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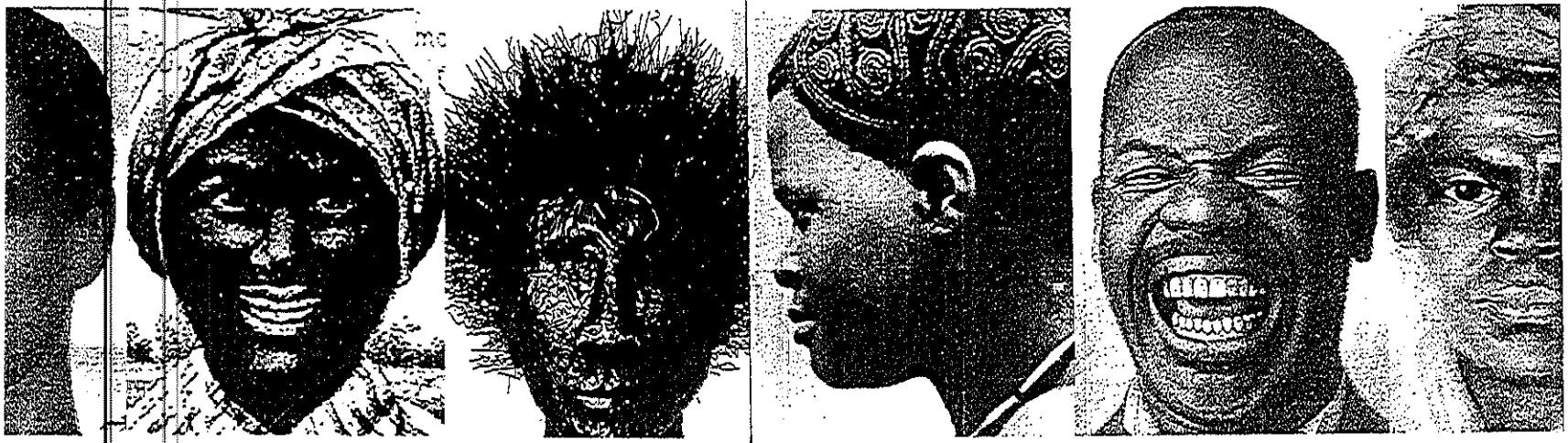

RACE AND VISUAL REPRESENTATION

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Ch6: The Language of Appropriation: Fantasies and Fallacies

In 1987, during a two-week visit to Egypt for a conference/tour that explored Egypt as an African civilization, I met Makeda, a woman with dreadlocks who was from Cincinnati and had been living in London for about seven years. We became friends, and three years later, when I began doing my dissertation research in London, she was gracious enough to allow me to sleep in her front room for a few days. During one of my visits I noticed that she had a number of racist kitsch items, often called black memorabilia, shelved in her kitchen. She is not a politically unconscious, middle-class woman following a recent trend. She has proven herself to be a politically savvy woman committed to a lifetime of creative work on behalf of people of African descent. Although I oppose the collection and display of these items, our long debate about them has been respectful and interesting. But the fact that black folk like Makeda and Julian Bond, among others, collect ceramic uncles and mammies reminds me that the issue is complex. Still, what am I to make of the fact that at some memorabilia shows 80 percent of the dealers and a majority of the consumers of these items are black? How do we manage the fact that black support for and consumption of such objects has caused them to be produced anew decades after black protest had diminished their presence in American society?

There are equivalences between derogatory terminology and stereotypical images, and similar strategies of appropriation have played out in the use of terms. What can one make of the public and private surge of African Americans calling themselves "nigger?" Is this act in the same class as positioning antique mammies on contemporary shelves? Is it really possible to appropriate racist images and terms and drain them of their poison?

When considering why black folk collect self-deprecating objects, or use images of them in their art, I am led to think about the sophisticated postmodernist irony attributed to the sophisticated strategies of appropriation, reappropriation, or deconstruction when folk attempt to tame their demons by taking them home. Now that many young blacks have come to call themselves "nigger" (a rampant phenomenon in rap music lyrics) as if it is a descriptive, appropriate, endearing construct, I am supposed to feel that the word has been drained like a swamp of all the disease-carrying racist pestilence of its origins and actual meaning. When ceramic mammies and uncles sit in middle-class black kitchens as historical documents and mnemonics, why am I not moved in the way I might be if a Van Der Zee photo of a Garvey parade or a black religious group (figure 81) in 1920s Harlem hung there instead? Are we all really so sophisticated now, do we really (wink, wink) get it? If so, why is there anger and tension if a white person endearingly calls me his "nigger" the way a black person might? What is really going on here?

What complicates the issue further is the African American vernacular tradi-

FIGURE 81. *James Van Der Zee,* Moorish Zionist Temple of the Moorish Jews, 1929. *This group apparently did not survive, but another black Jewish community in Harlem that emerged around this time, the Commandment Keepers: Ethiopian Hebrew Congregation, is still active. Photograph © Donna Mussenden Van Der Zee.*

tion of signifyin'. Verbal strategies and subterfuges have allowed indirect jabs at something troublesome, or they have become the means of playing with circumstance. Several layers work in concert with the snap, "Ain't jo mama on a pancake box?" Here is the African proverb in action: *It's not what you call me. It's what I answer to.* There is a denial of association with the pancake mammy stereotype because of its absurdity. That is a white fantasy, and we know it. Since the undercurrent of the snap is an admonition against even the *appearance* of mammyhood, association of the sacred black mother with the mammy fantasy is so extreme that the play/performance is obvious. The linguistic slippage is inventive. If the snap draws a big laugh from bystanders, you must keep your cool and return fire with even more explosive wit. But then, when the comeback was, "Your mama is so black, she leaves footprints in a coal mine," there was a bit of psychological dross in there that went beyond mere signifyin'. When the signifyin' played with racial stereotypes, often there were undertones of self-deprecation that periodically came to the surface.

There seem to be several issues worth discussing relative to black folk playing with, appropriating, or recycling racist language and imagery. Combinations and degrees of these issues come into play when discussing the collection of racist kitsch, the imagery of artist Kara Walker, or the use of demeaning language in a first-strike effort to take control of its meanings. One is the strategy of *inversion*: turning a sign or a trope inside out, upside down, to disrupt its meaning and impact. Related to this is *recontextualization*: the Duchampian no-

tion of putting a urinal in a gallery to transform it into sculpture. Third, there is the idea of *reappropriation*: taking a weapon used against you, making it your own, and thereby controlling it and preventing it from doing further harm. Finally, in all cases we must consider the visual effect: can the application of a veneer of new interpretations overcome the subconscious impact of an image? Are these strategies truly effective or merely diversionary chimera?

INVERSION

Can one ever appropriate or reappropriate the fantasy of another? Is it possible to devise a strategy, a cultural guerrilla raid, that incisively moves into the conceptual terrain of the oppositional Other to capture the weapons used against one? African Americans, conceived as blacks, have been misrepresented in myriad ways for almost two centuries, both verbally and visually. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries a series of strategies have attempted to neutralize and undermine the harmful representations through resistance, inversion, appropriation for reinvention, and deconstruction. In his poem "Cultural Exchange," Langston Hughes uses inversion to signify, a point driven home by the final lines:

> *Dear* old
> Mammy Faubus!
> *Culture*, they say, *is a two-way street:*
> Hand me my mint julep, Mammy.
> Make haste!"[1]

Hughes is flipping the discourse on its head and giving it back with wit and sarcasm. He has not appropriated a plantation scenario but has inverted its population for effect and satire.

Recently, Texas artist Michael Ray Charles gained some notoriety for his use of stereotypical caricatures of blacks in his paintings to make social statements. He attempts to take an object of ridicule and turn it backward into a critique of those who might create or continue to accept such caricatures. In some works he seems to criticize blacks who act out the stereotypes. The works take on the appearance of minstrel or circus posters and locate themselves in the world of odd and strange entertainments where difference is the attraction. In a 1994 painting, *Beware* (figure 82), Charles has taken an old pickaninny/Sambo image and created a multilayered reference to the old carnival posters, as well as to posters for outlaws and, obliquely, runaway slave ads. The cartoonish child figure whistles through huge red lips with a greater resemblance to Mickey Mouse than to

FIGURE 82. *Michael Ray Charles,* Beware, *1994, acrylic latex, oil wash, and copper penny on paper. Courtesy of the artist.*

notions of a black brute. The references are ironic, satirical, and critical; why does this innocent figure generate fear and warnings?

In past periods of African American powerlessness, invisibility, and silence, the idea of "talking back" to white folks was carried out through subtle exaggeration, allusion, signifyin', and expressive cultural forms for all-black audiences. In blues songs, folktales, or literature by African American writers, often there was a tension between the imposition by whites of stereotypical expectations and the complicated, layered, often painful, reality that characters experienced. This was true for pale Clare Kendry who passed as white in Nella Larsen's *Passing,* as well as for Emma Lou who was deemed too black in Wallace Thurman's *The Blacker the Berry . . .* , both from 1929. Jazzman Louis Armstrong sung that same year with a self-awareness of his oppressed position when he lamented, "My only sin . . . is in my skin / What did I do . . . to be so black and blue."[2] The

very concept of the blues became a metaphor for the difficulties of life lived black. For the most part, it was only in white-dominated circumstances that blacks played the roles prescribed by white stereotypes; within the sanctuary of all-black situations folk expressed their full humanity.

Charles is not signifyin' in the sense of ironic reversal that we find in the Aunt Jemima of Jeff Donaldson or in Langston Hughes's poem of an earlier time. The sarcasm of Hughes's in-your-face "ask your mama," another line from "Cultural Exchange,"[3] is not embodied by this cartoon figure, but there is a level of sarcasm present. Marilyn Kern-Foxworth writes that Charles's works "serve as a sort of shock treatment for those who are unwilling to acknowledge the existence of stereotypes or as a wakeup call for those who are too sheltered to recognize their potential for harm."[4] Yet, one of the most striking things about the work is that it is *not* shocking. Coon and mammy imagery was ubiquitous in American culture until the 1980s in all manner of guises, disguises, and shadings, and artists have worked to supplant or destabilize them at least since the second decade of the twentieth century. Additionally, left unanswered is the question as to whether resurrecting stereotypes reinscribes their "potential for harm" or perhaps actually does harm anew. Charles says that he is "talking about the stereotypes and they are negative but yet positive. Think about the Sambo. Because of the Sambo image, blacks were allowed to get into entertainment." He says, "I really don't think I'm dealing with the negative at all. I know I'm dealing with an aspect of it. . . . I know according to the norm I'm dealing with negative images and I acknowledge that aspect about my work. But I really think I'm dealing with the positive aspect. . . . I think the whole black experience has become a caricature sort of image."[5]

There are contradictions in Charles's statements, and the differing reactions to his work by different audiences suggest something about the effect and effectiveness of the work. Charles says that his grand design is to "document the African American experience."[6] Though the artist believes his work to be rooted in the black experience and in black history, he acknowledges that "Whites generally accept the work from the beginning. Blacks have a hard time with it."[7] If we accept the premise that black stereotypes are based in white fantasy and projected onto blacks, then we can argue that Charles is playing with and complicating history and images rooted in nonblack culture. He is documenting an outside *perception* of the black experience, not the experience itself. His intention is to destabilize the images and turn them into a critique of the persistence of stereotypes as well as a celebration of black progress. The work is meant for a white audience, and it is from that audience's approval that the artist seeks his own validation. He privileges the positive reception of his work by whites—who obviously are not offended by the critical commentary—and he seems dis-

connected from the African American cultural tradition of call-and-response validation: "I feel that it is unfortunate that some blacks see my work and don't understand it. I think that someday they may. But the thing about it is, I think the work is going to have to be defined or accepted by the dominant culture of whites first and then more blacks are going to come around and say 'wow, so this is what he's doing; wow, he's a great artist.'"[8] This statement is consistent with the earlier one about minstrelsy in that it indicates a belief in the power of whites to permit black success, or to endorse it as a prelude for black acceptance.

According to a story in the *Houston Post*, Tony Shafrazi, the New York gallery owner who represents Charles, sees Charles, as he saw Jean-Michel Basquiat, providing a voice of the black experience, and the same article reports that Basquiat collectors are buying his work.[9] If these artists were legitimate representatives of "the black experience," it still would be discomforting to see nonblacks assume the authority to authenticate an African American artist in this way. It is particularly ironic if we consider Nicholas Mirzoeff's suggestion that Basquiat may have been helped in his self-destruction by "the threat that once the [white] audience tired of the novelty, they would move on to other, newer things," a premonition that proved correct.[10] Because his success was partially predicated on his being Other, it was insubstantial. Video artist Martha Rosler suggested that Basquiat was a "tamed entertainer" in the sense of a minstrel performer and that his existence outside the controlled, disciplined mainstream of whiteness generated a good deal of the fascination for him in the art world.[11] Mirzoeff argues that part of Basquiat's insecurity may have come from his continual effort to efface the racial body in his work, his critique of modernism, and his pollution of the elitist art scene with visual techniques having more in common with hip-hop music and graffiti sign-writing than with modernist painting practices and minimalist or pop art histories. The artist emerged during a period of strong conflict in New York between graffiti writers and the white establishment, who saw their intrusion as a threat to civility and rational order. Basquiat, as has been well documented, was a writer, and his tag was SAMO: Same Old S——.

Like the hip-hop expression he emerged from, Basquiat sampled fragments from a variety of sources, and his own identity suggested hybridity with its roots in Puerto Rico, Haiti, and lived middle-class experience in Brooklyn. The sampled fragments of images and language in his work were consistent with his days as a writer and fit well with postmodernist sensibilities and the rootedness of a good deal of recent art in semiotic ideas. Still, Basquiat was seen as black and primitive by many, including his so-called mentor, Andy Warhol. Despite his artistic efforts, Basquiat was unable to open sufficient space within the artis-

tic "heart of whiteness," as Mirzoeff labels it, to be an artist without a racial or ethnic adjective.[12]

If Charles is linked to Basquiat in the mind of his New York dealer, there is an implicit expectation that he be a young, hip-hop "tamed entertainer" as well. In many ways this is a new twist on the Harlem Renaissance era when whites were fascinated with black difference defined as primitivism. Patrons such as Charlotte Mason, who supported Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes, and Aaron Douglas, expressed an enthusiasm for the instinctive, primitive expression of blacks. In a gesture typical of the attitude of the day, Mason had her chauffeur drive her from New York to the Barnes Foundation outside Philadelphia where Douglas had gone to study and insisted that he stop his studies immediately lest they corrupt his natural instincts.[13]

Eugene Metcalf writes that "primitivism was not only a drawing card for Harlem nightlife but also an almost obligatory concern in any art form that aspired to popularity and sought to portray black America."[14] Playing among primitives was a way for whites of the time to "liberate themselves from dull and debilitating tradition, to reinvigorate their lives," and they turned their attention to Harlem.[15] Perhaps this fascination with black expression was a reprise of the fascination at the end of the eighteenth century with black dance and song on plantations and the voyeurism contributing to the mid-nineteenth-century growth of minstrelsy. Additionally, it may have offered a similar freedom from the strictures and guilt of white society that many whites who donned minstrel masks experienced. Metcalf makes the interesting argument that "[b]y supporting and promoting black artists and their art, white patrons could believe that they were working toward a more egalitarian future, but by insisting that the black behavior and art they supported conform to the unreal and potentially pejorative myth of primitivism, they were also insuring, perhaps unknowingly, that this future would be unrealized and their own social position and power remain unchallenged."[16]

Folk art and African art meet in the concept of primitivism. Though African American artists Henry O. Tanner and Archibald J. Motley Jr. exhibited in New York galleries, it is fitting that the first African American given an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art was folk artist William Edmondson in 1937. Black primitivism, according to Metcalf, "expressed often in terms of African origins, was discovered and celebrated by whites from all over the world."[17] In early-twentieth-century France, the fascination with *l'art nègre* was rooted in a sense of liberation because, as Jody Blake argues, "the French believed that African-American music and dance broke all the rules, or were entirely free of rules," and "challenged the decorum of an era of stiffly starched collars and tightly laced corsets."[18] Still, the craze for black music, dance, and African sculpture

"did not entail a rejection of racist stereotypes. On the contrary, it was because ragtime and the cakewalk seemed to represent the capitulation of 'civilization' to 'savagery' that Parisians embraced them."[19] So it is no wonder that when Motley was given his celebrated exhibition at New York's New Gallery in 1928, he was asked to paint several "voo-doo" paintings by the dealer for inclusion in the exhibition.[20] Motley completed several African "tribal" scenes but never returned to the subject after that experience.

It is telling that three of the most recent African American artists to experience a meteoric rise in the American art world at early ages are Jean-Michel Basquiat, Michael Ray Charles, and Kara Walker: artists whose work locates them deeply within white racial perceptions of blackness. This does not diminish, and is not a comment on, the quality of their work. However, I do wish to question the *response* to the work by many whites in an art apparatus that shows little egalitarian sincerity. If Basquiat, Charles, and, by extension, Walker represent the truth of the black experience, as Tony Shafrazi suggests, it is a perceived experience conforming to certain primitivist/Otherness expectations. If Charles, like Josephine Baker, has donned a mask to exploit white fantasy for his own benefit, he also has risked, as did Baker, helping to establish "aesthetic definitions that allowed socially powerful groups to appear to support a new and more democratic vision of American art and society while actually protecting and even augmenting their exclusive social interests."[21]

In a brief 1994 article about his work in *Vibe* magazine, a publication devoted to the world of hip-hop, Charles indicates that the stereotypes "might not be explicitly used anymore, but they still affect us unconsciously."[22] A year earlier he said, "I believe we are products of the past," and added that hiding the past is not productive.[23] Kern-Foxworth tells us that Charles "has proven that he is one of our premier 'custodians of culture'" and that he "uses historical imagery in the guise of Sambo, Aunt Jemima and other contemptible characters with large fleshy red lips, bulging eyes, and outrageous habits, to transport us back to a warped past" while forcing us to "confront the realities of today."[24] In a recent telephone conversation, Charles reiterated that he believes that African American "powerlessness continues" and that his images are a "challenge to create alternative images and representations."[25]

If we contextualize Charles on a trajectory from the primitivist history of the Harlem Renaissance, there is the risk that he can become the cultural custodian of a warped past that remains in place, in part, because of the continued acceptance of its assumptions. The question that must be asked is, whose past is being remembered here and what benefit is there in reviving it to critique the present? Does the possibility that derogatory stereotypes can be captured by their victims, inverted and played with, or commodified, indicate that they no

longer are rooted in the raw power that made them monolithic and dangerous? If that is the case, why would there be a continuing need for art that inverts or subverts derogatory images? Is it possible for common usage to give new meaning to derogatory terms or images? Are inversions more effective than subversions? Perhaps white enthusiasm for this type of work, an excitement seldom seen for art by blacks that is not rooted in racial victimization, is an effort to preserve the territorial assignments in the art canon. Blacks must act as blacks; as representatives from the primitive outside, tamed and entertaining.

If those whites who matter in museum, collecting, and gallery circles continue to position themselves as prime audiences and arbiters of taste for African American expression, they remain in control; they are the gatekeepers who can determine which amusements hold their attention and are rewarded. Images that seriously challenge racial hierarchies or that might be rooted in African cultural histories and sensibilities rarely summon the kind of attention and heat that can be found around work using demeaning black imagery even while criticizing racist histories and consciousness. As Metcalf suggests, once again the fact that work by blacks concerned with racial issues is given heat and light allows for self-congratulatory mumblings while changing nothing.

Turning to a comparison of visual art and language, we can find useful Stuart Hall's statement (discussed in the introduction): "The relation between 'things,' concepts and signs lies at the heart of the production of meaning in language."[26] If a word represents a concept in the construction of meaning, consider the inversion of the word "nigger" in contemporary vernacular speech. For the sake of argument, let us say that Charles's caricature is the equivalent of vernacular play with the word "nigger." Perhaps it is the equivalent of the affectionate saying used by many black men: "You my nigger even if you don't get no bigger." Walter Ong suggests that "concepts have a way of carrying their etymologies with them forever. The elements out of which a term is originally built usually, and probably always, linger somehow in subsequent meanings, perhaps obscurely but often powerfully and even irreducibly."[27] Because we live in a literate culture, dictionaries and texts preserve all the interpretations of a word including the original ones. If we accept this, and I do, then the inversion is never complete—never total. The origins of a concept linger, often out of view but potentially present. To affectionately call a friend "nigger" is a subconscious admission that the prevailing racial hierarchy is permanent and unassailable, or, at best, it is a sardonic admission of being located within that hierarchy. In other words, do such terms take us outside the racial box, or do they just reorganize the inside of it?

Slight variations such as *nigga*, *niggaz*, or the old *nigra* amount to subtle shifts of pronunciation or spelling but do not separate them from the original term.

There are some occasions, some contexts, wherein "nigger" reverts to its etymology, and it always iterates the persistence of a racial context because it is never meaningful without that context. It is a demeaning term that whites spat at people they were oppressing, people of color. The word contained such disreputable connotations that some whites were called "nigger lover" in disgust to indicate that they too had become demeaned by their association with blacks. In recent years white youth appropriating black speech, dress, and hip-hop culture have been derogatorily called "wiggers"—white niggers—by other whites. We must remember that for ironic inversions, like those of Michael Ray Charles, to have any meaning, they must first invoke an understanding of the original concept. You must revive the old and set it up to knock it down with the new.

Here is the turn for the worse. An artist best roots artistic expression and critique within his or her identity and sensibilities. If the work is a mirror held up to society to force a confrontation with its own ugliness, the artist positions himself as holding the mirror from a position separate from what is being reflected. Lorna Simpson's feminist racial critiques are rooted in her sensibilities as a woman of color and are pitted against masculinist, racialized histories. Can we imagine de Kooning or Warhol or Jeff Donaldson being able to make similar statements? Playwright August Wilson wrote in the *New York Times* about being an artist: "Before one can become an artist one must first be. It is this being in all its facets, its many definitions, that endows the artist with an immutable sense of himself that is necessary for the accomplishment of his task. Simply put, art is beholden to the kiln in which the artist was fired."[28]

The inversion or recycling of derogatory images carries an implicit bargain with the mainstream art establishment and the white world that the artist will implicate himself or herself in the imagery. To use such imagery ironically or satirically, one must don the cork and be the minstrel. As Bay Area artist David Huffman admitted, "[T]he minstrel theme really focused me, almost like a self-portrait. The minstrel embodied my political, psychological, emotional, and unconscious feelings about the world."[29] If we contrast this approach with that of late 1960s and early 1970s artists like Jeff Donaldson and Wadsworth Jarrell of AfriCobra, we see that they inhabited roles akin to those of political activists like H. Rap Brown and Stokely Carmichael of SNCC or imbued with the attitudes of the Black Panther Party. Playing the minstrel role is acceptable in some circles because the imagery is not problematic or uncomfortable for many white audiences and the artist inhabits a designated space appropriate to his or her racial/ethnic identity. As cultural critic Stanley Crouch states in a documentary about the making of Spike Lee's film satire *Bamboozled*: ". . . you see, the grand irony of it is minstrelsy was on its way out when the Civil War ended. But when the black people came into it, they revitalized it because they danced extremely

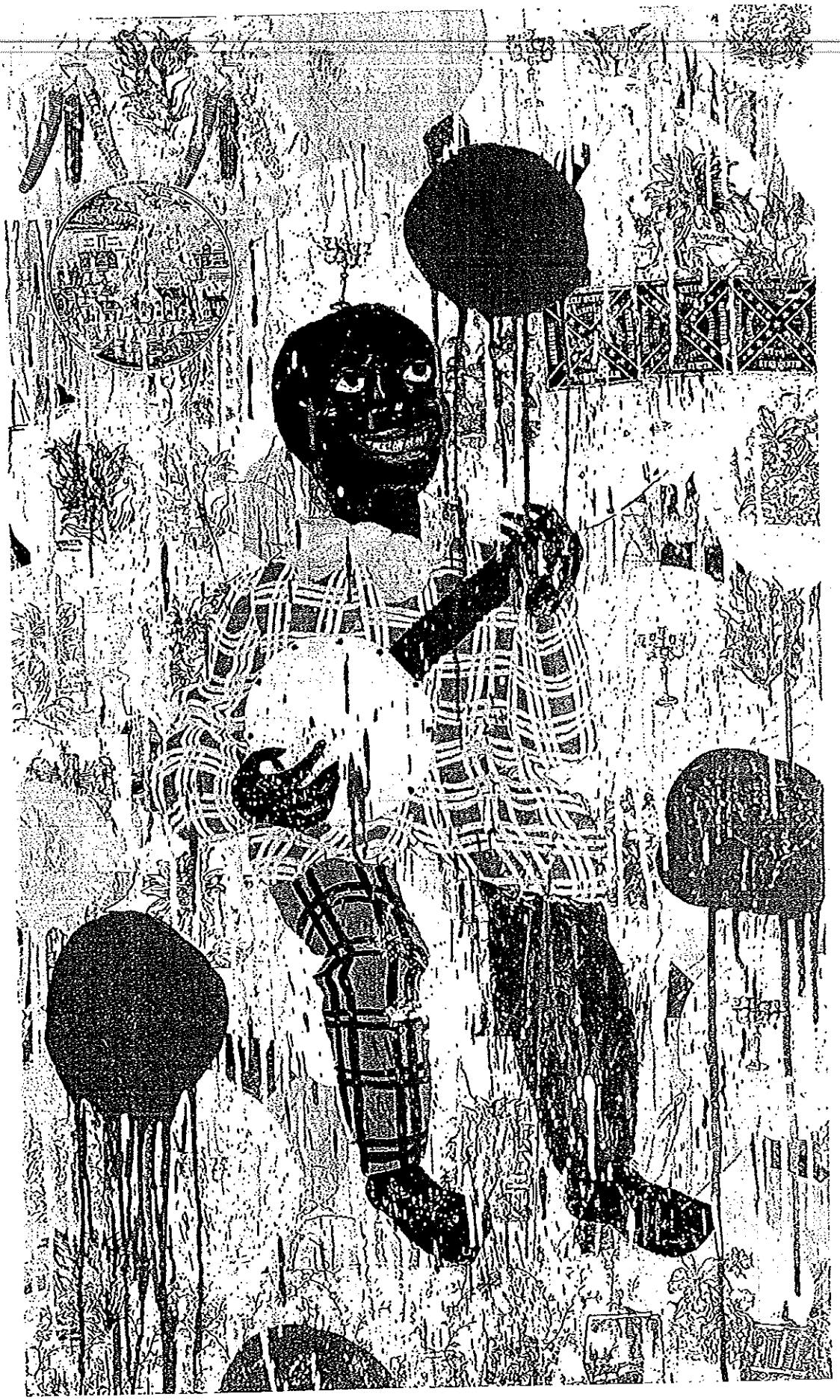

FIGURE 83.
David Huffman, 1997, Untitled, *acrylic, enamel on board, 48" × 28". David Huffman and the Patricia Sweetow Gallery, San Francisco. Huffman says, "I think I got lost in the freedom to express myself through the minstrel" (Patricia Sweetow, interview with David Huffman, n.d.).*

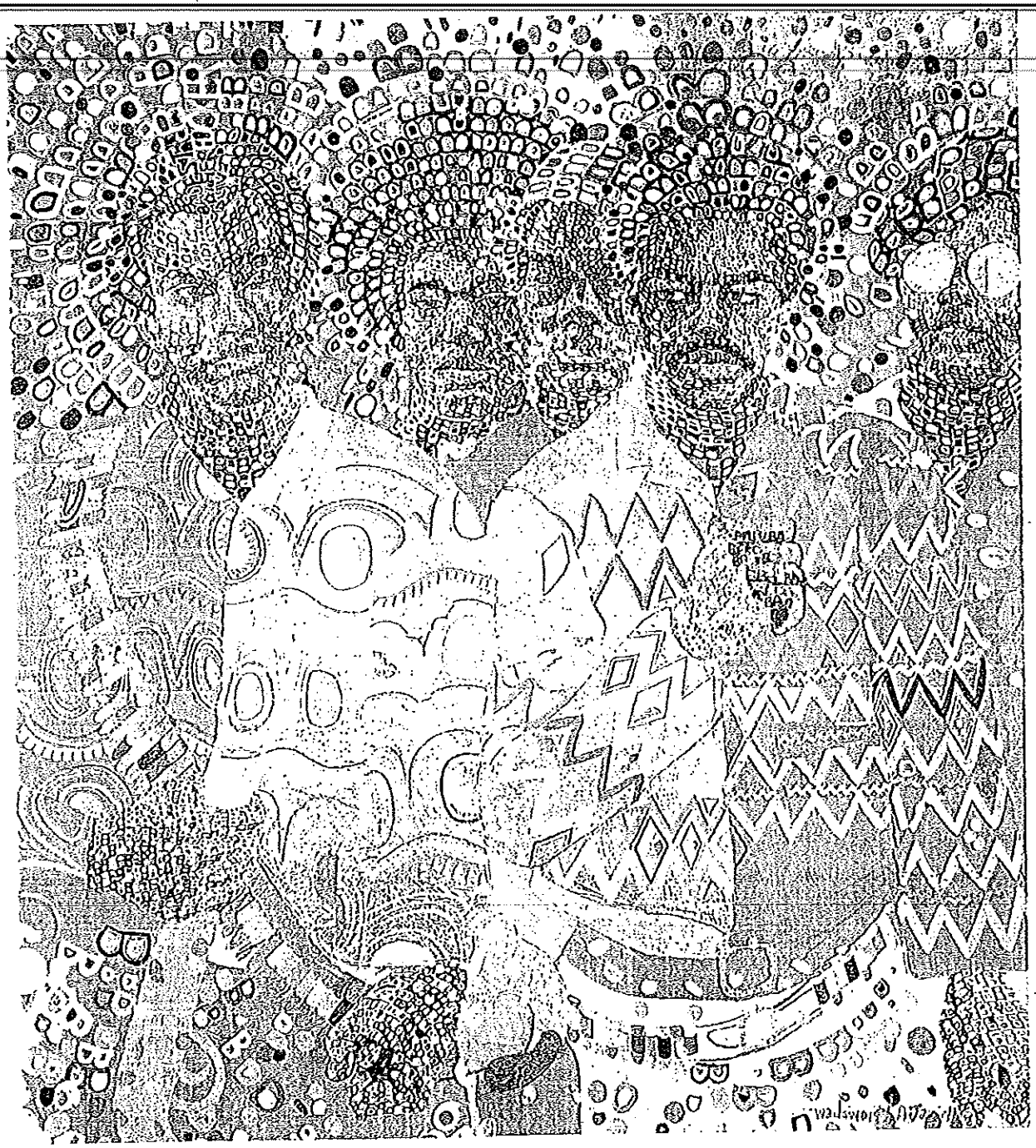

FIGURE 84.
Wadsworth Jarrell, Liberation Soldiers, *1972, acrylic and foil on canvas, 50" × 48". Courtesy of the artist. Black Panthers Huey Newton, Bobby Seale, and others are shown in this image to celebrate their social programs and black liberation rhetoric. See Robert L. Douglas,* Wadsworth Jarrell: The Artist as Revolutionary *(San Francisco: Pomegranate Artbooks, 1996), 38–40.*

well. They were funny. And they did sing well. So, in an interesting way, it's as though they came and reinforced the bars of the cage that they were in through their talent."[30]

Right side up, or upside down, racial imagery/language remains within racial discourse. The imagery is rooted in the white imagination, and its acceptance

offers whites the potential for self-congratulatory accolades due to an alleged sensitivity to racial issues. The dialogue between the artist and this audience remains within the discourse of race, which, of course, sustains it.

Interestingly, Michael Ray Charles's most surprising critiques may be those of NBA basketball players (figure 85), athletes he lampoons as coons acting out stereotypical behaviors and showing little social responsibility. Or, perhaps, he is suggesting that whites may perceive them in stereotypical ways. In the same sense that Aunt Jemima is transformed into "ain't jo mama," this work insults and signifies by linking the unreal and the absurd with actual people. In suggesting that the subject is linked to a stereotypical fantasy, the absurdity hits home and demands a response. Linking this type of imagery to whites is more abstract and far less visceral because of the complicated formula required to decipher a derogatory black image in a way that is harmful to whites.

Let us turn to the use of the term "black" to describe African Americans. Use of the word as descriptive of people only functions in a racial context to denote difference, though it has more potential slippage than the term "nigger." It must be remembered that it was the word "Black" in the original version *The Story of Little Black Sambo*[31] that facilitated the story's acceptance in the United States despite its references to India—tigers, after all, are found in India, not in Africa. The term "black" is virtually useless in all-black contexts other than to suggest that whites are not present. Therefore inverting it to drain it of its potential for hurt still locates one within a racial context where the potential for objectification by color still exists. Black always is dependent on the existence of white for meaning so it offers no means of transcendence. To be black and proud, or black and anything, one must remain in some conjunctive relationship with white. When the term began to be used in a Pan-Africanist sense, it functioned as a label of solidarity in opposition to white solidarity and thus served as a ploy in the racialized black Atlantic world. A marker of discreditation and exclusion became a signifier of belonging and a basis for political action. It functioned as a step in the journey from inside racial ideology toward an imagined transracial existence outside the boundaries of racial ideology. It has been a means to an end, not an end in itself.

Graphic images can be thought to harbor potential similar to that of language, and it is within graphics that we find the foundations of written language. Writing gives language the stability of being visible, and visual signs consistently recall the concepts represented. The sound event that is speech is stabilized for re-collection through visual signs evoking concepts akin to those found in speech. Is it not true that the word "mammy" and a mammy cookie jar evoke the same anachronistic complex of ideas? There can be slippage and play in speech and visual expression, but the meaning in the slippage may be de-

FIGURE 85. *Michael Ray Charles,* Lifesaball (Forever Free), *1995, acrylic latex, oil wash, and copper penny on paper, 60" × 36". Courtesy of the artist. In this image, Charles suggests that the basketball has replaced the watermelon in an updated racial stereotype.*

pendent on its conflict with the original meaning, a fact that keeps the original meaning nearby.

This is not to say that there is no value in the paintings of Michael Ray Charles or to insist that he create positive imagery. Like Basquiat, he samples images, ideas, and language from a variety of sources, and he cleverly uses signage in his attempt to create disruptive signs in the semiotic sense. It is to say that the audience for the work primarily is white, and it is an approving audience. The subject in the work, the artist himself, attempts to play a stereotypical role in the context of white power, and his critique of that power is layered underneath the minstrel song being sung. The signifyin' that functioned as a trickster critique in the nineteenth century may not be present in this performance because African American audiences, as the artist admits, often do not get it.

RECONTEXTUALIZATION AND REAPPROPRIATION

Beginning with Aunt Jemima, stereotypical black characters have been associated with products and marketed throughout the United States. Innumerable household items were sold to decorate homes, provide humorous imagery, and increase the presence of product trademark figures in homes. These items included postcards, salt and pepper shakers, notepads, dolls, tablecloths, spoon holders, cookie jars, and so forth. The vast majority of them incorporated exaggerated imagery that was offensive to blacks. Among the familiar product names and characters were Aunt Jemima, the Cream of Wheat chef, the Gold Dust twins, Coon Chicken Inn, Sambo chocolate drink, Mammy's Soda, Nigger Hair Tobacco, Dinah Black Enamel paint, and Mammy-Ann Cane Syrup, to name just a few. Additional kitsch produced for use in homes included ceramic figurines serving as salt and pepper shakers or cookie jars that whites may have felt were cute or humorous. There were numerous children's books like *The Children's Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *Petunia Be Keerful*, *Watermelon Pete*, *Cocoa Dancer*, *Little Black Sambo*, *Ten Little Niggers*, *I'se Topsy*, *Plantation Poems*, and *Black Alice*. Then there was minstrel sheet music, still being produced in the first decades of the twentieth century, with derogatory imagery and song lyrics: "When Coonhood Was in Flower," "Bees-Wax Rag," "Jig Walk Charleston," "You'll Get All Dats Acomin' to You," "Poverty Rag," "Coffee Cooler's Tea," "I Don't Care If Yo' Nebber Comes Back," "When You Sang Hush-a-Bye Baby to Me," "Shortnin' Bread," "I Don't Know Where I'm Goin but I'm on My Way," and "Little Black Sambo and the Twins." And we should not forget those aggravating little lawn jockeys that became widespread after the Second World War.

The majority of these items were in service between 1894 and 1950, a period

of rigid segregation, lynching, and the kind of racial violence that led to the destruction of the black section of Wilmington, North Carolina, in 1898, the black section of Tulsa, Oklahoma, in 1921, and the obliteration of the all-black town of Rosewood, Florida, in 1923. From 1892 to 1931, 2,586 blacks were lynched.[32] Additionally, there was the Red Summer of 1919, with widespread racial violence across the United States, including the riots in Chicago discussed in chapter 5. The violent, oppressive acts appear to have been responses to the diminishing control over blacks that whites were experiencing and the sense of a loss of status produced by that declining control. Sociologist Steven Dubin indicates that stereotypical images "helped allay status anxiety and promoted a sense of social solidarity and superiority among whites." The violence enforced social controls, and the imagery reinforced it symbolically.[33]

If we look at these racist images and objects using Hall's model, we can argue that stereotypical imagery formed a part of the racial discourse constructing general knowledge about, and justifications for, the violence of racial oppression. A cluster of ideas, images, practices, and institutional structures constituted the discursive formation of race and defined "what knowledge was considered useful" and what "sorts of persons or 'subjects' embody its characteristics." We can think of so-called black collectibles or memorabilia as "subjects" embodying the characteristics defined by the racist discourse that constructed the oppressive discursive formation within which all of the objects, ideas, images, and acts flourished. The totality of this discursive formation was suffocating for African Americans in many ways and distorted self-images and the process of identity formation. Given this premise, it becomes very difficult to imagine how the collection of racist kitsch redeems the objects and images or inverts their meaning. It is not impossible to imagine that the meaning of blackness will shift significantly in time and that racist objects may become the pitiful evidence of discredited attitudes; the thing itself, the image embodied, would become useless rather than be given a second career with new meaning as a redemptive or transformative agent.

During a scene in *Bamboozled*, Jada Pinkett-Smith's character, Sloan, says, "I love these black collectibles. It reminds me of a time in our history, in this country, when we were considered inferior, subhuman, and we should never forget."[34] Yet one of the more important points made in the film is that these objects destructively insinuate themselves into the environment and consciousness of folk who own them; by the end of the story the character collecting the racist kitsch has donned blackface himself. The objects are fragments of the discursive formation of race, and they lack the potential for reversal to the point of becoming weapons for the disruption of that formation. They document its historical presence, just as photos of lynchings might, but they offer no redemp-

tion or salvation for their victims. If the folk behind the stereotypes have not been liberated in the past eighty years, there is little reason to believe that surrounding oneself with racist objects at home will somehow be cathartic or liberating today. There also is the question of whether liberation can ever be found within a consciousness of victimization.

These household objects—"collectibles" or "memorabilia"—that formed stereotypical images of blacks carried social implications. Dubin points out that most of the objects had some functional rather than decorative use, and work that was typical of blacks was symbolically recreated by the functional items. He suggests that, taken collectively, they might comprise a code replicating minority-majority relations and that they helped establish strong symbolic control over blacks during a period (1890–1950) when white control over blacks was diminishing.[35] Additionally, he argues that there was a concern for the accumulation and consumption of goods enhancing social status and that meaning projected onto objects helped people derive "a sense of self and their relation to others."[36]

White New York photographer David Levinthal has done a series of dramatically lit 24-by-20-inch color photos of black collectibles, which he calls "stereotypes of iconography," part of his ongoing exploration of toys, dolls, and such objects in American culture. This work, the Blackface series, problematizes the objects by presenting them in a black background completely without context or mediation. Levinthal says, "I wanted to present these things in a complex way that was beautiful and horrifying at the same time."[37] The images are produced in large formats for exhibition and have the slick, rich look of product advertisements. Levinthal suggests that the series encompasses issues of history, sexuality, alienation, and race.[38]

Though the objects have been transformed from collectibles to subjects in Levinthal's photographs, they have been taken out of any context and stand as imagery rather than as collectible objects. Any mediating forces and conceptual veneers have been removed, and we confront them as monumentalized images in pristine gallery settings or in slickly produced coffee-table books, rather than as small objects in private kitchens. This process heightens our awareness of the objects on a purely visual level, and the intention seems to be to challenge us as a society about the assumptions behind the things, about the context that could create them. Isolating and focusing on an object of this type forces us to stop and notice its visual characteristics and absurdity. We are forced to look at it closely and asked to render it meaningless. How fully does this strategy destabilize the object? And is its etymology meaningfully disturbed?

A comparison of Levinthal's photograph (figure 87) with another of the same object in Kenneth Goings's book about the history of collectibles (figure

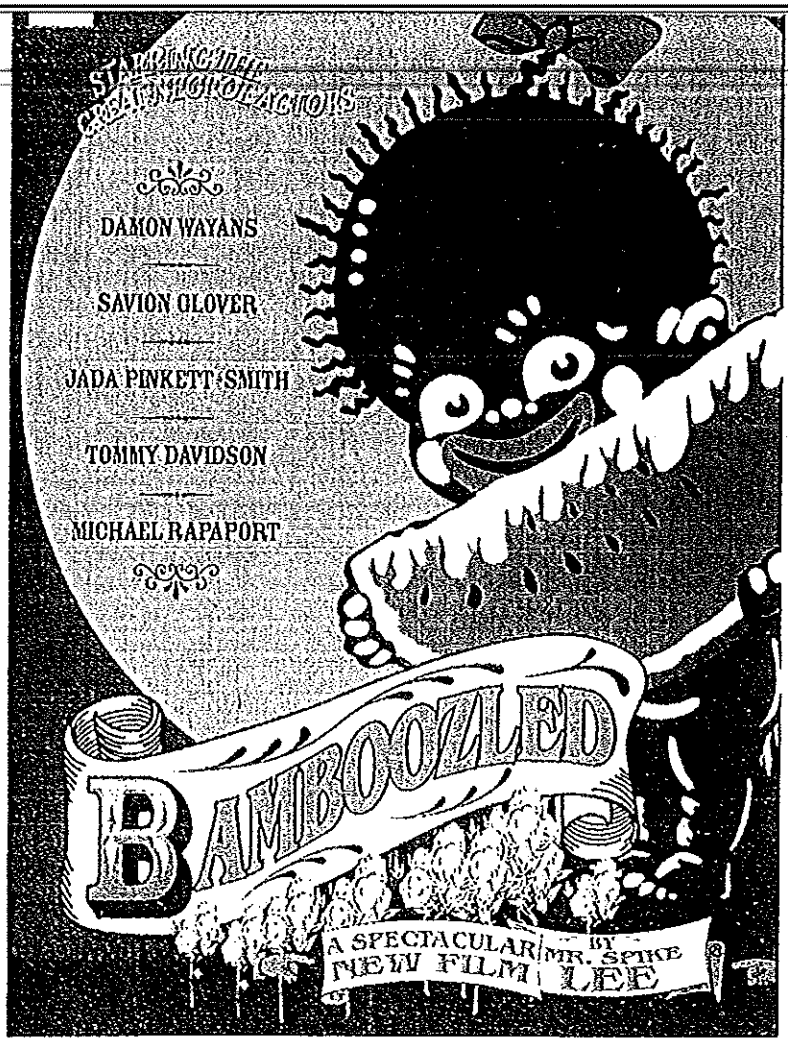

FIGURE 86.
Cover art for DVD of Spike Lee's Bamboozled. *40 Acres and a Mule Filmworks, Inc., 2000.*

88) suggests that the image continues to do its original work. Levinthal's artistic photograph looks up at the face of the figure, monumentalizing it and emphasizing it as an icon. The visual and emotional effect of the work, however, remains virtually identical to the documentary image of the collectible. Interestingly, this is played out during the closing credits of Spike Lee's *Bamboozled*: the Levinthal photograph mentioned above is shown along with images and filmed segments of racist kitsch, with no distinction being made between the original objects and Levinthal's image. Both images, Levinthal's photograph and Goings's documentary image, accentuate the commercial appeal of the objects and, in many ways, fetishize them as valuable, notable, and collectible. The photographic mediation and recontextualization does not transform the piece significantly enough to alter its meaning and effect. Perhaps the American social context that initially produced the objects has changed to the point of lessening the consequences of such imagery while allowing the growth of alternative, self-representational imagery created by African Americans. Artist Fred Wilson, who has created an installation dealing with racist kitsch, has expressed con-

above left:
FIGURE 87.
David Levinthal, Blackface series, 1995–96. Courtesy of the artist.

above right:
FIGURE 88.
Aunt Jemima cookie jar, ca. 1930s. Collection of Kenneth W. Goings.

cern that art can perpetuate an ugly icon even as it attempts a satirical critique. He says that the objects are "highly charged. Black people collect them because they think that by owning them, they can overpower them. But in my experience ownership gives you less understanding. It numbs and anesthetizes you. Living with these objects in my studio for a period of time has diminished my anger. They're insidious."[39]

It is also possible that Levinthal does not experience the emotional history of such objects, though there is nothing malicious in his intentions. He explores the aesthetic possibility of the objects and the issues and tensions they evoke, but he does so at a safe distance. He has no historical or emotional connection to the objects, and he began to work with them as part of a larger investigation of toys and dolls aimed at developing a critique of American social assumptions that could be excavated from them. Michael Ray Charles paints at a chronological distance from the original stereotypical images, separated from times when he might have faced his own reduction to and association with Sambo in his encounters with whites. Protest might have cost him his life rather than resulting in the attention of the powerful New York art world.

If we look at a sculpture, *Forever Free* by Sargent Johnson (figure 89), from the same period as the Aunt Jemima cookie jars (the 1930s), we can see that there is an unmistakable shift from the periphery to the center of African American experience and self-perception. In both Johnson's sculpture and the cookie jar, we find an attempt to simplify black physiognomy into archetypal forms, and the facial expression carries the meaning of the work. Both objects use a closed, cylindrical form to represent the figure, and there is a reliance on skin coloration for effect: one using a deep, unnatural black to match the exaggerated features and expression, and the other employing a rich brown in an acknowledged attempt to explore the diverse coloration to be found in Negro skin. Both figures are rooted in domesticity, and both are perceived as foundations of the home. Johnson's work, however, emphasizes the woman's protective, maternal qualities and her quiet, defiant, dignity. She is the foundation of her *own* home. Simply, Johnson's *Forever Free* emerges from the center of experience as self-expression, and it works as a counterhegemonic expression counteracting the image of the mammy cookie jar. Inherent in the work is a sense of resistance to unnamed forces and obstacles. Charles has painted a *Forever Free* series that uses inversion strategies to pull imagery in from the periphery of African American experience—that place on the edge where racial or ethnic antagonisms clash and stereotypes live—to defend the center.

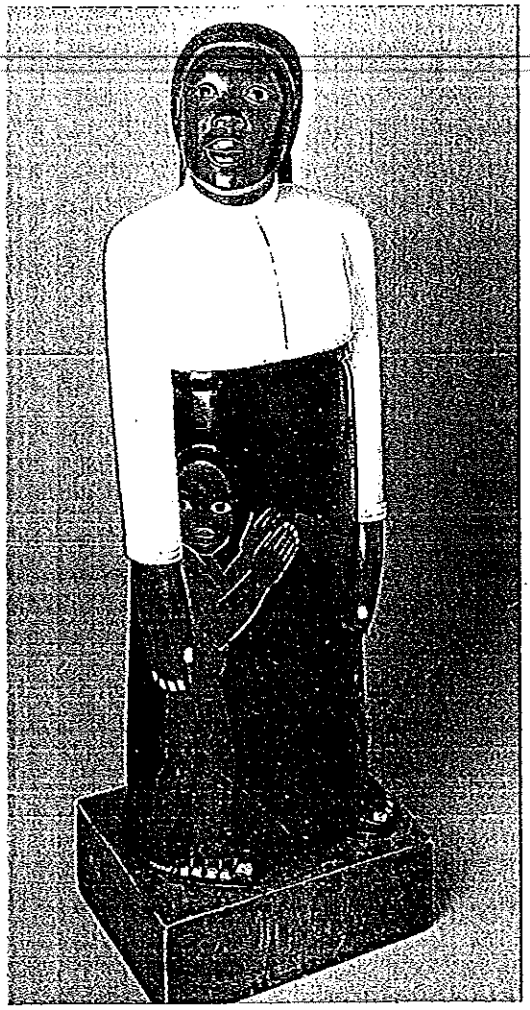

FIGURE 89. *Sargent Johnson,* Forever Free, *1933, wood with lacquer on cloth, h. 36", 1934. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, gift of Mrs. E. D. Lederman.*

Levinthal's imagery plays out its entire drama on the periphery, but it is rooted in the epistemological frame of nonblack Otherness. Perhaps his identification with blacks approximates the early days of minstrelsy, when the discredited black figure became a means of identification with the outsider as a critique of the American white center and a recognition that the strategies for demeaning and controlling blacks were rehearsals for more subtle, refined use of those strategies to control certain whites. The demeaned black figure is a convenience, and the critique, as in minstrelsy, is dependent on the presence of that black figure as a demeaned sign.

One of the central points of my argument is that intention, or the imposition of transformative concepts and language, does not completely overcome the foundations (or etymology) of demeaning images or derogatory terminology. Just as the recontextualization of the mammy cookie jar through photography

does not significantly alter its visual impact, so the collection of such objects in black homes does not liberate, appropriate, or domesticate them. Their racist foundations sit beneath the facade of transformative intentions like radioactive isotopes burning through the redemptive language and releasing visual and psychological toxins into our personal landscapes. The efforts made to deal with these objects and images in ways beyond historical exploration and documentation root African Americans in who we are not rather than who we are. One might say that such efforts potentially and unwittingly allow us to be participants in our own oppression by reinforcing and naturalizing a victim status memorialized through derogatory images. The objects only have meaning in the context or history of racism, and they are rooted in the shame of barbarism toward African Americans, not in the expression, history, and triumph of people of African descent.

RECYCLING AND REITERATION?: KARA WALKER'S GROTESQUE MINSTREL SHOW

Kara Walker is perhaps the most notable and controversial artist who has chosen to use derogatory racial imagery in art. She has won major awards, the fervent support of many collectors and galleries, the adoration of curators like Thelma Golden (formerly of the Whitney Museum and most recently the Studio Museum in Harlem), and the appreciation of art historians. She also has inspired the unprecedented disdain of artists like Betye Saar and Howardina Pindell and many others within African American cultural circles. Her work is uniquely brilliant, timely, essential, and disturbing in unusual ways. In an uncanny way, she has created in her work a confluence of race, taste, sexual mores, the excesses of contemporary art, and the postmodernist trend toward eradicating the boundaries between popular culture and high art.

Walker is noted for the creation of tableaux, installations of a sort made of silhouettes cut from black paper. The works are arranged on blank canvas or on walls, often turning corners, and the white background highlights the silhouettes and metaphorically points up the reductionist character of racial discourse into black and white terms and ideas. The work has the haunting spectacle of a fatal three-car automobile accident with its routine depiction of the unspeakable, the perverse, and the supposedly dark secrets of racial histories in the United States. Often it is grisly, but you are compelled to look at it. Here is a shadow text lurking behind the American dream that no one wants to talk about really. Yet the work is more than that because there is a gallows humor in the satire; the kind of horrid jokes one is a bit ashamed of having laughed at.

in the margins because of their inherent inadequacy. That is an erroneous and racist assumption.

63. Clark, *Dark Ghetto*, 82.

64. Phillip Pilevsky, *Captive Continent: The Stockholm Syndrome in European-Soviet Relations* (New York: Praeger, 1989), 3–5.

65. Arthur S. Reber, *The Penguin Dictionary of Psychology* (New York: Viking, 1985), 735.

66. Pilevsky, *Captive Continent*, 16.

67. Claude M. Steele, "Race and Schooling of Black Americans," *Atlantic Monthly*, April 1992, 69.

68. Ibid., 72.

69. Ibid.

70. Ibid., 74. Steele argues that another strategy of survival occurs in this process, particularly in schools, where blacks "disidentify" with the society or the school, producing a devastating alienation affecting performance and probably (I suspect) social behavior.

71. The Rodney King beating case in Los Angeles, the vicious abuse of Abner Louima, and the shooting of Amadou Diallo in New York are just three of the more publicized cases of police violence against blacks. Recently, there has been increasing discussion of DWB—Driving While Black—because black males are stopped on highways by police in numbers that show racial targeting.

72. Aptheker, *"One Continual Cry,"* 12.

73. Pilevsky, *Captive Continent*, 17.

74. Ibid., 20–24.

75. Steele, "Race and Schooling," 74.

76. Ibid., 75.

77. Pilevsky, *Captive Continent*, 35.

78. Ibid., 35–38.

79. Ibid., 38–43.

80. Clark, *Dark Ghetto*, 64.

81. Barbara Huddleston-Mattai and P. Rudy Mattai, "The Sambo Mentality and the Stockholm Syndrome Revisited: Another Dimension to an Examination of the Plight of the African-American," *Journal of Black Studies* 23, no. 3 (March 1993): 346.

82. Ibid., 350.

CHAPTER SIX

1. Langston Hughes, "Cultural Exchange," in *Ask Your Mama: 12 Moods For Jazz* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), 9.

2. Louis Armstrong, "(What Did I Do To Be So) Black and Blue," music and lyrics by Thomas "Fats" Waller, Harry Brooks, and Andy Razaf, recorded July 22, 1929.

3. Hughes, "Cultural Exchange," 8.

4. Marilyn Kern-Foxworth, "Painting Positive Pictures of Images That Injure: Michael Ray Charles' Dueling Dualities," in *Michael Ray Charles, 1989–1997: An American Artist's Work* (Houston: Blaffer Gallery, University of Houston, 1997), n.p.

5. Don Bacigalupi and Marilyn Kern-Foxworth, "An Interview With Michael Ray Charles," in *Michael Ray Charles*, n.p.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. Susan Chadwick, "Texas Artist Bursts onto N.Y. Art Scene," *Houston Post*, June 14, 1994.

10. Nicholas Mirzoeff, *Bodyscape: Art, Modernity and the Ideal Figure* (London: Routledge, 1995), 166. Mirzoeff indicates that Basquiat's declining stature reversed after his death and that once again he was granted a position of favor in the art world. Judd Tully writes that in "August 1988, after a brutal diet of drugs and hurtful reviews, Basquiat succumbed to an overdose" and that "[o]nly his headline- and myth-making death resurrected Basquiat's moribund market." Judd Tully, "The Legacy of Basquiat," *Art and Auction* 15, no. 3 (October 1992): 115.

11. Mirzoeff, *Bodyscape*, 166.

12. Ibid., 162–89.

13. Charlotte Mason was the wife of Rufus Osgood Mason, a surgeon who believed hypnosis and psychic powers were healing agents. He believed that great spiritual powers resided in "primitive" and "child races," terms he used to describe Native Americans and African Americans. Charlotte Mason shared these beliefs. Romare Bearden and Harry Henderson, *A History of African-American Artists: From 1792 to the Present* (New York: Pantheon, 1993), 129.

14. Eugene W. Metcalf, "Black Art, Folk Art, and Social Control," *Winterthur Portfolio* 18, no. 4 (Winter 1983), 277.

15. Ibid., 276.

16. Ibid., 277.

17. Ibid., 276.

18. Jody Blake, *Le Tumulte noir: Modernist Art and Popular Entertainment in Jazz-Age Paris, 1900–1930* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 21.

19. Ibid., 18.

20. George Hellman, owner of the New Gallery in New York, wrote to Motley: "My general suggestion to you would be that during the summer you paint some pictures showing various phases of negro life in its more dramatic aspect—scenes, perhaps, in which the voo-doo ele-

ment as well as the cabaret element—but especially the latter—enter." George S. Hellman to Archibald J. Motley Jr., May 9, 1927, Archibald J. Motley Jr. Papers, Chicago Historical Society.

21. Metcalf, "Black Art, Folk Art, and Social Control," 280.

22. Daniel Pinchbeck, "Sampling Sambo," *Vibe*, September 1994, 114.

23. Susan Chadwick, "Artist Updates Black Images of Yesteryear," *Houston Post*, July 13, 1993.

24. Kern-Foxworth, "Painting Positive Pictures," n.p.

25. Michael Ray Charles, telephone conversation with author, February 5, 2001.

26. Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 18–19.

27. Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (1982; reprint, London: Routledge, 1995), 12.

28. August Wilson, "Sailing the Stream of Black Culture," *New York Times*, April 23, 2000.

29. Patricia Sweetow, "Interview with David Huffman, Artist," (San Francisco: Patricia Sweetow Gallery, May 30, 1999).

30. Stanley Crouch, in Spike Lee (writer and director), *The Making of "Bamboozled,"* on the DVD of *Bamboozled* (40 Acres and a Mule Filmworks, 2000).

31. Helen Bannerman, *The Story of Little Black Sambo*, illustrated by Helen Bannerman (1898; reprint, New York: Fred Stokes Co., 1900). Bannerman wrote this story for her children, from whom she was separated while in India. Given the usual assumptions about the story, it is ironic to find that Sambo is in fact a trickster figure and that his mother, Mumbo, completes his victorious encounter with several tigers by serving them, after they have melted, as butter on pancakes.

32. From 1882 to 1891, more whites than blacks were lynched (751 to 732). However, from 1892 to 1931, only 531 whites were lynched.

33. Steven C. Dubin, "Symbolic Slavery: Black Representations in Popular Culture," *Social Problems* 34, no. 2 (April 1987): 122.

34. Lee, *Bamboozled*.

35. Dubin, "Symbolic Slavery," 123–31.

36. Ibid., 122.

37. Quoted in Richard B. Woodward, "Color Bind: White Artist + Black Memorabilia = No Show," *Village Voice*, June 25, 1996.

38. Charles Stainback and Richard B. Woodward, *David Levinthal: Work from 1975–1996* (New York: International Center of Photography, 1997), 180.

39. Quoted in Woodward, "Color Bind," 79.

40. Nicholas Mirzoeff, "What Is Visual Culture?," in *The Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff (London: Routledge, 1998), 9.

41. Ibid., 9.

42. Julia Szabo, "Kara Walker's Shock Art," *New York Times Magazine*, March 23, 1997, 50. Walker was born in Stockton, California, but moved to Atlanta just before beginning high school.

43. James Hannaham, "Pea, Ball, Bounce," *Interview*, November 1998, 119.

44. Szabo, "Kara Walker's Shock Art," 50.

45. *Kara Walker: Upon My Many Masters—An Outline* (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1997), n.p.

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid.

48. Jerry Saltz, "Kara Walker: Ill-Will and Desire," *Flash Art*, November/December 1996, 86.

49. Ibid., 82.

50. Szabo, "Kara Walker's Shock Art," 50.

51. *Kara Walker*, n.p.

52. Saltz, "Kara Walker," 84.

53. Ibid.

54. Jessica Kerwin, "Kara Walker," *W*, February 2000, 117.

55. Christina Elizabeth Sharpe, "Kara Walker and Michael Ray Charles," in *Looking Forward, Looking Black*, ed. Jo Anna Isaak (Geneva, N.Y.: Hobart and William Smith College Press, 1999), 41.

56. Saltz, "Kara Walker," 86.

57. *Kara Walker*, n.p.

58. Metcalf, "Black Art, Folk Art, and Social Control," 280.

59. Szabo, "Kara Walker's Shock Art," 50.

60. Saltz, "Kara Walker," 84–85.

61. Alain Locke, "Enter the New Negro," *Survey Graphic* 6, no. 6 (March 1925): 631.

62. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 17.

63. Ibid., 18.

64. Rowland Abiodun, "Introduction: An African(?) Art History: Promising Theoretical Approaches in Yoruba Art Studies," in *The Yoruba Artist: New Theoretical Approaches to African Art*, ed. Rowland Abiodun, Henry Drewal, and John Pemberton (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994), 42.

65. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986; reprint, London: James Currey, 1991), 5.

66. Ibid., 13.

67. Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 33.

68. Ibid., 32.

69. Mirzoeff, "What Is Visual Culture," 6.

70. Kern-Foxworth, "Painting Positive Pictures," n.p.

CHAPTER SEVEN

1. The American Missionary Association became involved, and it later was responsible for the opening of more than 1,000 schools and colleges for blacks in the second half of the nineteenth century. One of those schools was Talladega College, and, according to Woodruff, the mural was a gesture of appreciation by the school. Michael D. Harris, "Urban Totems: The Communal Spirit of Black Murals," in Robin Dunitz and Jim Prigoff, *Walls of Heritage, Walls of Pride: African American Murals* (San Francisco: Pomegranate, 2000), 24.

2. For an overview and historical contextualization of AfriCobra—which I joined in 1979—and the Black Arts movement, see Edmund Barry Gaither, "Heritage Reclaimed: An Historical Perspective and Chronology," in *Black Art, Ancestral Legacy: The African Impulse in African-American Art* (Dallas: Dallas Museum of Art/Harry N. Abrams, 1989), 17–34.

3. Nubia Kai, "AfriCobra Universal Aesthetics," in *AfriCobra: The First Twenty Years* (Atlanta: Nexus Contemporary Art Center, 1990), 6.

4. It should be noted that a number of artists during the late 1960s and the 1970s produced work imbued with sensibilities and African visual elements similar to those found in the work of AfriCobra members. Among others, these artists include Charles Searles, Ademola Olugbefola, Alfred Smith Jr., and Edgar Sorrells-Adewale.

5. I have written more extensively about Renée Stout in "Resonance, Transformation, and Rhyme: The Art of Renée Stout," in Wyatt MacGaffey and Michael D. Harris, *Astonishment and Power* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), 105–55.

6. Willie Dixon, "Hoochie Coochie Man" (Bug Music 0/13/0, Hoochie Coochie Music, BMI).

7. Quoted in Marla C. Berns, "On Love and Longing: Renée Stout Does the Blues," in *Dear Robert, I'll See You at the Crossroads: A Project by Renée Stout* (Santa Barbara: University Art Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara, 1995), 38.

8. Robert Johnson, "Crossroad Blues," in *Woke Up This Mornin': Poetry of the Blues*, ed. A. X. Nicholas (New York: Bantom Books, 1973), 95.

9. Juan Logan, interview with author, tape recording, Chapel Hill, N.C., May 23, 2000. Subsequent quotations are from this interview.

10. Camille Billops, interview with author, tape recording, New York, N.Y., August 22, 2000. Subsequent quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from this conversation.

11. Noliwe M. Rooks, *Hair Raising: Beauty, Culture, and African American Women* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 26.

12. Ibid., 33–34.

13. "Conversing Forms: A Dialogue between Artist Alison Saar and Curator Mary Nooter Roberts," in Mary Nooter Roberts and Alison Saar, *Body Politics: The Female Image in Luba Art and the Sculpture of Alison Saar* (Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 2000), 18–19.

14. Ibid., 30.

15. Ibid.

16. Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), 134.

17. Ibid., 117–18.

18. Rooks, *Hair Raising*, 10.

19. Ibid., 15–16.

20. "Conversing Forms," 27–28.

21. Ibid., 28.

22. Toni Morrison, "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation," in *Black Women Writers (1950–1980): A Critical Evaluation*, ed. Mari Evans (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1984), 339.

23. Carrie Mae Weems, conversation with author, Eatonville, Fla., August 25, 2001.

24. Thelma Golden, introduction to *Freestyle* (New York: Studio Museum in Harlem, 2001), 14.

25. Ibid., 15.

26. Deborah Solomon, "The Downtowning of Uptown," *New York Times Magazine*, August 19, 2001, 46.

27. Patricia Sweetow, "Interview with David Huffman, Artist," (San Francisco: Patricia Sweetow Gallery, May 30, 1999) n.p.

28. Hamza Walker, "Renigged," in *Freestyle*, 17.

29. W. E. B. Du Bois, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903; reprint, New York: New American Library, 1969), 45.

30. Langston Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," *The Nation*, June 23, 1926, 692.