

**Cornel West, “Decentering Europe: A Memorial Lecture for James Snead,”**  
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I am very glad to be able to come to Pittsburgh, and give this memorial lecture for James Snead. I think it's very important that we recognize in the life and work of Brother Jamie that he represents a new breed of black intellectuals who were produced by those cultures on the underside of modernity. And by 'new breed' what I mean is that, given his energy and the quality of his mind, he was willing to no longer confine himself to the Afro-American terrain, but rather to try to redefine the whole in the light of his understanding of that terrain. When we look at his work—be it on Joyce, be it on Mann, be it on Faulkner, be it in this powerful reading of 'Benito Cereno' which remains unpublished (and I hope will be published one day) and a host of such essays, as well as his pictures—we see Jamie as, in many ways, a symbol of a new generation of black intellectuals, self-confident, no longer anxiety-ridden, no longer looking for the kind of approval and legitimacy in the eyes of their white peers, but willing to flex their intellectual muscles and move in whatever directions and trajectories that they choose. It is a very new movement, a very new movement of black intellectual life. This came out in recent conversations I had with St Clair Drake. Now St Clair Drake is of course one of the towering figures in American social science, a black intellectual who wrote the classic *Black Metropolis* in 1945. But in talking to Drake, I was telling him about James Snead, and was telling him about the work that Jamie and I were doing together and which will be completed: producing black analysis of Afro-American culture—from culinary black practices across black intellectual practices, and so forth. And St Clair Drake was saying to me, 'You know, there's a sense in which I recognize myself in what you describe James Snead to be, and there's a sense in

which I don't.' There is a break, there's a discontinuity, a kind of disruption that has occurred. Now St Clair Drake is 78 years old, trained at the University of Chicago (1954, PhD). And when I go back and think about five wonderful years with James Snead, meeting him at Yale in 1984 and reading his works and having many, many conversations (the last being at MLA at New Orleans, just this past December, to complete our characterization of what we precisely wanted to do in our text), I think St Clair Drake is right. And I think the legacy of James Snead, the grand contribution of Brother Jamie, will be something with which I myself and Professor Henry Louis-Gates Jr, who is here in the audience, and a host of others will have to engage, and we will have to ensure that we hold up that blood-stained banner in a way that would make Jamie proud.

Let me begin to talk a bit about my subject, 'Decentering Europe: The Contemporary Crisis in Culture'. I think it's almost obligatory these days to begin with an historicist gesture to contextualize and pluralize, to trash the monolithic and the homogeneous in the name of heterogeneity and plurality and multiplicity, to acknowledge the degree to which we're concerned now with the concrete, the particular, with the hunger for the concrete and particular. Yet it seems that we still remain in a kind of rhetorical orbit, feeling as if we're on the ground but not really, not really. This historicist moment (interesting to see how long it will last), but this historicist moment means then, I want to suggest, that the dominant mood of theoretical activity goes back to demystification, something that itself had been trashed in the name of deconstruction and sophisticated austere and epistemic scepticisms. And by demystification I mean the notion of explanation now comes back beyond simple description, be it thick description, descriptive mappings and so forth. That explanation begins to come back in relation to the mobilization of

meanings, and structures of domination—once more, sits on the agenda. The Marxisms, the feminisms, the various anti-racist, anti-homophobic forms of social theory begin to come back with power, and we're concerned with the degree to which operations of power are still hidden, are still concealed.

What I want to argue, in fact, is that when we talk about contemporary crisis in culture, the one way of beginning to come to terms with this is having to historicize and pluralize and contextualize the postmodernism debate. That's what I've come here to do in memory of James Snead. To historicize the postmodernism debate and try to come to terms with what precisely is at stake. How does it relate to the vocation of the intellectual, given the challenge of the technical intelligentsia, given the challenge of the middlebrow journalist? What kind of role and function can the humanistic intellectual have in advanced capitalist society, given his or her placement within the academic's life of the professional managerial class of this particular society?

For one begins this by going back, and that's precisely what I'd like to do. I want to provide a mapping of postmodernism by examining four major cultural critics of modernity: Matthew Arnold, T.S. Eliot, Lionel Trilling and Frantz Fanon. This mapping shall be guided by three fundamental historical coordinates: first is the legacy of the end of Europe, of what it means to live 44 years after the end of the age of Europe, when those nations between the Ural mountains and the Atlantic Ocean are no longer at the centre of the historical stage, and what are the ramifications and repercussions of living in such a time, given our role as cultural critics, given our role as intellectuals. The second, of course, has to do with the ascendancy of the United States as an uncontested world power, and issues of hybridity and heterogeneity in its concrete sense, namely in this new world

nation, the first new nation that had to deal with hybridity and heterogeneity in a very, very real sense, given the dispossession of the land of indigenous peoples, and the story that we all know to be the constitution of what America—as an ideological construct and, of course, in its concrete embodiment—is all about. And the third historical coordinate is that of the decolonization of the Third World, the exercise of the agency and the new kind of subjectivities and identities put forward by those persons who had been degraded, devalued, hunted and harassed, exploited and oppressed by the European maritime empires. These three large historical coordinates are linked to the four critics—linked to Arnold, Eliot, Trilling and Frantz Fanon.

Now in the popular mind, postmodernism is usually understood as a set of styles and sensibilities and forms associated with either historical eclecticism or buildings, the return to the decorative and the ornamental reference of older styles, for example, works of Venturi and Charles Jencks and Robert Stern. Of course, we know even the postmodern movement in architecture now is passe, very much like deconstruction is passe in literary criticism, and yet there are still residues. There's also an association with the confusing denarrativising strategies in literature of Barthelme, Ishmael Reed, John Barth, Thomas Pynchon and others. And I think Thomas Pynchon is probably the towering figure in this regard. Just as crack is a postmodern drug because in the culture of consumption, we live in a culture which forces us to be addicted to stimulation at its highest level, and crack, of course, is the highest level of stimulation known to the human brain. Pynchon is dealing with the wasteland and the repercussions of the wasteland, and the ways in which advanced capitalist society has tried to recycle it through the consumption cycle in such a way that it generates addiction and stimulation. Yet Pynchon still holds on to critical intelligence to bring the kind of

credibility to the debate, by fusing his understanding of Eliot's metaphor with the attempt to hold on to some sense of agency 'that keep cool and care', which underlines, of course, his classic *Gravity's Rainbow*, 1974.

Postmodernism is also usually associated with increasing incredulity toward metanarratives—the Lyotard definition. I happen to think Lyotard is excessively overrated. But when you actually look at 'increasing incredulity towards master narratives' and see the religious revivals and the ideological revivals and the national revivals—be they in the Second World, Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, or in the First World, or Khomeini—you say, whose? Who is he talking about in terms of increasing incredulity toward master narratives? He and his friends hanging out on the left bank, whom does he have in mind? And then, of course, his readings of Kant and Wittgenstein are quite middlebrow. But of course these are cheap shots—I'd defend them if I had to—but these are cheap shots. But the important point is that in using Lyotard as a kind of launching pad, it shows just how narrow our academic inscription actually is as critics; just because he writes a book that the Canadian government in Quebec asked him to write, and as a Frenchman he titles it *The Postmodern Condition*, somehow it becomes an important text. Deleuze is a much more important figure, overlooked because he doesn't translate in part, but that's another story and has to do with where the travelling theories come from, why certain theories do come in the way in which they do, and the ones that stay home, or the versions of the ones that stay home. Deleuze, of course, came to us in *Anti Oedipus* as opposed to the author of Nietzsche and Hume and Spinoza. That's the real Deleuze.

On the one hand, then, in the popular mind, postmodernism is associated with these particular impressionistic perceptions I am putting forth. On the other hand though, it is important

to note the degree that postmodernism is an American phenomenon. And here I think Andreas Huyssen is right—in his 'Mapping the Post Modern', that wonderful essay in *After the Great Divide*, in which he talks about postmodernism as being initiated, first among architects, and later painters, writers, photographers, and critics, who revolted against the domesticated modernisms of the museums, the academy, and the gallery network. The academic mind is right then to note the degree to which issues of difference, of marginality, of otherness, of alterity and subalternity, of being subjugated and subordinated do indeed become very important parts of the problematics of postmodernism that was raised in such a way that it appropriates late transgressive modernists—the French going back to the Nietzsches, Mallarmés and others.

And yet on the other hand, it is a profoundly American phenomenon. Why? Because in fact it is the response to the degree to which modernism became part of the ideological arsenal used in the cold war against the Soviets, and the attempt of younger artists, painters, architects, and others to revolt against the modernisms whose own transgressive power was seemingly highly circumscribed, diluted, absorbed, co-opted, and so on. So where does that leave us? Well, it leaves us, it seems to me, in a situation in which we have to acknowledge the degree to which the struggle over what we understand postmodernism to be and historicize it, raises issues of historical periodicity in the ways Jameson talked about, so insightfully, and also blindly, if we are to read Jameson dialectically, as he attempts to read others. But the issue of historical periodicity is very important. Why? Because then we begin to raise the question: Well, if we're talking about the postmodern moment, what do we understand by modernism, what do we understand by modernity? And it hints of course at the kinds of discourses that we have these days on what we understand a modern to be, noting the variation

within the conception of the modern (modernism, modernization, postmodernity, and so forth), every conception of which is linked in some way to our understanding of when it began, when it peaked, when it declined, and whether it ended or not, and such a definition is linked to how we conceive of ourselves and how we conceive of the possibility of social change in the present moment.

Now I'll begin with the legacy of the age of Europe because postmodernism, I'm understanding, is a set of responses due to the decentring of Europe—of living in a world that no longer rests upon European hegemony and domination in the political and economic, military and cultural dimensions which began in 1492.

Given the slow but sure Europeanization of the world, as we know, the European nation by 1835 owns, well, 35 per cent of land and peoples on the globe, and, as Said has pointed out over and over again, by 1918 almost 85 per cent of peoples and land on the globe. It is the reshaping of the globe within one's own image. Now it's not a monolithic image, but it is, broadly speaking, a European imposition willed upon the world in the colonial and imperial form. Two major cultural critics that highlight the modern crisis during the last decades of the age of Europe are Matthew Arnold and T.S. Eliot. The contribution of Arnold was that he acknowledged religion - the glue that frigidly held together the old aristocratic-led regimes in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries could not do so in the nineteenth century. As did Alexis de Tocqueville, Arnold saw that the democratic temper was the wave of the future. He thereby proposed a new conception of humanistic culture that had to play an integrating cementing role in the state and emerging secular bourgeois capitalist society. His famous castigation of the immobilising materialism of the declining aristocracy, the vulgar philistinism of the emerging middle classes, and the latent explosiveness of the

working majority was motivated by his desire to create new forms of legitimacy, authority, and order in a rapidly changing moment—late nineteenth century Europe. For Arnold, this new conception of culture 'seeks to do away with classes', he says, 'to make the best that has been thought and known in the world current everywhere; to make all men live in an atmosphere of sweetness and light' (taken from *Culture and Anarchy*).

This is the social idea—men of culture are the true apostles of equality. The great men of culture are those who have had a passion for diffusing, for making prevail, for caring from one end of society to the other. Keep in mind the Gramscian notions of hegemonic activity as the saturating of a culture with a set of values and sensibilities, a set of ways of life and ways of struggle to reshape it in such a way that culture has institutional elaborations and apparatuses set in place. So to talk about power/knowledge in this regard is something very concrete, and Arnold, I think, understood it very well—but to make prevail from one end of society to the other, 'the best knowledge, the best ideas of their time'; 'to divest knowledge of all that was harsh, uncouth, difficult, abstract, professional, exclusive,' this is still Arnold, 'to humanize [culture], to make it efficient outside the clique of the cultivated and learned, yet still remaining the best knowledge and thought of the time, and a true source, therefore, of sweetness and light'.

It was as an organic intellectual of the emergent middle class, as inspector of schools that led an expanding educational bureaucracy, as professor of poetry at Oxford, the first non-cleric and the first to lecture in English rather than Latin (Professor Jonathan Arac has talked about this in his powerful essay on Arnold in *Critical Genealogies*, his recent text) that Arnold defined and defended a new secular culture of critical discourse, lodged in the education of periodical apparatuses of modern

society, that would contain and incorporate the frightening threats of an arrogant aristocracy and especially an anarchic 'working majority'. His ideal of disinterested, dispassionate, and objective inquiry that would regulate this new secular culture of critical discourse in its justification of using state power to put down any threats was widely accepted. I think one of the most telling sentences in Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* is: 'through culture lies not only perfection but our safety'. And this notion of culture is something that provides a kind of fortress against threats, so that the safety or survival of this cultural critical discourse is something that becomes part and parcel of holding on to the best of the past. And this idea of safety maybe had something combative in mind. Maybe it was going to play a crucial role in terms of containing as well as incorporating those who were potential threats to this culture, and need we forget, of course, that powerful metaphor in the last section of *Culture and Anarchy*: those who are a threat to this survival, he said, why, you throw off your Tarpeian Rock. And of course he has appropriated that metaphor from his father, Thomas. The Tarpeian Rock was where late imperial Rome cast out convicted murderers. And as we shall see, the use of state power enables you to cast out not only individuals but whole cultures.

For Arnold the best of Europe was modelled on Periclean Athens, Elizabethan England, and late republican early imperial Rome. It is important to remember that Arnold believed, like so many who lived in Europe in 1850, that Periclean Athens had no links to northern African civilization. Martin Bernal and a host of others have begun to contend with this reading in which Greece, as an ideological construct, is separated from the African continent, hence is autonomous in some sense and has no link to the very people or their traditions which will be subjugated in the name of European civilization. But in Arnold's view, the best of the age of Europe would be promoted if

there was an interlocking affiliation—the emerging middle classes, a homogenising cultural critical discourse in the educational university networks, and the state (this is the connection - the state on the one hand, the set of institutions that has a monopoly on the instrumentalities of violence in the culture, that has a monopoly on its administration; at the same time the university, bureaucracy and the emergent middle classes). The candidates for participation in the legitimation of this grand endeavour of cultural renewal and revision would be the detached intellectuals willing to shed the parochialism and provincialism and their class identities. Arnold calls them aliens—persons who are mainly led not by their class spirit, but by a general humane culture, by the love of human perfection. Now needless to say, this Arnoldian perspective still informs many of our academic practices and cultural attitudes even given the passing to and fro of different schools of thought, and so on. Why? Because it is inscribed in the practices and the institutions of higher learning from the moment that Johns Hopkins breaks from ecclesiastical authority, in 1876. And Hopkins itself was modelled on the German universities of the nineteenth century, they themselves taking as a model the University of Berlin, the great modern university. The Arnoldian institution is one that gives to persons like ourselves who are socialized in a cultural way—into this culture of critical discourse—some sense of who we are, a sense of identity, even displacing our early identities. It moves us beyond our early lives, sophisticates us, refines us, makes us part and parcel of the world of educated gentlemen and, later, gentlewomen. And this Arnoldian model is still operating in part. Our views about the canon, about admission procedures, about collective self-definitions as intellectuals, are still marked by this conception.

Yet Arnold's project was disrupted by the collapse of nineteenth-century Europe, which comes of course in August 1914—World War I; in George Steiner's words, the first of the bloody civil wars within Europe—the very definition of it as a 'world war' shows how Europe misrepresented itself in relation to the globe—a civil war within Europe that brought to the surface, not the violence of the masses that Arnold feared after the Hyde Park riots and violated middle-class space and gardens, but rather this violence of the state, of the very institutions Arnold valued, the violence of the state itself. In the ashes of the vast human carnage of its innocent civilian European population, Thomas Stearns Eliot emerged as the grand cultural spokesman. He would say, 'Have strength to force the moment to its crisis.' His image of Europe as a wasteland of cultural fragments with no cementing centre, a chamber of horrors, loomed large. And though his early poetic practices, I would want to argue, were much more radical, much more national than his critical practices—a point I think that needs to be made over and over again—it was very clear that Eliot posed a return, a revision of tradition, capital T, as the only way of regaining European order, authority, and stability. For Eliot, too, contemporary history becomes as in James Joyce's note in *Ulysses*, a nightmare from which he is trying to awake, or as in Eliot's review of that masterpiece—in the *Dial* of 1923—the immense panorama of futility and anarchy. In his influential 1919 essay, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', Eliot writes: 'if the only form of tradition of handing down consisted in following the ways of the immediate generation before us, in a blind or timid adherence to its excesses, "tradition" should positively be discarded. We have seen many such simple currents soon lost in the sand, and novelty is better than repetition.' Tradition is a matter, he says, of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour.

After his conversion in 1927, Eliot found his tradition in the Church of England, a tradition that permitted him to promote his Catholic cast of mind and his Calvinistic heritage. Like Arnold, Eliot was obsessed with the idea of civilization and the horror of barbarism, or more pointedly the notion of the decline and decay of European civilization. With the advent of World War II, Eliot's obsession became a reality, again. Unprecedented human carnage throughout Europe, as well as around the globe, put the last nails in the coffin of the age of Europe. After 1945 Europe consisted of a devastated and divided continent with humiliating dependence and deference to the USA, on one hand, and of course after Yalta, to Joseph Stalin's USSR on the other.

The second historical coordinate, then, is the emergence of the USA as the world power (in the words of André Malraux, the first nation to do so without trying to do so) which sets the immediate context for the emergence of the problematic of postmodernism, of difference, of heterogeneity and so forth. The USA with, in the phrase of Henry James, its hotel civilization, a unique fusion of the centrality of the market and the stress on the warmth and security of the home, precisely what a hotel is. Highly suspicious both of the common good and the public interest, highly privatistic both of home and market, individualistic—in short a country unprepared for world power status. I'm sure you're all acquainted with the way that F.O. Matthiessen, that great American critic, a left critic from the middle part of the century, said, 'Is in fact the United States the first modern nation moved from a stage of perceived innocence to corruption without a mediating moment of maturity?'

It's not a cheap shot. He's trying to understand something about the nature of this first new nation that is thrown upon the scene, given the ashes of the end of the age of Europe. How would it

undergo its maturation, what form would it take, and how would it deal with its own problem of heterogeneity and hybridity, especially given, of course, the legacy of slavery and the legacy of its patriarchy. Yet with the recovery of Stalin's Russia, which had more than 20 million dead compared to the 385 thousand dead in the States, the USA felt compelled to make its presence felt around the globe with the Marshall Plan to strengthen Europe against Russian influence and provide new markets for US products. With the 1948 Russian takeover of Czechoslovakia, the 1948 Berlin blockade, the 1950 beginning of the Korean War, the 1951 establishment of NATO in Europe, it was clear there was no escape from world power obligation, from imperial obligations. It was clear that the thrust of the nation's history would force it to constitute itself as an empire, given the collapse of European maritime empire, as would the Soviet Union, slowly but surely, constitute itself as an empire. The post-World War II period in the USA, the first decades of what Henry Luce envisioned as the American century (it would only last 28 years, from 1945 to 1973), was not only one of incredible economic boom, but also cultural ferment. It was not simply the creation of a mass middle class, the first society in human history to make the shape of the social structure appear like a diamond, with the majority being in the middle, with the poor being a minority. But, also the emergence of the first major subcultures of American non-WASP intellectuals, as seen in the so-called New York intellectuals around *Partisan Review*; or seen in the abstract expressionists in painting of course, when the world of painting shifts from Paris to New York; or seen in the bebop jazz artist, the first fine black intellectuals being taken seriously as part and parcel of the new art form that was distinctive and novel in the new world (something that Dvorak understood way off in Czechoslovakia, and he looked at the new world to see what was new, and incorporated it in his

'New World Symphony')—Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie, and a host of others. This emergence signified a challenge to an American male WASP elite, loyal to an older and eroding European culture in which Arnold was the major model. The first significant salutary blow was dealt when assimilated Jewish-Americans entered the higher echelons of the academy and, slow but sure, anti-Semitic barriers began to unravel under pressure of alliances with those liberal WASPS who were willing to at least entertain a few refined assimilated Jews within their WASPY terrain. Lionel Trilling is an emblematic figure in this regard. This Jewish entry to the anti-Semitic exclusivistic and patriarchal culture of critical discourse in the elitist institutions of higher learning initiated the slow but sure undoing of male WASP cultural hegemony as well as homogeneity. The contribution of Trilling was to appropriate Matthew Arnold for his own political and cultural purposes in his doctoral dissertation. Professor Daniel O'Hara's recent text, *Lionel Trilling: The Work of Liberation*, the best treatment that we have of Trilling up to this very moment, is a reading of the degree to which Trilling is trying to reshape a new kind of consensus, a liberal, anticommunist consensus for the new emerging middle classes in the new empire, in the new American empire—using the values that we associate with Trilling, of course, complexity, difficulty, modulation, and so forth and so on: again those values and features that became the badge of the intellectual climate, holding off what was perceived to be the Manichean discourse of the left, and at the same time the philistinism of mass culture in television, emerging film, radio, and so on. The same kind of Scylla and Charybdis orientation going on—mass culture, on the one hand, and left politics on the other.

The postwar boom laid the basis for intense professionalization and specialization expanding institutions of higher learning, especially in the natural sciences, partly in response to Russia's

successful venture into space. This forced humanistic scholars to search for new methods in order to buttress self-images and to be rigorous and scientific and serious, and so forth. New criticism became, in fact, a useful way of appropriating highly serious and rigorous methods that had to do with not only close readings of texts, but also buttressing self-images of these humanistic intellectuals. But it was, of course, a new criticism that was severed from its ideological roots. This is also true, I think, in other disciplines—be it the logical precision of reason in analytic philosophy, the jargon of Parsonian structural functionalism in sociology—all providing languages into which persons could be socialized and could be viewed as having scientific self-images, vis-à-vis their scientific peers, which is to say vis-à-vis their peers in the natural sciences. Yet towering cultural critics like C. Wright Mills, Richard Hofstadter, and W.E.B. Du Bois bucked the tide. And I think it's interesting that we don't have any serious treatments of these figures.

Trilling, in his famous essay on the teaching of modern literature, asks the question, 'Can we not say then that when modern literature is brought to the classroom, the subject being taught is betrayed by the pedagogy on the subject?' It's true. 'We have to ask ourselves whether in our day too much does not come within the purview of the academy. More and more of the universities liberalize themselves and turn their beneficent and imperialistic gaze upon what is called life itself. The feeling grows among our educated classes that little can be experienced unless it is validated by some established intellectual discipline,' which is Trilling's point. You can mention the fact that university instruction often quiets and domesticates radical and subversive works of art, and that it then turns its objects into merely habitual regard—this process of what he called the socialization of the antisocial, or the acculturation of the anticultural, or the legitimation of the subversive, leads

Trilling, and I quote, 'to question whether in our culture the study of literature is any longer a suitable means for developing and refining the intelligence'. This is the same Trilling, of course, who had gone to Columbia in the 1920s and had been taught the famous slogan of John Erskine, 'You have a moral obligation to be intelligent.' How, in fact, do you sustain, cultivate and refine critical intelligence? And Trilling is reaching a point where maybe in fact the teaching of literature is just another big Baconian idol that gets in the way of the cultivation of intelligence. The question becomes, what is the alternative to this for Trilling? He asks this question not in the spirit of denigrating or devaluing the academy, but rather in the spirit of highlighting the possible mobility of an Arnoldian conception of culture to contain the overwhelming philistine and what he perceived to be the anarchic alternative. It was these alternatives that were becoming more and more available to the students—on the one hand mass culture, and on the other hand radical politics. And it is this which leaves Trilling world weary at the end of his life. He felt that, in fact, the space that he had tried to create—that liberal space—was collapsing and there was no possibility of holding back the anarchic forces on the one hand—the radical students—and on the other hand, the mass culture. And we know now from some of the notebooks that Trilling did enjoy television, especially *Kojak*. But that's another matter.

This threat is associated with the third historical coordinate that I'll end with, namely the decolonization of the Third World. It is only when we take this process into account that we can grasp the significance of, on the one hand, the end of the age of Europe, and, on the other hand, the emergence of the USA as the world power. The first defeat of a Western nation by a non-Western nation—Japan's victory over Russia in 1905—the revolutions in Persia in 1905 and Turkey in 1907,

Mexico in 1911, the Soviet Union as we know in 1917, on up to the major break in 1947 with India; Ghana in 1957, Guinea, and so forth and so on. This shaping of a very different world, a very different world indeed, in which the way in which decolonization takes place serves as a source of radical interrogation of the Arnoldian model of culture as well as that appropriated by Trilling, let alone, of course, a return to the tradition put forward by Eliot. The first thing to note here is the centrality of violence, the degree to which a person begins to recognize just how ugly and brutal the world really is. Not simply, of course, the mushroom clouds of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, not simply the concentration camps—the Holocaust—but also the everyday violence, part and parcel of the very state and states that Arnold had been putting forward, the European violence and brutal subjugation of colonized persons. Also it has to do with issues of identity, what Paulo Freire has called ‘conscientization’ in new self-perception, in which persons no longer view themselves as objects of history, but rather as subjects of history, willing to put forward their own selves and bodies to reconstruct a new nation. And, of course, ironically appealing to the old European ideology of nationalism to channel their utopian energy. This long-festering underside of modernity, this is not only within European colonies but also within the United States itself—those who for the most part bore the social cost of what Europe understood progress to be, what Europe understood monumental culture to be, what Europe understood order to be. But, the empire begins to strike back. The impetuous ferocity of moral outrage that motors this process is best captured by Frantz Fanon in his 1961 classic, *The Wretched of the Earth*, published a year after he died at the young age of 36. Fanon from Martinique moves to Paris and then Algeria. He tells us how decolonization which sets out to change the order of the world is obviously a program of complete disorder. Enough

dialectical reversal of our normal conception of order on the one hand, and the acknowledgment of the way disorder is part of the process to show the degree to which disorder rests upon a disordering of those beneath—not at the bottom, but beneath—the societies and empires. Decolonization, Fanon says, is the meeting of two forces, opposed to each other by their very nature, which in fact owe their originality to that sort of encounter which results from, and is nourished by, the situation in the colonies. The first encounter was marked by violence in their existence together, that is to say, the exploitation of the native by the settler was carried on by dint of a great array of bayonets and cannons. And decolonization is therefore the need for a complete calling into question of the colonial situation. If you wish to describe it precisely, you might find it in the well-known words, 'The last shall be first, and the first, last.' Decolonization is the putting into practice of this sentence. The naked truth of decolonization invokes for us bullets and blood-stained knives which emanate from it, for if the last shall be first, it will only come to pass after a murderous and decisive struggle between the two protagonists. Of course, Fanon is linked to a Manichean discourse in this regard, and we can be quite critical of it. But the most important point is the degree to which this long-festering scent of denial and deep degradation had been articulated. Fanon's strong words still describe the feelings and thoughts between the occupying British army and colonized Irish in Northern Ireland, or the occupying Israeli army and colonized Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the Polish army and colonized Polish peoples in Poland, the South African army and colonized black South Africans, Japanese police presence in Korean communities, Russian armies vis-à-vis colonized Armenia—we could go on and on and on. For so many human beings that still live, in fact, within this intersection, within this encounter, in which violence is really at the very

edge of how they interact with the model—no buffers, as it were, for the cultural critical discourse given the highly mediated associations between civil societies we experience as humanistic intellectuals. Of course, there were intellectuals, be it Have1 in Czechoslovakia, or be it Dennis Brutus in South Africa, and so forth, who have had a much closer experience of what it is to be at the edge of that group—reality. And in the same way, of course, many Afro-Americans and indigenous people in the United States have that close relationship with the repressive apparatus of the state —that close and ugly relationship.

During the late fifties, sixties, and early seventies, these decolonized\ sensibilities fanned and fused the civil rights movement, the black power movements, the student anti-war movement, the feminist, gay, and lesbian movements, and this witnessed a shattering of the previous male WASP cultural homogeneity and the collapse of the short-lived liberal consensus. And this, of course, is part of our own moment, the ideological polarization, the racial polarization, the class polarization that comes as a result of a concerted response to this upsurge, this insurgency that took place from 1955 in December, beginning in Montgomery, up until the murder—4 April 1968—of King, with its current ambiguous legacy for both African Americans and Latino and Latina Americans.

Keep in mind that Jamie goes to Yale in the early seventies. Here's that first generation of ruling-class institutions that allow highly talented black folk to attend (Du Bois's PhD was in 1896 and he couldn't think about teaching at Harvard and Yale). Jamie was part of that generation; Professor Henry Louis Gates Jr was part of that generation; I'm part of that generation; you're talking about a host of others, which means we're riding the tide of decolonising sensibilities that, by means of organization and mobilization and politicization of the populace under the leadership of

people like King Jr and a host of others, bring power and pressure to bear on these institutions. And, hence, new kinds of unprecedented opportunities - discursive, political, ideological, existential—begin to present themselves, in a similar trail, of course, for Latinos and Latinas, for native Americans, and for American women. The entry yields intensive intellectual polemics and inescapable polarization. These polemics and polarization focus principally on the silences and the blindnesses and the exclusions of the male WASP cultural homogeneity and its concomitant notions of the canon. In addition, these critiques promoted three crucial processes that have affected the life and the mind of the country. First was the appropriation of travelling theories of postwar Europe, and this is part of the irony of this moment: that given the McCarthyite act suffocation of so much of intellectual life in America as it relates to progressive social change, the younger generations had to look to a devastated Europe that was trying to understand its decline in terms of difference as it had been then decentred by the colonized peoples. And you get the kind of radical scepticism of a deconstructive move coming from an Algerian Jewish person who was born as a French colonial subject, but as a special kind of French colonial subject, given the intimacy between Algeria and the French empire. But when I talked to Jacques Derrida it was very clear that he doesn't see a possibility of the decolonization process and, hence, all he can do is try to unsettle the ironic repetitions on which the dominant Western cultures rest, with very little possibility of mobilization and organization and so forth. But the scepticism becomes a way of creating openings, even though it's very difficult to make moves in that regard. Then the feminists come along, and the blacks will come along, and say, look, we've got movement. Serious movement here, not just a matter of talking about difference and heterogeneity, but difference and heterogeneity as a matter of concrete embodiment

in a certain political direction. It's not just a matter of being accused of being a metaphysician of presence, but trying to change the world. But the charge is very important because of course scepticism is, as Stanley Cavell has taught us, something that never goes away. This link toward the tragic is something that never goes away, but is never concluded—it is always a challenge for those whose backs are against the wall.

But the travelling theories did come. Publishing houses made money, but it also provided a new internationalization of the discourse—the Frankfurt School, Althusser, Gramsci, and on and on—an opening, a crucial opening. But still narrow in the sense of being Eurocentric; still narrow in the sense of not really radically interrogating the context in which these theories emerged as responses to their moment. What was the name of the appropriate French theory, given the anti-Hegelian moment in France, given the collapse of Marxism at that time, given the devastation of the French communist party at that time, given the refusal to say anything about Arab guest workers at that time, and so forth and so on? These kinds of radical interrogations haven't even taken place at the moment. But the important point is that it was an attempt to fuse these versions of transgressive modernisms with what was perceived to be the decline in Marxist, post-Marxist, left politics in the European moment. All interesting enough, but the European figures shun the term postmodernism for the most part, and yet still see themselves deployed in such a way that in the American context they become exemplars of it.

The second moment I want to put forth, now coming to an end here, is the recovery of the revision of American history in light of the rule of those who had been excluded—the workers, the women, African Americans, native Americans, Latino Americans, gays and lesbians, and so forth. I

want to argue that this is probably the most important moment. The reason is that if we want to make an historicist turn, then we've really got to come to terms with historiographical practice. We can't make gestures through historicism without understanding what are the new developments and tendencies in present-day historiography. It means reading the Genoveses, reading the Eric Foners, reading the John Blassingames, reading the Paula Giddings, and so forth. It means a certain retooling has to take place for those who have been shaped by the Arnoldian models—by the Eliot and the Trilling-like models—not that there aren't elements there that aren't very important, but the retooling has to take place, and it has to take place in relation to this recovery and recuperation that has been going on. This doesn't mean that we're uncritically accepting, but we have to come to terms with a third moment which has to do with the impact of forms of popular culture, on highbrow literate culture—of television, of film, of music, and of sports. What is the significance, for example, of the fact that in the United States you have, for the most part hegemonic, two forms of cultural activity that have been created by non-middle-class persons; namely, black music, on the one hand, and athletics on the other? What is the significance of that in terms of our perceptions of culture? How can we begin to get at these forms in such a way that we're not only critical, but also acknowledging of the internal dynamics at work? What does it mean for these to become hegemonic at particular moments in capitalist society, shaping the identities of those who do not come under the academic purview, and many of those who do? And those who do come under the purview are usually running from it. Why? Because we know that popular culture has been associated with anti-intellectualism that tends to suffocate the life of the mind, and we're trying to preserve critical intelligence in a society that is suffocated by money-making, business operations, and so forth and so

on. Very important questions, it seems, and I don't have any definitive answers, as you can imagine. But these are the kinds of questions, again, that James Snead was raising. I recall, I was asked actually to give a lecture on black film at the Whitney Museum in 1984. I knew absolutely nothing about black film, but it's not that uncommon for me to be asked to lecture on something about which I know nothing. That's part of the circulation of the very few black intellectuals in American society, so I refused to go. And I asked Jamie, 'Do you know anything?' And Jamie said, 'Well, I'm not sure, Cornel.' And I said, 'Well I'll tell you what, why don't you go for me.' And Jamie did go. And I did not go with him, but I'm told he gave a marvelous lecture. And thank God, from then on he began to move into black film—film in general, but black film especially. He linked up with the *LA Times*, and began to write criticism there, and has written a magisterial text that will be published. We all anxiously await that. But this move into popular culture and trying to keep track of black agency, full of resistance at the level of popular culture, is something that is very important.

After 1973, the end of the American century—the deep crisis of the international world economy, the American slump in productivity, the challenge of OPEC nations in North Atlantic monopoly of oil production, increasing competition in the high-tech sectors of the economy from Japan and West Germany, and the growing fragility of international debt structures of Third World nations—the United States entered the period of waning self-confidence, a period compounded, of course, by Watergate and a contracting economy. The economic boom was over. As the standards of living for the middle classes decline, along with runaway inflation, the quality of living for most fail due to escalating unemployment and underemployment and crime. Secular neo-conservatism and religious conservatism emerge with power and potency. Traditional cultural values are used primarily

against feminist gains. That is the groundwork of the era in which we live. And issues of nation and class and gender and race and empire begin now to come back with power. Hirsch can talk about this in terms of what it means to be a citizen of an empire, to have a certain kind of knowledge, and so he trots out the history of that empire; it's no accident what he excludes—it's predictable what he excludes. Because you don't need what he excludes if you're going to be a responsible citizen in that empire, given his perception of what that empire is, and what its ends and aims are. Postmodernism has to be understood in light of this cultural context of heterogeneity and plurality and academic dissensus, given the historical and social forces at work that I've sketched. In the political context, this is what the market means: the very important production of styles and products for quick consumption and lucrative careers; and the expansion of the professional-managerial class, the degree to which the academy comes to be more and more shaped by the business culture and our students go off into communications and business and medicine, so that, low or high, humanistic studies seem to be outside of where the real action is going on. And for those of us who are left holding the bag, it still is important to read these novels, it still is important to read this criticism, even though we find ourselves undergoing commodification as intellectuals and find our discourses undergoing reification in terms of our ability to communicate. And there's the difficulty of having any organic linkages with any institutions in civil society, like churches and synagogues and mosques and trade unions, and other intermediate associations that have some link to the outside of the academic orbit in which we find ourselves. I'm talking structurally, I'm not talking just about individuals and individual willed volition and so forth. I'm talking about ways in which persons are inscribed within certain structures.

Where does this leave us? It leaves us, I think, very much where Jamie was going, which is to say. It leaves us to talk about traditions of resistance, to talk about holding on to the possibility of social movement and social momentum and social action at a time when it's now unpopular; indeed, when it is very difficult even to imagine, very difficult to imagine, given the larger international constraints in which it seems as though social democracy is the best that anybody can do—in Europe, in the Second World, in the Soviet Union, as well as in the Third World—given the protracted character of the decolonization process, and, of course, its association with the bureaucratic bourgeoisie in these nations, and the butchery of so much of the bureaucratic bourgeoisie in the Third World nations in Africa and Latin America and in parts of Asia—much of Asia one should say. And so it seems to me that the role is going to be one in which we still hold on to some of the precious ideals of rational discourse, democracy, freedom, liberty, and equality. But these notions are read dialectically—they're expanded, they're enriched, they're deepened, they're broadened such that they provide a vision to put forward, such that they provide the courage that has to be mustered in time. Our role as intellectuals remains one that fundamentally links the life of the mind, the best of the life of the mind, to the best of organized forces for social change, even in this conservative moment in which we find ourselves.

But long live the legacy of James Snead. I know I will never, ever forget what he's meant to me—his joy, his laughter, his intelligence, and I'm sure the same is the case for you all here in Pittsburgh. Thank you.