

SUNY series, Philosophy and Race

Robert Bernasconi and T. Deane Sharpley-Whiting, editors

# Constructing the Nation

A Race and  
Nationalism Reader

Edited by

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and

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**SUNY**  
PRESS

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55. *Ibid.*, 323.  
 56. *Ibid.*, 437.  
 57. *Ibid.*  
 58. *Ibid.*, 580.  
 59. *Ibid.*, 313.  
 60. The proceedings were published in the fall 2002 issue of *Partisan Review* 69, no. 4 (2002): 500–669.  
 61. The speakers were Norman Podhoretz, Sanford Pinsker, John Patrick Diggins (an African American), Raymond Kurzweil, Gerald Weisman, James Collins, Hilton Kramer, Michael Meyers, Edward Rothstein, Jules Olitski, Robert Brustein, Cynthia Ozick, David Pryce-Jones, Liah Greenfeld, and Walter Laqueur.  
 62. *Partisan Review* (2002): 532–541.  
 63. *Ibid.*, 638, 643.  
 64. *Ibid.*, 655–669.  
 65. *Ibid.*, 620–621.  
 66. For more on the issue of multiculturalism see Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the America Mind* (New York: Touchstone Book, 1987); William Bennett, *The De-Valuing of America* (New York: Touchstone Book, 1992); John Arthur and Amy Shapiro, eds., *Campus Wars: Multiculturalism and the Politics of Difference* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995).

## 2

## When Fear Interferes with Freedom

INFANTILIZATION OF THE AMERICAN PUBLIC  
 SEEN THROUGH THE LENS OF POST-9/11  
 LITERATURE FOR CHILDREN

Kyoo Lee

We crossed the ocean seeking opportunity,  
 seeking freedom,  
 seeking peace.  
 Surely it wasn't our fault  
 that we found our opportunity occupied  
 by those we named Indians,  
 Though they had never seen India;  
 redskins,  
 . . . A plane crashes into a tower.  
 Two planes.  
 Two towers.  
 Another into the heart  
 Of our ability to make war  
 We are afraid.  
 We are afraid.  
 We are afraid.  
 What will they do next?  
 What will we do?  
 A plane crashes into a tower.

—Marion Dane Bauer, "A White American's Lament"

## Urgent Needs

The above poem opens the "Reacting and Recovering" section of 9/11: *the Book of Help*.<sup>1</sup> This anthology of essays, stories, poems, and artwork aims to offer "teachers and parents a vehicle for opening discussion with children and young adults about fear, heroism, hate, and healing."<sup>2</sup> This text seeks to "provide comfort in time of need," because

[w]ritten words give power to the powerless, and hope to the hopeless. They bring light to darkness, courage to fear and companionship to loneliness. When tragedy struck our nation on September 11, 2001, teachers and parents struggled with what to say to the children. A year has passed, but the images of that horrible day are forever implanted in the minds, hearts, and souls of all Americans. Children, especially, need to reflect upon that day, and find ways to express their thoughts and feelings. What better way than through the writings of authors they already respect?<sup>3</sup>

Eight years on, I find myself echoing that urgency: "Children, especially, need to reflect upon that day." *Teacher's Guide for 9/11* amplifies the voice of the haunted poet: "Discuss what Marion Dane Bauer means when she writes that . . . fear 'diminishes our humanity.' How can fear interfere with freedom? Debate whether our nation's attempt to protect us is indeed creating more fear."<sup>4</sup> Indeed, "how can fear interfere with freedom?"

My plan is to offer some philosophical observations on the post-9/11 infantilization of the American public. And my thoughts are anchored on a case, a kind of literalized allegory, a sample of mainstream pedagogic literature for American children and young adults relating to the event "9/11,"<sup>5</sup> the aesthetically ontologized and selectively historicized spectacle that haunts the recent American memories that have been immediately packaged and globally exported. Focusing on the political logic and rhetoric of "home" or "homeland" that "protects us" from "them," I will show how the figures of the threatening other, media-theatrically contrasted with those of the united family and friends, become not simply antagonized but specifically racialized.

The current political context that our reading inhabits and at the same time problematizes is the aggressive delimitation and production of a national pronoun, "we," who wage a war after and within the extended war of 9/11, we who "Bring the holy war home."<sup>6</sup> That is, the reflexive urgency of 9/11, still resonant today, sets the stage for interrogating the roles, places, and modes of patriotic discourse in American children's literature. The wake-up call has brought to the surface another cold war, a struggle between, this time, the United States of America and its other that causes un-united states of affairs.

Thus, the guiding premise of this chapter is that the urgent task, posed since *September 12th, 2001: (When) We Knew Everything Would be All Right* was written,<sup>7</sup> of "rebuilding the nation" through an ideological *re-bildung* or sociopsychical homogenization of future citizenship, calls for an equally urgent, critical examination of its mechanism, political and rhetorical. Here I am recalling the urgency with which Ellen Willis suggested, already in the winter of 2001, that we pay immediate attention to the powers and perils of cultural politics in the post-9/11 United States. Eight years on, what this chapter seeks to anatomize, in that same theoretical spirit, while using children's literature as an allegorical mirror, is the modes of coextensive interaction between the post-9/11 wars abroad and the ethnocultural "war at home." Such an interdisciplinary interrogation into the complex duality and duplicity of the political present, also undertaken as an attempt to interweave the conceptual resources of philosophical inquiry and the material richness of children's literature, is then a kind of "cultural criticism" that Theodor Adorno envisioned against the reified, "bewitched" reality of cultural capitalism fueled by "vulgar positivism and pragmatism."<sup>8</sup> In the end, I've come to agree with Adorno that "cultural criticism must become social physiognomy."<sup>9</sup>

#### An Allegory of September 11, 2001: *The Day That Changed America*

Why children and their books? Immediately apparent is their allegorical hook: the narrative simplicity, graphic directness, and pedagogic topicality of coated terror stories offer manageably analytic and even magnetic access to the otherwise elusive, multilayered "event." Saint-Exupéry, for instance, began composing *The Little Prince* during World War II. "A picture of a hat," with which the story begins, is x-rayed to reveal a picture, in it, of "a boa constrictor digesting an elephant." Immediately subtextualized here, with the graphic literalness, is an allegorical tension between the adult world of oblivious civilization and the children's world of unadulterated perceptions: the hat, in which the violence of the jungle is hidden, reveals the failure of moral imagination in the world of adults who seem to have lost the ability to see things as they are. Or take Dr. Seuss, of the 1960s, whose transgressive mobilization of domestic material such as butter, ham, and eggs in many stories of minibatles brings close to home the polarized realities of the cold war, to which those indifferent to *New York Times* editorials or reports from the Soviet Academy of Sciences too can relate, the child or the childlike. Allegory then, as Walter Benjamin noticed when few did, is not simply a hermeneutical trick; it is an alchemist's lens through which the disorder of social epistemology reveals itself. Allegorical narrative seeks to do justice to the historical ontology of the ambiguous.

The narrative ambiguity and parallelism of allegory creates inner distance. Allegory brings theatrical comfort, and to that extent it is socially therapeutic—especially in times of crisis, individual or collective.<sup>10</sup> Thus, a nation at a historical turning point will sublimate the aggregated traumas and confusions of such a moment through storytelling or dramatization. And predictably, the “countertransferentiality”<sup>11</sup> or counterfactuality of reactionary fables reveals the reflexively inscribed polarity of victory self-images emerging from the ruins of the traumatic event; the victim becomes the victor, and “community defensiveness”<sup>12</sup> will at times allow the victory to be permanent, at least momentarily. Such narrative consolation on a mass scale, taking the form of symbolic co-crying and cuddling, that is, literary reconciliation with each and every inner child, collectively contributes to the reduction of posttraumatic symptoms that one cannot and must not “ignore, deny, belittle, or tolerate”; one will have to live with and eventually overcome the inner child’s “somatic complaints, sleep difficulties and nightmares, clingy and regressive behaviors, fears, inability to concentrate, avoidance of talking about the event, irritability, hypervigilance, acting-out behaviors, repetitive play,”<sup>13</sup> and so on. Eight years since, and eight years from now, we are and will not be surprised by the abundance of post-9/11 stories for children.

What kind of story and what sort of child reader, inner or outer, should one envision in the aftermath of globalized national shock such as “the” 9/11, a singularized event in the recursive calendar of the unified world? A vulnerable child made more vulnerable by the imaginary return of the original trauma? Something akin to a prehistoric crisis of the absent presence of the world, for example, the ultimately “horrible terrifying thoughts . . . what if both Mom and Dad hadn’t come home?”<sup>14</sup> Now, does the same sensitive child ever ask the five-year-old question of metaphysical origin “Where . . . from?” at least once, at least later on? Simply: *why* did that happen? Do we see or hear any questions of that kind? Oddly, no, although there are a couple of notable exceptions, one of which enabled this chapter to start. Here is what nine-year-olds and above are reading today:

1. In 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait and the United States launched Operation Desert Storm.
2. Desert Storm helped push the Iraqi invaders out of Kuwait.
3. Following Desert Storm, the United States left soldiers in Saudi Arabia to help prevent future skirmishes.
4. Saudi Arabia also is a source of much of the oil upon which the United States depends.
5. Osama bin Laden was very upset about having U.S. soldiers in Saudi Arabia.

6. The nation is considered home of the two most holy places in the region of Islam.
7. He also hated the support the United States provided to Israel.
8. He began to talk with other people about driving these infidels out of the holy lands.
9. As time went on, it appeared his hatred of America grew. He declared a holy war against the US.
10. He began recruiting more people to help him.<sup>15</sup>

Let me propose a minireading experiment. Let us imagine and follow a thoughtful child reader, who is trying to absorb the information presented in the numbered list by putting it through some sort of reasoning process. This nine-year-old reader has limited but good vocabulary that is rapidly growing. So first, Osama was very upset (5). That’s why he did it. But *why* was he upset? We helped Kuwait and Saudi Arabia (1–3) because they were invaded or were about to be by Iraq and we also helped Israel (7). So we help people when they need our protection<sup>16</sup>—but then what was Israel’s problem (question 1)? Was Iraq trying to invade Israel too? That is unclear but what we know is that Osama did not like the fact that we helped Saudi Arabia and Israel when they were in trouble (5, 6). Then, why did he dislike it (question 2)? The book also says Saudi Arabia has oil that we need. Does it then mean that Osama does not like us using Saudi Arabia’s oil? But then does that mean Israel and Kuwait too, both, have oil? Is that then *why* we helped Saudi Arabia? But we are helping people in need, not people we need (question 3). What is this IS-lahm, a religion? Osama hates US being in Saudi Arabia (5), but what has it got to do with Saudi Arabia being IS-lahm (6), and what has it got to do with US supporting Israel (7)? What are the connections? (question 4) And also, how can Osama think that Saudi Arabia is a holy land but also that people in it are unholy? And does “people” mean both Saudi Arabians and the American soldiers living with them? How can they be unholy when they are already in the holy land? *Why* are they make (question 5)? Is that because they have or need oil? Then does that make US, the United States, unholy too? Is that why Osama attacked US too? (9) But are we not supposed to be holy too, like Osama thinks he is (8) (question 6)? And more importantly, is Osama then going to attack anybody he thinks unholy? Are we then unholy (question 7)? If we really are actually holy, will he ask us to fight for and with him? Against whom (question 8)? Are we supposed to fight against him or fight with him against us? Who are we: fellow Americans, as we say (question 9)? How can we fight against and also for us? But Osama should not attack us because we are religious too; we go to church. So why are we fighting (question 10)?

The cited passage, which our imaginary child reader is trying to understand, illustrates, among other things, the extent to which publicly

accessible reasoning has become scarce in a country rich in publicly accessible information. With the exception of 911: *The Book of Help*, written in the tone and style of egalitarian dialogue, and another text that I will introduce later, nowhere in the texts I examined, not unlike what was examined here, is there present or implied a child thinker with original sensibility, analytical ability, and contextual awakening. Almost no one in those books asks meaningfully and logically ordered questions about causes or origins, and almost everyone in those books seems handheld or umbilicalized by an imaginary parental supervisor who would do the question and answer for the kids concerned, after doing a perfunctory thirty minutes of homework on their daily trip to the CNN newsroom that offers a 24/7 recursive diet of incredible stories that keep them bolted to their recliner.

Today, the United States of America, the hypermilitarized media-aesthetic state that exploits popular culture and entertainment as a weapon of mass distraction and inscription, seems to have reached a critical stage of compulsive self-hypnotism. Even a TV commercial for a local supermarket, "we're holding a spatula and salute you,"<sup>17</sup> cryptically reinscribes in the popular memory the much publicized scene of the wartime president soon-to-be holding up an American flag, emerging from the rubble of ground zero.<sup>18</sup> Given the paternalistic dominance and structural capitalization, since the culture war of the early 1990s, of quasi-theocratic right-wing politics in the United States today that significantly feeds into the concerted process of infantilization/domestication, anti-intellectualization, and media-production of public sensibilities, it is unsurprising that most post-9/11 "comfort"<sup>19</sup> books for children leave little room for creative self-reflection and critical self-examination: to wit, for the cultivation of the Emersonian faculty. After consuming those "here & now reproducible"<sup>20</sup> books with cookie-cutter drawings of recovered white heterosexual nuclear middle-class families plus occasional dogs and neighborhood look-alikes, the target reader—or, shall we say, the targeted reader—in pajamas is supposed to feel secure in the bosom of "God who cried too" or inspired to emulate *New York's Bravest* that dates as far back as the 1840s. Or generally, they are to feel simply "a lot better,"<sup>21</sup> thus able to go out and play freely, happily forgetting all about what happened.

At times like this, trauma is unavoidable, and sensitivity is necessary. And precisely for that reason, the nation in mourning has a collective responsibility to articulate and express her future vision and hope; the national tragedy has united them and us, children and adults. Then the question for us is whether we are using the defenselessness of the child to reinforce our own childish defensiveness. Will they ever get to think about those fellow children sleeping around the U.S.-Mexico border, dreaming good dreams and bad dreams?<sup>22</sup> Will the children of the United States ever be arrested

by a sudden grayness of the world, by the paradox that the parallel "rebuilding of a nation" at home and abroad leads to the simultaneous shrinking and spreading of the homeland? Will they ever discover this paradox that nation-building is an act that is at once supremely optimistic and supremely oppressive? Will they ever wonder, facing our leader facing a hate killer, whether we too are "defiant and evasive"?<sup>23</sup> Will they ever be touched by this terribly simple irony of might: strong and vulnerable?

The notable weakness of public reflection paralleling the military strength of social conditioning is hardly shocking; yet alarming nonetheless. In the same vein, we need to pay attention to the proliferation of age-diversified pedagogic books on the national political catastrophe, which contributes to the homogenization of public voices and views on it. We will not forget that we have been attacked, but we have forgotten that we have often been attackers, justly or not. We seem to want to forget pernicious and predictable side effects of the Rooseveltian doctrine of "Get action, do things,"<sup>24</sup> that is, "the domination of the world";<sup>25</sup> indeed, are not the American moments, guilt, and identities easily, if not entirely, definable by the military images of attacks and counterattacks? Foundational genocide; battle with colonial Britain; the Spanish-American War; Pearl Harbor;<sup>26</sup> Hiroshima—are we not walking into a memory hole yet again when escorted into the Philippine House of Representatives and away from thousands of local protesters who refuse to share our cheerleaders' ultimate goal? (An/aestheticized?<sup>27</sup> "imperial amnesia"<sup>28</sup> it is; are we going to continue to ignore that the United States too has (been) played ground bullies, and not a few (times)? But, "Why? Why? Why?"<sup>29</sup>

Although at least one of our books calls into question the nationalized drive toward world dominance as an explanatory background to what happened, the pattern of the other tragedy is clear enough. The reactive intervention and historical amnesia of the nation in mourning, locatable in the little corner of American literature today, quietly demonstrates the extent to which a strategic alliance between pedagogy and ideology, between mnemonic technology and media politics, is being forged in the name of national and international pride linked to the discourse of "moral values" that rests on the socio-Darwinian convertibility of mortal<sup>30</sup> threats to moral<sup>31</sup> threats: the simultaneous individuation and unification of Pan-American identity in the name of freedom has come at a sloganized price that one buys without realizing its worth, actual and virtual.

### Color Un/Conscious: No/Black and White

Hit, panic; collapse, panic; terrified faces running away, eyeballs glued to TV; we blanked out, blacked out. Ground Zero has become something of a location for a horror film that harbors serialized memories of a collective

panic attack. The nation watched, in “real time,” over and over again, the safe house of identities and ideals turning into the graveyard of the undead, suddenly and completely. The site houses, and has become, a contemporary allegory of the national house in ruin.

Now, where does the United States turn? Where should the United States turn at this political “zero point” of the twenty-first century, performatively designated as such? Is she progressing or regressing? “It is my experience,” says the performance artist Anna Deavere Smith, “that when things are upside down, there is an opening for a person like me. When things fall apart, you can see more and you can even be part of indicating new ways that things can be put together.”<sup>32</sup> The compositional metaphor she is employing when envisioning a future that is a gift of rupture is inspirational. What new ways is the United States exploring? Or is she? How is the shattered public space to be reconfigured? How is American membership within the global community to be reidentified, regrouped, and reproduced in the aftermath of the catastrophic fall?

Ground Zero remains gray, and the White House under President Bush became whiter than ever. Scared and raced, we are scaring and racializing each other. We want “all in our control” and nothing beyond our control, since we are a nation believing in purely controlled peace.<sup>33</sup> The promise of American liberty and equality is being compromised by collective acts—for example, the USA PATRIOT Act—of profound evasion and amnesia. One pretends as if nothing had happened, or nothing that requires reasoned reflection, or else one proceeds as if no one should be protected from the invasive violence of imperial sovereignty. Unpleasant facts, white-washed and airbrushed, are tossed into and are piling up in the repressed archive of national memories. While the ex-president focused on the hard work, the really hard work God made him do, the ex-vice president forged the “one percent doctrine”: a theory of preemptive strike that justifies, on the basis of paradigmatic convertibility of statistical probability to selective liability, the military destruction of would-be enemies such as terrorists parading as tourists, which in turn justifies domestic policing actions such as the racial profiling and incarceration of U.S. citizens, residents, and visitors of Arab, Muslim, and South Asian origin. We will make *them* visible before they appear, since we have reason to assume they are the new DWB (driving while black/brown) with WMDs (weapons of mass destruction). In other words, we saw a historical ghost of race racing out of the Oval Office of evasion and amnesia and marching into a new domain of black and white grammar: “they” who terrorize versus “we” who are terrified. We saw a post-9/11 reemergence of the “one drop rule,” the racist policy enforced and maintained during the Jim Crow era, which could be read as the white government’s totalized attempt to symbolically phenomenalyze “invisible Blackness,”<sup>34</sup> the invisible threat that is the black bloodline

contaminating the white gene pool even with a drop, even “without a hint of Africa.”<sup>35</sup> The undconstructed white logic, of historical blindness and ideologized purity, unfolds on the reflexive urge to draw a line between the past and the present: black and white, pure and simple. Ground Zero has become sanitized ground.

The post-9/11 United States has transcoded Du Bois’s “color line” into a color bar, or a colorful barcode; right there, the twenty-first century is merging with the twentieth century. In the name of a political decision (*crisis*) animating the traumatic cut of 9/11, the nation is restaging race panic, wanting a psychopolitical protection not of but from truths. We rarely have a principled protection of bare truths obscured by historicized assumptions, pernicious prejudices, and political smokescreens. But we do have a digitalized protection from dark truths, violently ambiguous and contagious like the prehistoric intention of Hitchcock’s birds waging a war of the species for no apparent reason. We the people have become numb, have caught the bird flu already—and virtually. Unable to grasp where they come from and why they come to us, gripped by the fear of fear, the United States is losing its ability to judge without being judgmental; the affectivity of race panic is being converted to a moralized excuse for systematic, symbolic, and literal violence exercised in the name of state sovereignty. The United States, the global “promoter of democracy,”<sup>36</sup> has even become suspicious of and hostile to the faculty, the *art*, of judgment that is arguably the most important human resource and building “block” for participatory democracy—a block that, as I will illustrate shortly, when rhetorically liquidated could turn into the experimental object of gunpoint democracy.

That is, terror has become real through a codified surrealization of the conflicting psychological energies of and within the collective. The visible war on invisible terror is both the cause and the effect of the color codification of dangerous strangers within belongers. That seems to be how the *homeland* security advisory system operates, parallel to the racial profiling happening inside the *homeland*. Through the classificatory inscription of colors on the national body, the immanent futurity of terror seeks momentary stability: the emergency of the present is prescribed through the reflexive logic of self-fulfilling prophecies, that is, a round-trip of sanctioned paranoia from “We know it, you will see” to “We knew it, I had already shown you” and back to the presumption. A cancerous result of this tautologized fear of the taxonomized other is the escalation of race-based xenophobia. Schizophrenic dichotomy fueled by race panic is destroying the progressive ideals of and commitment to the construction of the egalitarian and pluralist society that the founding fathers of the United States promised, blindly.

The fact that rainbows, emblematic of a multicultural and multiethnic utopia of American modernity, are not “bows” but rays or circles is

worth remembering at this point. Worth pondering also is this question posed by Carl Friedrich in 1963: "Are nations really built? Or, rather, do they grow?"<sup>37</sup> The questions, thus combined, are Do the rainbows stack? Or do they spill over into each other? Are the rainbows not *infinite* brands of light, of hope? Will the children of immigration, or transportation, notice that difference between the word and the world? Or could that irreducible difference be, perhaps, precisely the origin of their preschoolled fascination with the materiality of the world?

Children are fascinated by color, texture, shape and design. You can attract the children to the art center by including activities that promote each of these. For example, invite the children to make a collage (pasting objects together onto a surface) of varying yellow colors found in magazines. This activity encourages preschoolers to cut, glue, look for and discover that any color can have many shades;<sup>38</sup> for younger [c]hildren, it is helpful to start with one color at a time. Have them use the primary colors of red, blue, and yellow.<sup>39</sup>

Given the formative role that pedagogy plays in nation-building, primary education of this kind is a dual source of despair and hope. In the rest of this chapter, I shall explain some of my philosophical issues with the nation's "color" education; then I shall explore some reasons why it is too soon for us to give up, to "renounce" our philosophical "interference . . . in the ever-changing production of what is always the same."<sup>40</sup>

The digitalized abuse of color in colorful education is a reason for despair. The aesthetic conditioning of neurological responses to solar and significant wavelengths facilitates the production of advanced citizen automata seamlessly integrated into the socially constructed system of classification and representation.<sup>41</sup> Such prejudicial social programming of the political body happens at the semiotic, that is, prelinguistic or presymbolic, level of ideological engineering. Physical experiences have become woven together with social meanings and values, producing gestalt reflexes within racial and gender consciousness. The measurability of colors, in the hands of behaviorist technicians, translates into the malleability and predictability of colored perceptions that, in turn, sedimentizes the genealogical materiality of dominant social rhetoric. The ontological complexity of color gets lost in the socioepistemological reduction of its gradational vibrancy to snippets of useful truths such as racial and racist stereotypes.

So the United States, as was once suggested by a fellow academic jester, is in fact a bowl of gumbo rather than a melting pot.<sup>42</sup> This alternative metaphor effectively discloses the lies, illusions, and pitfalls of "multicultural" education that end up typecasting rather than liberating the

sociopolitical imagination of the United States today. Simply put, in "a world of rainbow students in which people often see race or color first and only afterward move on to the content of a person's character,"<sup>43</sup> the promise of social justice can be as easily fulfilled as that of virtualized reality. Thus, in the world of political drama scripted by the imperial "tyranny of expectations,"<sup>44</sup> both the assimilated stranger and the unsimulated invader play a role; the former as a counterbalancing extra, a model minority, and the latter as the antagonist. If the former fulfills the social expectations by "continually negotiating role expectations based on (skin) pigmentation,"<sup>45</sup> the latter does so by refusing to negotiate. The former internalizes the inclusive-exclusive logic of racial integration in order to survive, and the latter, in order to retaliate, *both* "the good guy" and "the bad guy" originate from white America's suspicion over dual or fuzzy identities. An extreme and extremely disturbing case in point is the image of the rainbow "pedagogically"<sup>46</sup> exploited by the Ku Klux Klan that uses black as a color of racial mixing, which is "bad," and rainbow as a color of racial integration (read: placing), which is "good";<sup>47</sup> good enough to represent the colors of their goods at "Kstore . . . Coming Soon!"<sup>48</sup>

We have just glimpsed the logic of terrorized justice that keeps intact and fragile the facade of the colorized nation-state, which tends to be slighted, if not ignored, by the idealized philosophy of nonracial identity such as the "color-blind" version that Anthony Appiah proposes as a futuristic vision.<sup>49</sup> But the fact is, in this garden variety world of pick and mix, the use value of phenotypical and ethnocultural stereotypes can save us or kill us, not simply misidentifying or at best amusing us; more precisely, the problem of blind pretension or justice in colored thinking or social policy lies in a systematically "unfair"<sup>50</sup> or asymmetrical activation of color consciousness, which is where the ideal of blind justice remains insufficiently and inadequately blind to the concrete realities of its own randomly self-contradictory behaviors. Consider, for instance, "the inconsistencies between the color blindness that is invoked against affirmative action and the color consciousness that becomes apparent in the denunciation of immigration."<sup>51</sup>

Here is an illustration of the simple yet complex shifty color of racialized terrorism, again from *September 11, 2001: The Day That Changed America*. Two consecutive chapters, "Pitching In" and "The Roots of Hatred,"<sup>52</sup> show two faces of the potentially terrifying other. A bearded man in a blue turban, faintly smiling or perhaps squinting, is holding up an American flag bigger than him, about to hoist it in front of the door that bears the sign "Under 18 . . . Tobacco"; another American flag, smaller, is hitched behind the door, and so the reader has a parallel view of the miniflag and the megafly, back and front. The caption reads: "Showing the Colors: A Sikh immigrant from India puts up an American flag outside his shop in downtown Manhattan."<sup>53</sup> What colors? It is hard to tell



because we only see a subtly coerced, overdetermined display of “color-blind” patriotism among the colored. Next, a partially scarfed, youthful, Middle Eastern face, on which the camera zoomed in, is revealing its black, screaming mouth; the outstretched fist above the face, which forms the only and fuzzy background, completes the scene of some sort of fury. The caption helps: “Anger Boils Over: A Palestinian protester shows his hatred of Israel and the United States.” What hatred? It is hard to tell because we only have an isolated representation of “unyielding hatred” that remains incomprehensible, that is, that which “few people could understand.”<sup>54</sup> Puzzling as well as illuminating is the fact that the writer could not or did not make an effort to visually verify the geohistorical information—is that screamer locatable in Manhattan too, or is that person possible only in Palestine? The phenotypical similarities between the two characters are rhetorically apparent. Yet in the first picture, the focus is on the flag, the very act of verticalizing it and multiplying it, and the second, the face itself: the eyes, the nose, the gaping mouth, the terrifying youth. The corner shopkeeper of America can occasionally become an American *although* he is not really American; the Palestinian madman, wherever he ends up being, can never become an American *because* he is really not. Between those two images that speak two dissimilar languages, one a hyperbolic assurance and the other a heightened assault, we see the back of the neck of a white male New York City firefighter with a paper flag hitched on his helmet, “surveying the wreckage of the World Trade Center,”<sup>55</sup> as if surveying the United States for clues.

Here is another example. Take *New York’s Bravest*. The legendary firefighter from the 1840s, named Mose Humphreys, employee No. 40, is multiplied by contemporary legends, “all eight feet tall and able to swim the Hudson River in two strokes.”<sup>56</sup> This tall tale, dedicated “to the memory of 343 New York City firefighters who gave their lives to save others on September 11, 2001,” is historically accurate to the extent that the accompanying illustrations blacken only three or four faces among about a hundred featured therein. What is curious is the last page of the book where the moral of the story is summarized, “Whenever we save folks, he saves them, too. You see, that firefighter—he’ll never leave us. He’s the very spirit of New York City”; there suddenly appears a small girl with East Asian features held in the arms of, and holding onto the neck of, none other than the one and only but also many Mose Humphreys who apparently just saved her. On a charitable reading, the ahistorical eruption of this alien character from the Far East could be deciphered as a pictorial gesture toward the racially inclusive, rainbow future of New York City. Still, however, structurally problematic is the incoherence, impossibility, and predictability of its paternalistic rhetoric, symptomatic of the economized desire for a sudden, selected continuity with the past; as the text is “originally” from the

idealized past, the new Mose could not have been Mose Wang, and the new rescuee could not have been Mohammed Humphreys.

Lest you think the reading so far is too arbitrary and exaggerated, I suggest we visit *This Place I Know: Poems of Comfort*. *This Place* has been explored in various ways by eighteen renowned picture artists, who offered visual reflections on poems of their choice. Some consistent efforts at diversifying the facial colors of the families and friends within each pictorial space are visible, quite unremarkably. The notable part is the cover picture that represents the overall tone of the anthology. Here we have the face of an unshaven pale male with a hat on, *or* which the whole of gray Manhattan sits, and he is gazing vacantly at the poem on the opposite page: Walt Whitman’s *Song of the Broad-Axe*.<sup>57</sup> That is the only page on which a male adult appears and does so broodingly. Is this place I know, then, created and inscribed initially and finally by the white man’s burden, and in his headache? Is this reading of paternalistic guilt and authority in post-9/11 discourse biased?

Consider this too. Next to the poem by Susan Swanson, *Trouble, Fly*, is a quilt of houses where everyone is sleeping, including cats and dogs inside and outside.<sup>58</sup> The focal point of this picture is the united nations of a nursery room: a white mother is asleep, with her arms around brown, yellow, and white children altogether bundled up in one bed; the sleeper series begins with the blond mom and ends with a blond kid who too had to stretch his or her arm (one of his or her arms) in order to bring closure to that dreamy space. If New York City is protected by the father, homes are managed by the mother who will breed and feed the next Mose Humphreys. Now, what does this ready evocation of the motherland do and not do in the given context? Who else has access to that immediately and ultimately huggable uber mom?

Here is a more curious and most troubling part: the visible exclusion of specifically “Muslim” or “Middle Eastern” or “Arabic” markers, pictorial or narrative, from almost all of the child characters in the books I surveyed, which were conscientiously or correctly “multicultural.” One very colorful and poetic exception I could locate is *We Are All the Same Inside*, where an extraterrestrial sage, reminiscent of Dr. Seussian characters, “comes to us, a person like you and me, but with only the inside we can see,” with “a goal, . . . a soul, . . . with no outside skin (because the sage came from the ‘planet where we are all kin’).”<sup>59</sup> And,

Sage was all alone and needed a home.

Without any fear, Sage looked far and Sage looked near.<sup>60</sup>

Will they think I’m Dwight when my outside is all white?

Will there be a scar due to Dasha’s black and violet hair?

What about Safa’s veil. . . I wonder if it will fail?<sup>61</sup>

The insider heard some chatter. So you know Sage went to see what was the matter.<sup>62</sup>

The matter is, again, the systematic post-9/11 exclusion of the emerging other. Another example: the picture diary book put together by the first-grade students of H. Byron Masterson Elementary School, Kennett, Missouri, (Heartland, USA), *September 12th: We Knew Everything Would be All Right*, which received “Kids Are Authors Award, 2002,” seems not quite right. Given the geohistorical and demographical background of that region, it is unsurprising that the pupils photographically represented here are “black” or “white” with one “Hispanic” boy added to one corner of the pictorial list. But what remains troubling is the symbolic clue this prized model provides: now, the Muslim other is the new black, for blacks have been politically united with, that is, recruited supplementarily into, whites in this time of crisis, as exemplified by Darwyn al-Sayed in *Sleeper Cell* (Showtime drama series, 2005), an undercover FBI agent, an African American Muslim hero who infiltrates an Arab terrorist network that is plotting to bomb Los Angeles. No father or mother or even ex-slave of the United States can and will protect those with markers of terrifying otherness, not even Humphreys who will go as far as rescuing a Chinese girl. Suddenly, U.S. citizens, residents, and visitors of Middle Eastern and South Asian origin/face/name find themselves terrified orphans, totally inside and outside the laws of protection and exclusion.

Is it then shocking that the nation, thus mediated and united, is implicitly following the sanctioned hunt for those who deserve torture when necessary? Does not such ethnosocial zoning, distancing and outcasting, which is a function of race panic, as discussed earlier, reproduce the figurative culture of a United States paradoxically yoked to provincial familialism, the root of which dates back as far as the days of slavery? Given the color-coded boundaries of inclusion/exclusion and lines of flight, which constitute the sociohistorical ontology of the United States, what kind of social justice and hope can be multilaterally envisioned? How can we think across, and act against, the line? Can we even show a book of “We are all the same inside” to our “Mom and Dad”<sup>63</sup> who don’t think the alien Sage is or should be in and among us? Where can we go from here?

In Place of Conclusion: This Place I Imagine

One book I kept in view while writing this chapter is Walter Benjamin’s *Berlin Childhood around 1900*.<sup>64</sup> Perhaps the origin of the present piece is dislocatable in that “blue onion pattern,”<sup>65</sup> which seems to have left a lasting impression on the child reader in me. Young Walter, or the legendary guardian angel in him, is delivering this message to us via the diary

entry “Society,” which describes the hustle and bustle of a house hosting a dinner party:

The doorbell began to ring. . . . And it was in keeping with this demand that, for the time being, the door was opened immediately and quietly. Then came the moment when the party, though it had barely gotten underway, seemed on the point of breaking up. . . .<sup>66</sup>

The mirror-bright dress shirt my father was wearing that evening appeared to me now like a breastplate, and in the look which he had cast over the still-empty chairs an hour before, I now saw a man armed for battle. . . . Then I had been given permission to help set the table. In doing so, not only was I honored by having utensils like lobster forks and oyster knives pass through my hands; but even the familiar everyday utensils called into service. . . . All had a festive air about them. . . . I was suddenly touched to the quick by the small sign of peace that beckoned to me from all the plates. It was the pattern of little cornflowers that adorned the set of flawless white porcelain—a sign of peace whose sweetness could be appreciated only by a gaze accustomed to the sign of war I had before me on all other days. I am thinking of the blue onion pattern. How often I had appealed to it for aid in the course of battles that raged round this table which now looked so radiant to me!<sup>67</sup>

And when my mother—although she was staying at home this evening—came in haste to say goodnight to me, I felt more keenly than ever the gift she laid on my bedspread every evening at this time. . . . When my father then called to her from outside my room, I felt only very proud, as she departed, to be sending her thus arrayed into society. And without quite realizing it, I grasped there in my bed, shortly before falling asleep, the truth of a little enigma: “The later the hour, the lovelier the guests.”<sup>68</sup>

Or rather, the later the hour, the scarier the guests, one might still think. By now, the reason why this little gem remains inspirational should be fairly obvious to the reader too. How about learning an ethics of hospitality from young Walter? Why do we, the post-9/11 children of hope, risk becoming smaller by doubling the fear and sanitizing the bloody battles? Could we not, as Maurice Merleau-Ponty would suggest, allow our perceptions to “bleed”<sup>69</sup> a little bit? Could that be a way of accessing the vibrating pattern of a blue onion?

In “a load of books,” an allegorist of the enduring end of childhood writes:

The Little Duke is dead and betrayed and forgotten; we cannot recognize the villain and we suspect the hero and the world is a small cramped place. The two great popular statements of faith are "What a small place the world is" and "I am a stranger here myself."<sup>70</sup>

After all indeed, it seems the liminal strangeness of awakening that turns fully functioning adults into dislocated children over and over again, as captured by Graham Greene's metaphysical miniaturization of the progressive-regressive rhythm of cultured life. An estranged child, I too find myself rereading, compulsively, a story of *Braveheart*, intended "for those who, in a dark and terrifying hour, saw what needed to be done—and did it";<sup>71</sup>

Once upon a time, there was a wicked dragon. . . . So begins the bedtime story that Mole tells his little baby-mole. And dragons do seem far away for this ordinary mole and his family, living out their lives in the usual way.<sup>72</sup>

They too need a story. Something safe, that they could pick up and read, or keep out of sight on the shelf, as they wished. A story for them alone. And, since this is my work, I wrote them one.<sup>73</sup>

## Notes

1. Michael Cart, Marc Aronson, and Marianne Carrus, 911: *The Book of Help*, 1st ed. (Chicago: Cricket Books, 2002), 138–141.
2. *Teacher's Guide for 911: The Book of Help* (cited September 11, 2006); available from [http://www.cobblestonepub.com/resources\\_bks\\_911.html](http://www.cobblestonepub.com/resources_bks_911.html)
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*; Mitchel Levitas et al., *A Nation Challenged: A Visual History of 9/11 and Its Aftermath*, 1st ed. (New York: New York Times/Callaway, 2002); Marc Gellman and Harry Bliss, *And God Cried, Too: A Kid's Book of Healing and Hope*, 1st ed. (New York: HarperTrophy, 2002); Lynne Jonell, *Braveheart* (New York: Putnam's Sons, 2002); Mary Pope Osborne, Steve Johnson, and Lou Fancher, *New York's Bravest*, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf, 2002); Jill C. Wheeler, *September 11, 2001: The Day That Changed America*, *War on Terrorism* (Edina, MN: Abdo, 2002); Carol Marsh, *September 11, 2001: When America Was Attacked by Terrorists: Factual, Tactful Information to Help Us All Help All Kids!*, *The Hear & Now Reproducible Book of the Day That Was Different* (Peachtree City, GA: Gallopade International, 2001); H. Byron Masterson Elementary School

(Kennett, Missouri), *September 12th: We Knew Everything Would Be All Right* (New York: Scholastic, 2002); Rosina Schnurr and John Strachan, *Terrorism: The Only Way Is Through: A Child's Story* (Ottawa, ON: Anisor, 2002); *Teacher's Guide for 911: The Book of Help*; Georgia Heard, *This Place I Know: Poems of Comfort*, 1st ed. (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge Press, 2002); Timothy D. Bellavia, *We Are All the Same Inside* (New York: T.I.M.M.-E. Co., 2000).

6. Ellen Willis, "Bring the Holy War Home," *The Nation*, December 17, 2001; emphasis added.

7. H. Byron Masterson Elementary School, *September 12th*.

8. Theodor W. Adorno, *Prisms: Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981), 23, 29.

9. *Ibid.*, 30.

10. Ester Cohen, "Play and Adaptation in Traumatized Young Children and Their Caregivers in Israel," in *Psychological Interventions in Times of Crisis*, ed. Laura Barbanell and Robert J. Sternberg (New York: Springer, 2006), 151–179.

11. *Ibid.*, 174.

12. *Ibid.*, 156.

13. *Ibid.*, 155.

14. Schnurr and Strachan, *Terrorism*, 33.

15. Wheeler, *September 11, 2001*, 52; this passage is from the chapter entitled "The Roots of Hatred," 50–53. Numbers added for sequential analysis; the original source is accompanied by an illustration, "Target: Bin Laden; A photo of Osama Bin Laden taken sometime in 1998."

16. Secretary of State's speech addressed to U.S. troops ready to move into Kosovo as peacekeepers: "You are being asked to make it possible for those people to return to their villages, reunite with their families, and rebuild their lives. I know the Balkans are a long way from your families and your homes. But that is a price Americans pay for being the best. . . . Your job is to help us transform this region from a breeding ground for war into a source of stability, to put the last piece in the puzzle of a Europe that is stable, united and free. And to send a message to bullies like Milosevic that *the good guys don't back down*. In so doing, you will make a huge contribution to the security of future generations of Americans. And you will make this a better and safer world. Thank you for what you are doing. You will be doing God's work" (emphasis added). See Madeleine K. Albright, *Remarks to U.S. Troops in Operation Sabre, Camp Able Sentry near Skopje, Macedonia, 11 June 1999* (cited September 11, 2006); available from <http://secretary.state.gov/www/statements/1999/990611a.html>.

17. Kroger Grocery Stores.

18. A reproduction of this image is found in Wheeler, *September 11, 2001*, 14., with which the chapter "Mourning in America" begins.

19. Heard, *This Place I Know*.
20. Marsh, *September 11, 2001*. This series teaches "things kids want to learn about today."
21. Schnurr and Strachan, *Terrorism*, 33.
22. Luis Alberto Urrea and John Lueders-Booth, *By the Lake of Sleeping Children: The Secret Life of the Mexican Border* (New York: Anchor Books, 1996).
23. "After he recovered, Zubaydah was defiant and evasive. He declared his hatred of America." George W. Bush, *Transcript of President's Speech on the Global War on Terror* (The White House Office of the Press Secretary, 2006, cited September, 11, 2006); available from <http://usinfo.state.gov/>.
24. David Grubin, "Theodore Roosevelt, 26th President," an episode in the PBS series *American Experience* (1996). The official Web site includes some "fun" facts about Roosevelt: PBS, *Theodore Roosevelt* (1997-2002; cited September 11, 2006); available from [http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/presidents/26\\_t\\_roosevelt/index.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/presidents/26_t_roosevelt/index.html).
25. John B. Judis, "Imperial Amnesia," *Foreign Policy*, no. 143 (2004): 53.
26. See for instance David Ray Griffin, *The New Pearl Harbor: Disturbing Questions About the Bush Administration and 9/11* (Northampton, MA: Olive Branch Press, 2004).
27. Matthew Frye Jacobson, "Imperial Amnesia: Teddy Roosevelt, the Philippines, and the Modern Art of Forgetting," *Radical History Review* 73 (1999): 117-127.
28. Judis, "Imperial Amnesia."
29. Cart, Aronson, and Carrus, 911, 101-107.
30. "We have seen our vulnerability—and we have seen its deepest source. For as long as whole regions of the world simmer in resentment and tyranny—prone to ideologies that feed hatred and excuse murder—violence will gather, and multiply in destructive power, and cross the most defended borders, and raise a mortal threat." George W. Bush, *Inaugural Address: President Sworn-in to Second Term* (2005; cited September, 11 2006); available from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/01/20050120-1.html>.
31. "We will persistently clarify the choice before every ruler and every nation: the moral choice between oppression, which is always wrong, and freedom, which is eternally right. . . . We have confidence because freedom is the permanent hope of mankind, the hunger in dark places, the longing of the soul." *Ibid*.
32. Anna Deavere Smith, *Anna Deavere Smith on Art and Politics* (PBS, 2006; cited September 11, 2006); available from <http://www.pbs.org/now/shows/232/index.html>.

33. "So I'm interested in having all—having an arsenal at my disposal, or at the military's disposal, that will keep the peace. We're a peaceful nation and moving along just right and just kind of having a time, and all of a sudden, we get attacked and now we're at war, but we're at war to keep the peace." George W. Bush, *Press Conference by the President, the James S. Brady Briefing Room, March 13, 2002* (2002; cited September 11, 2006); available from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/03/20020313-8.html>.
34. Frank W. Sweet, *Legal History of the Color Line: The Notion of Invisible Blackness* (Palm Coast, FL: Backinyme, 2005), 3; emphasis added.
35. *Ibid*.
36. Joshua Muravchik, *Exporting Democracy: Fulfilling America's Destiny*. Aei Studies 513 (Washington, DC: AEI Press, 1991), 221.
37. Carl J Friedrich, "Nation-Building," in *Nation Building*, ed. Karl Wolfgang Deutsch, William J. Foltz, and The American Political Science Association (New York: Atherton Press, 1963), 27-28.
38. Hilda L. Jackman, *Early Education Curriculum: A Child's Connection to the World*, 3rd ed. (Clifton Park, NY: Delmar Thomson Learning, 2005), 171.
39. *Ibid*, 1.
40. Adorno, *Prisms*, 23.
41. See empirical research data on color/gender awareness among children ages two to five noted in Joel H. Spring, *The Intersection of Cultures: Multicultural Education in the United States and the Global Economy*, 3rd ed. (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2004), 177.
42. "[T]he United States is not a melting pot but a rather unstable gumbo in which pieces of okra sometimes rise up, onions shift to the bottom, sausage bits hover at the middle. . . . well, most metaphors do wear out." Emily Toth, *Ms. Mentor's Impeccable Advice for Women in Academia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 121. From the chapter entitled "When Culture Collides," 105-128.
43. "Ms. Mentor agrees that you (a tall Norwegian American female professor moving from the Dakotas to a big city community college) won't ever pass as a woman of color. But she can help you feel less uncomfortable with your suddenly high visibility. She can assure that everyone will instantly know who you are. You'll encounter jovial inquiries you've rarely heard before ('How's the weather up there?') and field odd queries ('Are you a guard or a forward?'). If there's another tall blonde, you'll be instantly and forever confused with her. If she teaches German, people will forever be jabbering in German at you. All of which should sensitize you to a world of rainbow students in which people often see race or color first and only afterward move on to the content of a person's character. You're also living in a time of great, often unspoken, racial

ension, in which any classroom discussion of race is apt to generate a vast, brooding, hostile silence. Everyone's afraid to be called a racist; everyone's afraid to be attacked; and you, by yourself, can't handle, soothe, or solve problems that have festered for hundreds of years." *Ibid.*, 112–113.

44. Anthony Appiah and Amy Gutmann, *Color Conscious: The Political Morality of Race* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 7.

45. France Winddance Twine and Jonathan W. Warren, *Racing Research. Researching Race: Methodological Dilemmas in Critical Race Studies* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 1.

46. "On the front of our web site we have an illustration of a multi-colored rainbow and a black and white rainbow. It piques a lot of interest from young people who visit the site. It very simply illustrates that God's design was for different colors and different races to exist, each with their own abilities, culture, and innate differences. God does not hate the races He created and as children learn the basics then you need to build upon it so that they do not become filled with hatred. Race mixing destroys the rainbow God created. It is Satan who works to amalgamate the races upon the earth—to reduce all to a common level that can be easily controlled." Rachel Pendergraft, *Raising Your Children to Have Racial Integrity* (2006; cited September 11 2006); available from [http://www.kkk.bz/raising\\_your\\_children\\_to\\_have\\_ra.htm](http://www.kkk.bz/raising_your_children_to_have_ra.htm).

47. Ku Klux Klan, *Love the Diversity of God's Creation* (cited September 11 2006); available from [http://www.kkk.bz/NA00682\\_1.gif](http://www.kkk.bz/NA00682_1.gif).

48. Ku Klux Klan, *K Store* (2006; cited September 11 2006); available from <http://www.kukluxklan.bz/>.

49. Appiah and Gutmann, *Color Conscious*.

50. See Gutmann's point of contention in "Responding to Racial Injustice," *ibid.*, 109–110.

51. Frank H. Wu, *Yellow: Race in America Beyond Black and White* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 28.

52. Wheeler, *September 11, 2001*, 46–49 and 50–53, respectively.

53. *Ibid.*, 46.

54. *Ibid.*, 51.

55. *Ibid.*, 49.

56. *Ibid.*, front flap.

57. Heard, *This Place I Know*, 34–35.

58. *Ibid.*, 18–19.

59. Bellavia, *We Are All the Same Inside*, 6–9.

60. *Ibid.*, 13.

61. *Ibid.*, 17–19.

62. *Ibid.*, 21.

63. To whom *We Are All the Same Inside* is dedicated; *ibid.*, 38.

64. Walter Benjamin, *Berlin Childhood around 1900* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006).

65. *Ibid.*, 138.

66. *Ibid.*, 136.

67. *Ibid.*, 137–138.

68. *Ibid.*, 139.

69. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose of the World* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 152.

70. Graham Greene, *The Ministry of Fear, Entertainment* (New York: Penguin, 1993), 89.

71. The opening sentence of Jonell, *Bravemole*.

72. *Ibid.*, front flap.

73. *Ibid.*, back flap.