her husband so he would come out here and beat you for telling his wife the truth. (Pp. 147-48)

Although White acknowledges black male domination over black women, she finds that ". . . there is very few black women that their husbands can pocketbook to death because we can do for ourselves and will do so in a minute" (p. 149). Women's oppression is characterized as part of their economic dependence on men, associated with whiteness and not with the circumstances of black women.

When white women employ black women and men they are just as likely to engage in cheating and thievery as are white men. Mabel Johns recalls such an episode:

It turned out that [the grandmother] had left me fifteen dollars and her daughter had just took that ten-dollar bill and left me the five. Now, that's how they are. She felt ashamed, but that didn't stop her from robbing a blind person and me, and she couldn't see that she put herself in the gutter. (P. 168)

Gilbert Lanarck recalls a similar experience from his youth:

When I was twelve a cracker woman worked me two days as hard as you would work any grown man for half a dollar. She promised me two dollars, but . . . just renegotiated our contract. . . . She remembered that moldy dog bread and watered-down sorghum syrup she threw at me and that headache pill she gave me when the sun got to me in her melon patch and a lot of other things, like a pair of raggedy ladies' draws she gave me for some reason, and she proceeded to do some fancy deduction right there in front of me and her husband. He was cracking his sides! Deep inside them, all whites are like that that I have ever known. (P. 132)

Joseph Langstaff describes a white female employer whose treatment of him was worse than that afforded her dog:

When I was just getting to be a very young man, I worked for a white farmer. I did a man's work and when it was time for my dinner, this farmer's wife gave me a little dog bread and a little thin sorghum syrup. . . . She had dogs which she fed much better. She gave them meat and biscuits from her table, but she gave me cold dog bread and syrup that was little more than sweetened water. (P. 184)

The white female coworkers of black women show a similar disregard and display a "plantation" attitude. According to Surry, it is not that blacks have greater endurance but that they have less latitude in their working conditions and have to put up with more to keep their jobs:

I've actually been asked how I could stand the heat by white girls who were going outside because they said it was too hot for them to stay in the kitchen. But, you see, if I had decided that it was too hot for me and gone out back to cool off, when I got back I wouldn't have had a job. We fought that plantation thing because we had to, not because we were any more able to fight it than anybody else. (P. 239)

On the other hand, there are times when “belonging” to a white person protects a black person from the “wild card” of another white person. Hannah Nelson, for example, describes her relief that she was with a white woman when their car broke down and white policemen arrived:

I was very glad that the white woman was there with me because she was the only protection I felt I had at that time. My safety had nothing to do with any respect for my person, you see. Those white men did not deal with me as they generally deal with young black women because there was a white woman of high standing there with me, and any disrespect to me personally would have been disrespect to that woman’s nigger. (P. 6)

In the scenario that Nelson describes, the white policemen cannot play the wild card along with the rAce because the rAce of the white woman takes precedence. This is an interesting throwback to slavery, when whites were prevented by the white rule makers from causing harm to blacks possessed/enslaved by other whites.

The tendency of white women to play their rAce card by allying with white men precludes the development of a bond with black women, even though black women see white women as “not free.” It seems to May Anna Madison that she is bound more to the black man than the white woman:

White women have done more bad things to me than a black man ever thought of doing. Black men will make a fool out of me if I let them, but it was a white woman who had me crawling around her apartment before I was thirteen years old, cleaning places she would never think of cleaning with a toothbrush and toothpick! It was a female chauvinist sow that worked me a full day for seventy-five cents! When I was nothing but a child myself, white women looked the other way when their fresh little male chauvinist pigs were trying to make a fool out of me! . . . A black man can’t do any more to me than I will let him do because I can and have taken care of myself. But I do have to work to be able to do that and that means that I have to be able to deal with white people. White men and women are the people who make life hard for me. (Pp. 171-72)

As *Drylongso* speakers see it, then, whites play their cards against them from the time they are children. And as black childhood is practice for a life of playing a losing hand against those who hold the rAce card without succumbing to the wild card, white childhood is also shaped by “the game.” White children must be taught to play the high cards—the rAce, the wild card—and, where given, the gender and class cards as well.

White Children: “Getting Ready to Rule”

Drylongso speakers typically tell of their encounters with white children through their work as servants. When they have associated blacks with serving them, white children begin to understand that they hold a rAce card that blacks do not have. Since lying is crucial to how whites play the game, white children learn to play by inventing lies, just as adult whites learn to live complacently with the lie of white supremacy and meritocracy to protect their privilege. Rosa Wakefield and Sims Patrick offer two examples of how children play the game when they become aware that they possess the rAce card:

If you eats these dinners and don't cook 'em, if you wears these clothes and don't buy or iron them, then you might start thinking that the good fairy or some spirit did all that. They asked a little white girl in this family I used to work for who made her cake. . . . She said she made it an' then she hid her face and said the good fairies made it. Well, you are looking at that good fairy. (Gwaltney 1981:88)

I made me this goose-grease cake and the kids had to have some, so I let them take some. Well they had this little girl staying with them, and she came in there and we were all eating cake. Now, she opened her mouth and the first thing that came out was, Am I black? What she meant was, Why didn't you tell me about the cake too? In other words, if you are denied anything, you got to be black! (P. 112)

White children appear to “inherit their position of command” by being “raised to rule” as Jackson Jordan Jr. asserts: “The business of white men is to rule. I did not make it so, but it is so now. They want their children to rule, even to rule them. It pleases them, no matter what they say, when their children are rude and overbearing, because that is a sign to them that those children are getting ready to rule as their parents have ruled” (p. 98).

An important contradiction in this process of teaching white children to play the game lies in the practice of using black women to raise white children. Yula Moses thinks that white children may come to regard their black caregivers with love and affection. However, this affection is not transformed into a condemnation of the system that oppresses blacks, because at a certain point, according to Moses, white children must learn to “love that lying law” that their parents love, that forms the rules of the game:

I was more of a mother to him than the white woman who brought him into the world and then gave him to me to feed and teach. But that boy and his brothers and sisters were not taught by me for long. I would have taught them to love the things I love and to hate those things I hate. Now, that would have made every one of them a trial to their parents and an enemy to their people! . . . They were merciful to me and a few other black-folks, but they hate justice and real righteousness out of respect for their parents. They love that lying law and the shame and filth they have been taught to live by. (P. 181)

White children who have become attached to their black servants learn to deploy their rAce cards so they will be conditioned into a life of playing the game and the position playing with high cards guarantees them. As Toni Morrison (1992) asserts, the socialization process for learning one's place in the racialized society—the “game”—requires that one is defined in terms of whether or not one is black, a “nigger.” *Drylongso* accounts suggest white children learn that they have a rAce card and learn how to use it. In addition to those who are “white”—“average poor” man, woman, or child—there are the not-quite-whites. This is the category that *Drylongso* participants use for immigrants, who occupy a place in society between blacks and whites. They may look somewhat like losers (“brown-skin”), but they play the game as though they are “whitefolks.”

Immigrants: Bumping Blacks off Jobs and Playing Brown-skin Whitefolks

Drylongso accounts reveal strong resentments toward immigrants and white ethnic minorities that continue to have contemporary relevance. Gwaltney (1981) suggests that these resentments stem from blacks' assessments of immigrants' views about black goals of justice and equality. For *Drylongso* blacks, antiblack sentiments seem to be part of the immigrant's process of Americanization. John Oliver describes these issues and locates the ability of immigrants to enter the United States in their whiteness:

There was this Czechoslovakian guy on my job and people used to feel so sorry for him because those Russians almost got his ass. Now he comes over here, bumps a black man off his job and is then going to stand up in the cafeteria and tell me in broken English why "the colored people are pushing too fast for their rights." That man got here because he was white, not because he was right. (P. 20)

He also asserts that there is a pecking order among European ethnic minorities who, nevertheless, share a common disdain for blacks: "The Irishman is looking down on the Italian and the Italian is looking down on the Jew, but you can believe that they all are looking down on you!" (pp. 20–21). Harriet Jones demonstrates her sense of antiblack attitudes among immigrants whether they are "white" or not, when she says that she "would like to know what the Polish or the Jews or the Chinese think black people did to them" (p. 13). Carolyn Chase tells of being offended as a customer of a "Jewish salesman" who "stereotyped" her: "I say 'Jewish salesmen' because they are the most offensive to me, and I can give you all the chapter and verse you need!" (pp. 55–56). Rosa Wakefield is distrustful of immigrants like "this young Iraqi doctor" who is "darker than [she], but he sure did everything he could think of and then some to show how white he was supposed to be" (p. 90). Clinton Banks thinks that "black people from over there" are opposed to "the crackuhs" while they are in their own nations but start to play "brown-skin whitefolks" when they get into the United States:

The first thing one of them black people from over there do when he gets here is to see how much white ass he can lick! But over there, it is not like that. When they gits over here they play brown-skin whitefolks, but over there in they ownt nations, they know what the crackuhs are doin' to everybody and they don' even pretend to like it. (Pp. 91–92)

Even when faced with the realities of state regulation of immigrants who can be deported, *Drylongso* blacks see evidence that such immigrants faced less stringent requirements than they did for getting on the job, as Estelle O'Connor Kent suggests:

Some emigration people came over the job and took away some of the Spanish people who were working there because they didn't have visas. But they had jobs that black people couldn't get. To get the jobs we had, you had to show drivers' licenses. These people couldn't even speak English, black people were told, "You can't get any job down here unless you have a driver's license and registration." Now, how come we have to have all that if they will take people from a foreign country who don't have a thing? (Pp. 208–9)

Gloria Melton says that it certainly seems there is more help and sympathy for immigrants than for blacks, who “were born right here”: “A lot of people come to this country and get help because they can’t speak English. Then as soon as they can say a few words of English they go on to earn more money and get more advantages than we do, and we were born right here!” (p. 264).

Despite their view that immigrants compete with them for jobs and are pretenders to white supremacy, *Drylongso* speakers do not talk of immigrants in terms of “mojo” or “sayso.” Like average poor whites, they are viewed as having more advantages. They are given a rAce card to gain entry into the country (the game) and into a job (over blacks) but do not use the wild card of repression and brutality. In some ways, they are viewed in *Drylongso* with the same disregard reserved for those who are “passing,” pretending to be white, earning the name “brown-skin whitefolks.” This suggests that *Drylongso* speakers see them as playing against their brown-skin status, either “acting white” or pretending, like average poor white men and white women, that they can have what big white men have. While disdain and anger can be said to characterize how blacks regard whites and those who act white, respect and appreciation are given those who contest the game or speak against it.

“He Was White But He Told Them”: Whites against the Game

There is little attention given in *Drylongso* stories to antiracist game strategies among whites. More prevalent, but still few, are stories of whites who enjoyed the privilege of holding the rAce card without deploying the wild card. However, when whites deploy their rAce against other whites to destroy the game, they have the wild card played on them. When Gilbert Lanarck remarks on John Brown (Gwaltney 1981:132), it is to call attention to “the only white American that [he] ever could stand. “They lynched him when my grandfather was fourteen years old,” Lanarck continues. “He was doing what was right even if he had to fight his own people.” At the same time, it is clear that Lanarck’s utter disdain for whites is not racist because he sees John Brown as “the kind of man [he] would like to be,” one who will fight his own people to do the right thing, even if it means death. Jackson Jordan Jr. says, “The best white men have told their brothers that they were wrong to live as they do” (p. 101). Simply to speak against the game, against deployment of the rAce and wild cards is to be among the “best” of white men. Gloria Melton offers an example of a white male union representative speaking for fairness and against racial injustice:

Since that black girl had been working there five years before the white girl came in the door, I felt that the black girl should get the job. But I didn’t say anything because I was waiting for the head of the union to come and settle the thing. He came and he was white, but he told them, “. . . the girl that has been working for this company for the longest time is the one who gets the job.” . . . [T]he white girls were still very disappointed because they lost. (P. 257)

That such stories are few may suggest that blacks have not experienced many instances of white antiracist activity, though it may be a product of their focus on that which is problematic about race and racism in the United States at the time of

Gwaltney's interviews. Nevertheless, the appreciation for whites who contest the game in word and/or deed illustrates these persons' understandings of whiteness. Their theory links whiteness to racial practices and privileges that are socially produced and, generally, not an intrinsic quality of white people but a product of the game that maintains white privilege and the ideology of white supremacy.

CONCLUSION

The game metaphor that emerges from an analysis of *Drylongso* suggests that the game begins with the declaration of whiteness, the assignment of this rAce card to those who are declared white, and their access to a "different life" that is more comfortable than that afforded blacks. They also have the right to play a wild card, and, though it appears whites do not see themselves as using this, black versions of the game commonly assert that it has been used on them. In recent decades there has been a rise in hate crimes against blacks and in the membership of groups that perpetuate such acts (Wellman 1993). The social sanctions for such acts have varied significantly depending on the role of the perpetrator—whether he is acting as an agent of the state or as an individual. However, given that such acts are increasingly viewed negatively, it appears that whites are now playing their rAce card differently: they want to be seen as "nonracist." They wish to distance themselves from "racists" to avoid spoiling their identity as whites. However, seeking a "nonracist" label is not the same as the antiracist who actively opposes white racism, risking the label "race traitor" from other whites. Whites who want to be seen as nonracist are not actively opposed to holding privilege and are as apt to deny the persistence of and strategies that maintain white privilege as the white person who is an avowed racist. And both of them still hold the rAce card in the current social arrangement.

How do we end the game that grants whites advantaged access to social resources while making every hand a losing hand for blacks? In *Drylongso* Hannah Nelson says, "The whole matter is so mixed and complicated that nothing but a knife can put it anywhere near right" (Gwaltney 1981:8). The question remaining is how to wrest the rAce card from whites or neutralize its power. For as long as whites hold the rAce, their protestations of privilege will continue to ring false, at least to *drylongso* blacks.

It should be clear that the rhetorical stance whites adopt to explain their social location and social resources as the result of their merit is an expression of white racism. Based on Wellman's definition, it is a defense of the advantages whites have, and it is culturally sanctioned by the cementing of meritocracy alongside the most revered notions of freedom and equal opportunity. The rich detail in the stories of engagement with white racism suggests that blacks experience these encounters as a game played under pretense by whites and forced on them. I find this a useful device for comparison with data from my current ethnographic work involving black subjects. *Drylongso* provides a sharp critique of the racial system, blinders off, that is set in core black culture. Yet the notion of a "core black culture" is a dynamic marker, neither monolithic nor static as a descriptor for the ethos and orientation of all black people in all places at all times. Thus it can provide us

with a benchmark for assessing the direction and spirit of contemporary black biographies revealed through critical ethnography, as well as serve in assessments of the direction and scope of scholarly work on racial privilege and the forms of racism taken to defend its maintenance.

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