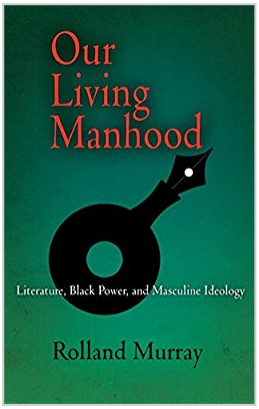

Our Living Manhood: Literature, Black Power, and Masculine Ideology

By Rolland Murray

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Murray analyzes the ways in which notions of masculinity were interwoven with essential movement philosophies regarding revolutionary violence, charismatic leadership, radical rhetoric, and black sexuality. Striving to forge a more nuanced account of how masculinist discourse contributed to the movement's overall agenda, he frames masculinity both as a linchpin of the seductive politics of Black Power and as a focal point of dissent by black male authors.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Clearly written and persuasively argued, *Our Living Manhood* makes a notable contribution to the long-standing critique of male supremacy in Black Nationalism by helping to complicate that critique, and demonstrates the ongoing importance of gender/sexuality studies for understanding African American literature and culture."—Marlon Ross, University of Virginia

About the Author
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Introduction
Our Black Nations Reconsidered

In 1965 Malcolm X's death prompted remarkable expressions of grief from black Americans even as the loss occasioned reinvention of their political identities. This interplay between lack and possibility animated the often-cited eulogy performed by actor Ossie Davis. Lamenting that Malcolm is "extinguished now, and gone from us forever," Davis nonetheless affirms that the "proud community" could find no "braver, more gallant young champion than the Afro-American who lies before us—unconquered still." The eulogy's synthesis of death, eternity, and communal identity calls to mind Benedict Anderson's observation that nationalisms routinely evoke the sacrifices of the dead in order to underscore the perpetuity of the nation itself. For while sacrifice reminds us of our own mortality, Anderson argues, nations "loom out of an immemorial past, and still more important, glide into a limitless future." Yet in this instance it is also the notion of racial identity as such that Davis represents as exceeding its earthbound limits. Malcolm "had stopped being a 'Negro' years ago," that term having "become too small, too puny, too weak a word for him. Malcolm was bigger than that. Malcolm had become an Afro-American, and he wanted so desperately—that we, that all his people would become Afro-Americans too." The grandeur of national sacrifice has its corollary in the capacious redefinition of racial subjectivity. And further shoring up the ties between grief and the potentialities of the nation is Davis's triumphant pronouncement that Malcolm "was our manhood, our living black manhood! That was his meaning to his people. And in honoring him, we honor the best in ourselves." The eulogy equates the racialized national community with the reconstruction of masculine identity and thereby reproduces a logic of communal belonging that has been a fixture of black politics from the antebellum era to the present. It is far from accidental therefore that Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice* (1968) one of the founding texts of Black Power nationalism, cites the eulogy to legitimate its own agenda. In its endeavor to fill the void left by the dead, Cleaver too ventriloquizes the will of a nation that will "have our manhood" or "the earth will be leveled by our attempts to gain it."

For some time now commentators have taken the Black Power movement to task for this heady alchemy of nationalism and masculine affirmation. From Angela Davis's observation that she was frustrated by male advocates who "measured their sexual height by women's genuflection" to bell hooks's assertion that male nationalists let "sisters know that they should assume a subordinate role to lay the groundwork for the emergent black patriarchy," these critiques consistently stress that the movement's masculinist bent

effectively marginalized black women. No doubt these critiques have been indispensable in promoting an ongoing analysis of how gender inequalities are reproduced in African American politics and culture. But notwithstanding the merits of such arguments, almost no one has examined the challenge to the movement's masculinist politics issued in works by black male authors such as James Alan McPherson, James Baldwin, John Edgar Wideman, Clarence Major, Hal Bennett, and John Oliver Killens. In fiction and essays written during the heyday of Black Power, they tracked the unevenness, political incoherence, and anxiety that beset nationalisms tethered to masculinist identity politics. Indeed, their dissidence reminds us that key purveyors of these gender ideologies were at times quite ambivalent about the movement's privileging of masculinity. The era's masculine focus thus bred contradictions for those within the movement and criticisms from those outside it. By recovering this forgotten cultural history, this book seeks to demonstrate how an era of nationalist advocacy was defined as much by its fault lines as by the pursuit of racial solidarity.

The cleavages generated by nationalist recourse to masculine identity can be fruitfully reassessed by attending more fully to how gender ideologies intersected with the overarching agendas of the movement. As a matter of course, nationalists equated political and aesthetic success with the development of new forms of identity, and therefore, they self-consciously theorized strategies for refashioning black subjects. For instance, in *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton pronounce that blacks must "achieve self identity and self determination in order to have their daily needs met." One of the first efforts to theorize Black Power systematically, their book proposes that building a shared racial consciousness necessarily precedes political action. And echoing the sentiment of Carmichael and Hamilton, Congress of Racial Equality director, James Farmer captures what became commonplace among Black Power activists in claiming, the "black man was taught to abnegate himself. Now he is rejecting that notion and seeking to develop a pride, a dignity, a self-esteem, and an identity." If white supremacist nationalism legitimated itself through ritual negation of blackness, the new nationalisms codified their authority by negating that negation and in turn producing new moorings for African American being. Arguably, the logic that foregrounded identity as a definitive end for black nationalism was even more pervasive among nationalist aesthetes. Dramatist and poet K. William Kgositsile advances a characteristic view when he defines the nationalist theatre as "a definitive act, a decisive song. There will be portions of actual life unveiled. All the things we could have been. All the things we are. All the things we will be. There will be instruction. There will be construction. There will be destruction." Kgositsile's theatre then is above all else a new set of aesthetic techniques for dismantling and reconstructing subjects. So that despite consequential ideological and tactical disagreement on a number of other fronts, in the aggregate the new nationalisms legitimated a stance in which the invention of alternative identities became a necessary first option in achieving political emancipation.

Masculinity was a critical term in this struggle—for representations of male identities intersected with political ideologies that addressed and legitimated revolutionary violence, charismatic authority, rhetorical performance, and nationalist sexuality. These intersectiions recommend a reading of masculinity along the lines of Stuart Hall's suggestion that we attend more carefully to how ideologies "connote or summon up one another in articulating differences in the ideological field." Hall usefully submits that ideologies achieve their political import not only through their differences from each other but in how their meanings slide into one another. His claim proves especially generative in this context because it provides a conceptual model for understanding the subtle ways that masculinist ideology was insinuated into the most fundamental premises of nationalist politics. Indeed, it may be the pliant utility of masculinity, the fluid ways that it combines and recombines with a range of contradictory political positions that illuminates its seductiveness in the past as well as in our own time. Such a formulation also has explanatory power in accounting for the varied and competing ways that nationalists evoked masculine selfhood. Bourgeois nationalist entities such as the Nation of Islam developed a model of masculine selfhood that depended on the paternal and filial networks traditionally attributed to patriarchy. Consequently, they emphasized the reconstitution of the patriarchal nuclear family and a strict imposition of separate spheres for the genders. Alternately, Marxist influenced

organizations like the Revolutionary Action Movement and the Black Panther Party rejected the patriarchal family as a model for political self-fashioning and instead privileged embodied male resistance as one of its enduring political constructs. And cultural nationalists like Ron Karenga's US organization stressed the liberating effects of masculine performance precisely because they viewed cultural particularity as the means to political autonomy. To track these developments sufficiently masculinity must be framed as more a floating signifier than a fixed essence or a list of attributes. For it is within these shifting relations that masculinity took on its multiple ideological meanings.

Further mapping of these intersections also requires an engagement with the synchronic dimensions of ideology—an unpacking of how ideologies operated across temporal and political divisions within the movement. Black Power advocates constructed their nationalisms in the absence of fully realized institutions or even a clearly designated geographical terrain that could be described as a state or a nation. Consequently, their nationalisms were particularly acute manifestations of Louis Althusser's now famous claim that ideology "*represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence*." Put another way, the representational dimensions of ideology that so preoccupied Althusser take on heightened significance in a context wherein the grounds for constituting nationhood were often highly figurative and symbolic. His argument that interpellation is a "hailing" of subjects through language and representation offers an interpretive frame for reading the rituals, codes, and narratives whereby the movement labored to dislodge black subjects from their position within white American nationalism and to reposition them as reflections of alternative representational economies. It is what Althusser refers to as the "speculary" or "mirror-structure" of ideology that his work contributes to the examination of black nationalism. Drawing on Jacques Lacan's theory of the mirror-stage, he establishes a correlation between the fragmented infantile subject taking comfort in misrecognizing its coherent representation in the mirror as its actual self and the subject recognizing its image in ideological representations. For "the human subject is de-centered, constituted by a structure which has no 'center' either, except in the imaginary misrecognition of the 'ego,' i.e. in the ideological formations in which it 'recognizes' itself." In this regard Althusser's assertion "you and I are *always already* subjects and as such constantly practice the rituals of ideological recognition" references the process wherein one's being is codified and recognized in the speculary representations of the other. This focus on ideology's capacity to concretize being through representation coincided with a Black Power movement that was also theorizing new methods for interpellating subjects. But while nationalist theory overlapped consequentially with Althusser's work, they placed a distinctive emphasis on the particular legacies of subjection that defined U.S. racial struggle. Whether in their efforts to reconstitute the patriarchal black family, reclaim the autonomy of the masculine black body, retool the politics of male oratory, or assert the necessity of new forms of masculine sexuality, the movement grounded its political assertions in interpellative models that were intended to counter historically entrenched racial subordination. In making these claims nationalists did not always adequately address how their negations of white supremacy produced troublesome assumptions in their own nationalism. And it was precisely this instability within nationalist dialectics—that male fiction writers of the day probed so cannily. Their work should thus be understood as an extension of the flows and contradictions that were already operative within Black Power.

In recasting the Black Power era as being definitively shaped by its internal contradictions my own thinking has been challenged considerably by developments in the evolving field of masculinity studies. More specifically, the pioneering work of scholars such as Robert Reid-Pharr and Philip Brian Harper asks us to imagine black nationalism as a formation that is not a cohesive totality but rather a set of identity claims that are always internally divided. Such work can be properly understood as part of a broader turn toward post-identity scholarship in the late 1980s and early 1990s—an intellectual development that not only interrogated the monolithic racial identities that undergird Black Power nationalisms but also the quasi-nationalist identity politics of vernacular critics such Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Houston Baker Jr. Along these line, Reid-Pharr argues suggestively that the development of a bourgeois domestic order grounded in the patriarchal nuclear family, has generated extraordinary anxieties in the black nationalist imagination since the mid-nineteenth

century. Nationalists such as Martin Delaney routinely equated emancipation with the establishment of autonomous, respectable, bourgeois households. And as Delaney policed the boundaries between proper and improper expressions of middle-class domesticity and sexuality, he denied "the ambiguity of the bourgeois position," a stance that often depended on a sadistic "subordination of other classes." In so doing he "was forced to engage in the very acts of ritual domination that typify the master/slave dyad that he decries." One powerful implication of this argument is that the necessary interdependence of black nationalism and white middle-class ideology vexed early efforts to enunciate a fully autonomous and racially particular national identity. Reid-Pharr's inclination to underscore the compromised state of antebellum nationalism runs parallel to Phillip Brian Harper's evocative work on the cultural nationalism of the 1960s. In his view the interpellative calls of black nationalists served not only "to promote racial solidarity" but to engender "a division among blacks," between those who were appropriately masculine nationalist subjects and those who were not. The cohesive identities that Black Power advocates constructed, bear a resemblance to their antecedents in that the very articulation of a masculine self as the foundation for racial cohesion also announces the anxious fragility of this strategy. I build on these reconsiderations of nationalist identity claims by suggesting that the turn toward masculinist ideology was also a conspicuously contested feature of the Black Power era. It is not only that this nationalism undermines itself through fraught assertions of unitary communal identities but that these efforts to represent the race politically and aesthetically animated significant ideological disagreement. The archive of writings testifying to the this legacy of conflict recommends that scholars in masculinity studies recognize that contemporary critiques of identity are an extension of a vital intellectual history in which writers have interrogated identitarian political claims.

An especially apt preface to the forms of knowledge generated in reconstructing that history can be found in James Alan McPherson's short story "Of Kings and Cabbages." Published as part of McPherson's acclaimed collection *Hue and Cry* (1969) the story focuses on Claude Sheats, a disaffected black nationalist who works to reinvent the political identity of his roommate Howard. As Howard presents it, he has good reason to be skeptical of Claude's instruction, for the latter's claims are so riddled with contradictions that he "hated whites as much as he loved them. And he hated himself with the same passion. He hated the country and his place in it and he loved the country and his place in it." Working to bring about "the Black Man's time to rule again," Claude enacts his brand of nationalism through his sexual liaisons with white women, each encounter serving as "an actual conquest, a physical affirmation of a psychological victory over all he hated and loved and hated in the little world of his room" (114). If Claude hopes to establish a kind of freedom through his sexual negation of whiteness, his labor only serves to multiply the fractures in his strategy.

As the tale unfolds, it charts the devastating consequences of Claude's philosophy for both men. Once the instability of Claude's politics increases, so too does his need to demonstrate the validity of his preachments. After each sexual conquest, he experiences a "silent emptiness that quickly intensified into nervousness," and during "these times he would tell me more subtleties about the Man and he would repredict the fall of the country" (115). By professing his racial gospel, Claude holds back the avalanche of inconsistencies that threaten to efface his politics and his very selfhood. Only by his persistent hailing of the potential convert can Claude hope to hold together his fantasy of radical personal and social change. Underscoring Claude's compulsive need to reify his politics in the ear of his brother, the narrative casts this fraternal bond as a thin splint holding together his masculine selfhood. Claude's affirmation of his political identity ultimately degenerates into a paranoid and tyrannical impulse to dominate Howard. The insular room in which Claude resists white domination serves as locus for these anxieties when he grows suspicious that Howard, "a black devil," has begun "walking about in his room after he had gone out" (120). Claude's growing neuroses about his sexual politics expresses itself in the delusion that Howard might discover and expose the suspect practices taking place within the confines of his boudoir. It is part of the narrative's corrosive irony, however, that Howard has already articulated the very political incoherence that Claude seeks to repress. Trapped by the limits of his own tactics of negation, Claude's paranoia becomes so acute that he bursts into Howard's room and threatens murder as he "stood over the bed in the dark room and shook his big fist" (123).

Meanwhile Howard is so cowed by this threat that he "lay there hating the overwhelming cowardice in me, which kept my body still and my eyes closed, hoping that he would kill all of it when his heavy fist landed" (123). In McPherson's rendering the model of political emancipation in which the nationalist realizes a speculary communal identity by hailing the convert is predicated on the desperate violence of the sadist and the ritual annihilation of the masochist. The story therby writes the coercive dimensions of nationalist becoming, the unsavory compromises embedded in a particular bid for emancipation. Certainly, the emphasis on the sadomasochism that inheres in this interpellative model parallels but also prefigures the dynamics that Reid-Pharr locates in early nationalism. But even more innovative here is McPherson's framing of the sadism as a definitive feature of the relations between black nationalists and the men they summoned.

Or to read McPherson's text from a different angle, his work distills the conflicted relation between fiction and the ideology of Black Power that animates my subsequent chapters. A crucial part of the work that fiction performed during this period was to trace the premises and suppositions of nationalist ideologies in ways that underscored at once their allure and limitation. And this may well explain why narrative modes that tend to mimic and defamiliarize the effects of ideology—i.e., parody, satire, comedy, and bricolage—figure so prominently in the works of McPherson and his contemporaries. At the same time these formal attributes of fiction only partially account for why these narratives surfaced as a conspicuous check on the movement's ideological excesses. Unlike earlier twentieth century literary periods—the Harlem Renaissance, the proletariat era of the 1930s, the potent flowering of integrationist literature after WWII—fiction was not a privileged mode among nationalist aesthetes during the Black Power movement. Breaking with a longer tradition that foregrounded the novel as a vital tool in improving the social standing of the black public, nationalists routinely construed drama, poetry, and autobiography as the preferred modes for disseminating their ideology. When cultural nationalists, for example, argued that political emancipation required black control of artistic production, they implemented their agenda by creating black-owned arts journals (*Negro Digest/Black World, Journal of Black Poetry, Broadside Series, Black Dialogue*), publishing houses (Broadside Press, Jihad Press, Black Arts Publication), and arts organizations (Black Arts Repertory TheatreSchool, Spirit House, the Watts Repertory Theatre, Affro Arts Theater) that focused disproportionately on poetry and drama. A chief rationale for such generic preferences was that these literary modes offered a more immediate and potentially transformative access to black audiences than did the novel. So certain of this distinction was the influential nationalist critic and poet Stephen Henderson that he could argue with confidence, "The poets and playwrights are especially articulate and especially relevant and speak directly to the people." Or in the more anecdotal terms of playwright Ed Bullins, "I was busting my head trying to write novels and felt somehow that my people don't read novels . . . But when they are in the theater I've got them." In the eyes of nationalist aesthetes poetry and drama were uniquely poised to interpellate black subjects because these forms most readily evoked the essence of a racial particularity that was to galvanize the new national consciousness. It was this sensibility that compelled the ongoing investment in vernacular forms such as music and folklore. Henderson took the jazz of John Coltrane and Charlie Parker as illustrative of the ways that the nationalist aesthetic "got hold of us, 'got way inside us,' and set dazzling with blackness the minds of those who hear them as they screech 'love in rolling sheets of sound.' Parker was blackness, Coltrane was blackness—the full spectrum of it." Paradoxically then vernacular cultural forms were imagined to be simultaneously already there, an essential part of what made blacks a distinct collectivity, and the very thing that had to be recuperated in order to return those subjects to their true identities. The relatively peripheral place of fiction with respect to both the ideology of nationalist aesthetics and the material production of texts made it possible for the novel to become a more likely vehicle for dissent. Of course there were also fiction writers who theorized a more affirmative relation to Black Power nationalism. William Melvin Kelly's *Dem* (1967), Sam Greenlee's *The Spook Who Sat Beside the Door* (1969), John A. Williams's *Sons of Darkness, Sons of Light* (1969) and Cecil Brown's *The Life and Loves of Mr. Jiveasss Nigger* (1969) are all texts that imagine how fiction can integrate the principles of the new

nationalisms into the novel form. But even if we give due note to such works, they were dwarfed in scale and influence by the volumes of poetry and drama that were published at the same time.

While black male novelists worked in a medium that gave them greater latitude for the expression of dissent, their objections did not track along a unified political axis. Indeed, their relationships to the masculinist ideologies of the day was often uneven and contradictory. But this very inconsistency is also the reason that these works offer such rich vehicles for revising our views about the relays between nationalism and gender. A case in point is the way that this fiction confirms and troubles the branch of masculinity studies advocated by scholars such as Michael Awkward and Joseph Boone. These male feminists argue that men's intellectual work in support of a feminism must expose "'the latent multiplicity and difference" in the word "men" and thereby disrupt "unproblematized perceptions of monolithic and/or normative maleness." Dissident male writers certainly affirm this politics in that they challenged dominant assertions about the relationship between masculinity and national political success. However, the theoretical model presented by Awkward also potentially reinscribes the black male intellectual's unfortunate history of usurping female autonomy through a solipsistic concern with masculinity. While he takes pains to avoid this problem, his claim that black men can contribute to feminism by recovering a masculinity that contains "useful means and methods of interacting with a repressed female interiority," lays the groundwork for a masculine appropriation of the feminine. The writers at the center of *Our Living Manhood* provide a generative alternative to this theoretical stance. At times their dissent expressed a shrewd critical awareness of how women's political participation was truncated by masculine social arrangements. In other instances their own critical reservations were impoverished by an inability to draw meaningful connections between particular masculinist ideologies and the subjugation of women. The very contradictions of these writings requires a method of reading that takes gender ideologies as an evolving object of inquiry rather than as a set of stable political propositions to be denounced or embraced. So that while my book is deeply influenced by and sympathetic toward the critical insights of feminism, it will also seek to foreground the recovery of often politically vexed exchanges routed through gender difference.

To further underscore this view of masculinity's ideological unevenness my book is especially concerned with why these dissident writings have *not* played a more significant role in our understanding of the period's literary culture. In telling the story of how dissent has been neglected, erased, and elided, I position masculine ideology within the broader history of critical reception and practice. In the case of James Alan McPherson, his audience framed him as an aesthete whose commitment to literary craft posed a necessary counter to nationalist aesthetics. Commentaries by figures such as Ralph Ellison, Irving Howe, and Granville Hicks celebrated *Hue and Cry* because in Hicks's words McPherson "does not go into spasms of indignation every time he describes an act of injustice." Although critics articulated the aesthetic divide between McPherson's fiction and aesthetes who were aligned with the new nationalisms, they did not assess the full range of ideological relations between his work and movement advocacy. And more recently Herman Beavers' otherwise shrewd analysis of McPherson's fiction only devotes the most cursory attention to the author's substantial conflict with Black Power ideology. By reexamining the archival documents and neglected literary works linking these writers to the Black Power movement, this book pursues a reconfiguration of the cultural history of the period and the literary biographies of individual authors.

These contrary overlays between literature and ideology unfolded with a striking vigor in the essays and fiction of James Baldwin. Consequently, chapter one submits that the representation of his conflicted encounter with the Nation of Islam (NOI) in *The Fire Next Time* (1963) effectively prefigured the uneasy nexus between male writers and Black Power that will be the principle concern of subsequent chapters. As Baldwin presents it, NOI philosophy operated under the premise that by submitting to the paternal authority of the group's leader, Elijah Muhammad, converts would be liberated from the tyranny of white supremacy. Baldwin depicts this submission to Muhammad as a pernicious abandonment of freedom as such. In mounting this challenge to the NOI, he became one of the first commentators to critically address the strain

of patriarchal nationalism that would be more broadly contested with the rise of revolutionary nationalism. The second half of this chapter submits that masculinist discourses were pivotal in Baldwin's efforts to establish himself as a relevant contributor to the black radicalism of the late 1960s and early 1970s. In exploring this shift, I reexamine Baldwin's uneasy position among the younger generation of radicals and his quiescence in the face of Eldridge Cleaver's homophobic commentary. Baldwin's response to Cleaver and other advocates pivoted on his desire to fashion himself as a masculine subject and maintain his political relevance. Nonetheless, he did express significant trepidation about his alliance with Black Power advocates in his fiction. His novel *Tell Me How Long the Train Has Been Gone* (1968), written at the height of his public support for Black Power, focuses on a gay male artist who is destroyed by his blind allegiance to a young Black Power advocate. Casting this union in dystopian terms, the novel forcefully troubles the very type of coalition with Black Power radicals that Baldwin advocated in his nonfiction. Thus, the chapter pursues the recuperation of a subtle reflexivity in Baldwin's later work.

By the late 1960s, the patriarchal nationalism of the NOI gave way to the revolutionary nationalism of organizations such as the Black Panthers and the Revolutionary Action Movement. Drawing on the theories of international revolutionaries such as Frantz Fanon, Mao Tse Tung, and Robert Williams these organizations asked the African American public to imagine its political reality through representations in which the masculine body and mind indexed the race's political standing. It is this very model of radical transformation that also propels the failed revolutionary plot at the center of John Edgar Wideman's magnificent novel *The Lynchers* (1973). Wideman's misgivings about this masculinization of radicalism was a shrewd elaboration of unconscious anxieties within revolutionary nationalism more broadly. Working to draw connections between fiction and ideology, the chapter shuttles between analysis of the newspapers, political tracts, and autobiographies of revolutionary nationalists on one hand and the radicalism represented in the novel on the other. In closing the chapter the historical irony that Wideman's writings in the 1990s reinterpret the radicalism of the 1960s in ways that are diametrically opposed to the skeptical portrait of revolutionary politics in *The Lynchers*. The chapter thereby illuminates how the author's recent work has obscured his historically vexed relationship to revolutionary nationalism during the Black Power era.

The political implications of nationalist paradigms that foregrounded the masculine body in imagining social transformation were equally unsettling as the movement tied sexuality to nationalist insurgency. Through an examination of fiction and essays by Clarence Major and Hal Bennett, chapter three will reassess how discourses about male sexuality became central to consolidating nationalist identities. Advocates such as Amiri Baraka, Lerone Bennett, and Calvin Hernton argued that white nationalism had consolidated itself historically through its sexual abjection of blackness, and thus only in overcoming that legacy could the black public achieve its liberation. A chief expression of this ideology was the flowering of literary works that involve the sexual conquest or violation of white women. Self-consciously trading in the historical specter of the black male as rapist, writers like Baraka consolidated their nationalism in relation to the representations of a white supremacist nationalism that had been part of the American scene since the late nineteenth century. At the same time that the movement heralded such representations as an avenue to freedom, they also submitted that heterosexual Eros between black Americans would serve as a negation of the race's historical subordination. Both of these strategies are treated with skepticism in the work of Major and Bennett. While Major was initially a supporter of black nationalism, he eventually dissented from its pervasive notion that establishing the sexual autonomy and authority of black men was necessary for the emancipation of the black public. Tracing the relationships between works such as his novel *All-Night Visitors* (1969), his little-known essay "In Living Color" (1969) and the movement's discourses on black male sexuality, the chapter demonstrates that Major's dystopian portrait of male eroticism rewrites black nationalist sexual ideology as a politics that fell short of its ends. Along similar lines, Major grew deeply skeptical of nationalist claims that black heterosexual Eros contained the seeds of communal emancipation. Hal Bennett's engagement with this sexual politics was equally robust. His novel *Lord of Dark Places* (1970) is preoccupied with defining the limits of nationalist enterprises that exalt the liberating power of the phallus.

Stressing the underlying homoerotics of nationalist phallocentrism, the work upsets conventional nationalist oppositions between heterosexuality and homosexuality to corrode Black Power ideologies. The novel thus trades in the defining ambivalence that emerged in the strain of nationalist discourse that constituted nationalism over and against the abject homosexual male.

Chapter four confronts the contradictions embedded in nationalist identity politics more extensively by unearthing the tense relationship between nationalist John Oliver Killens and the performative cultural nationalism that became orthodoxy in the late 1960s. Organizations such as the Republic of New Africa and US argued that black political emancipation must be preceded by a reclamation of African cultural forms, customs, and modes of self-fashioning. US founder Ron Karenga submits that collectivity based on common cultural assumptions "gives identity, purpose, and direction," "legitimizes a peoples' action and in turn gives self respect." In this way legible expressions of cultural fluency became inseparable from the quest for political success. Within this broader paradigm advocates like Haki Madhubuti stressed that masculine speech had an almost magical power to remake black identities-and thus to liberate subjects from the strictures of white supremacy. Theorizing a racially coded version of what J. L. Austin refers to as performative language, nationalists constructed a political ideology that troubled figures like Killens. In the essay form as well as in his novel *The Cotillion, or One Good Bull Is Half the Herd* (1973) he worked through his trepidation about nationalist dependence on performative identities. Undoubtedly, Killens's skepticism has to be understood as an outgrowth of critiques of cultural nationalism from within the movement more broadly. Whether in the systematic critiques of leftists like Robert Allen or in the nascent uncertainty of poets such as Sonia Sanchez, there was no clear concensus about the capacity of culture to foster black political autonomy. At the same time Killens's work introduces the category of masculine identity into these debates more extensively than his peers. So that even as he was himself often complicit in the masculinist inclinations of the movement, his work also posed some of the most withering questions about the inadequacies of performative masculinities.

The final chapter positions my work within public discourse about gender within African-American studies as well as in the broader debates about the end of identity politics in the academy. Unfortunately, conversations about gender within African-American studies have been limited by a penchant for fractiousness that is itself a byproduct of the Black Power era. At the same time the model of reading this strain of the counterculture also speaks to contemporary debates about the critique of identity as a political category. The divides shaping a founding period in identity politics have been elided in these debates. This book then initiates a conversation about how the protocols of our present would be usefully informed by a more rigorous consideration of the intellectual and aesthetic history that we have too often neglected.

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