

ECUMENICAL AMERICA: GLOBAL CULTURE AND THE AMERICAN COSMOS

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The modern process of global cultural interaction has repeatedly been subjected to two criticisms. The first is that it threatens the diversity and particularism of the world's cultures, resulting in a deadening homogenization of the human cultural experience. The other is that this growing global uniformity results from the dominance of America's culture -- that, in effect, global culture is nothing more than American cultural imperialism. Hannah Arendt's lament that we have been brought to a "global present without a common past [which] threatens to render all traditions and all particular past histories irrelevant," is typical of the first. Theodor Adorno's famous diatribe against American popular music is the *locus classicus* of the second. Both objections are without foundation.

The argument that Americanization is resulting in the homogenization of the world ignores the increased vitality of local cultures and ethnicities in recent times and the complexity of global cultural diffusion, in particular the extent to which so-called peripheral regions are increasingly contributing to American popular culture and to the world music scene. Nor does it explain the emergence of a special kind of regional system, what I shall call the regional cosmos, or the great cultural divisions in America itself. The American cosmos, as we shall see, is not a single cultural space, but is divided among three Americas: a traditional America, multicultural America, and ecumenical America.

The Diffusion of Global Culture

Industrialization and modernization both entailed the spread of common sets of behaviors and attitudes within the context of economic change. However, the globalization of culture also takes place independent of whatever economic changes are occurring in a particular region or society. Traditionally, the transmission of culture across societies was facilitated by two main media: migration and literacy. People learned about other cultures either through traveling themselves or from travelers, or by reading about other cultures and adopting or adapting what they learned. These traditional media could, under certain circumstances, be effective means for the transmission of cultures across the globe.

The distinctive feature of literary transmissions, and all diffusions through individuals except during mass migrations, is that they tend to be largely confined to elites, or, where not, to enclaves of non-elite persons cut off from the mass of their societies. This was true of the diffusion of Hellenism in the Mediterranean world and was largely true of the imperial influence on the societies of Asia and Africa. Until the end of the Second World War, Westernism was largely confined to a tiny minority of the populations of these continents, largely the educated native elites and urban workers. Since the fifties, however, this has changed radically. The globalization of culture, largely (although by no means solely, as the spread of Islam indicates) through the impact of, and *reaction to*, the diffusion of Western popular and elite culture, has not only greatly increased in terms of its spread over the surface of the world, but in terms of the depth to which it has influenced the populations of other societies.

Four factors account for this sudden change of pace. The first is the spread of mass literacy throughout the world, which resulted from the new nations of the post-colonial era investing vast sums and human energy in their educational systems, the structure and content of which were largely influenced by Western models. The second is the rise of mass communication. The third is the growth of global organizations, both private and public, such as the multinational corporation, the United Nations, the World Bank, the IMF, and the large number of regional agencies, themselves often modeled on and directly influenced and promoted by the former. The fourth is the revolution in long-distance transportation, which has resulted in the emergence of an entirely new kind of global, or more properly, subglobal system, the regional cosmos. The most remarkable of these

emerging regional cosmoeses is the West Atlantic system, encompassed by the eastern seaboard of North America and the circum-Caribbean societies of Central America and the islands.

The Global Popular Music Culture

The emergence of the regional cosmoeses provides perhaps the best evidence of the complexity of global cultural diffusion. But before turning to the subject of their development, let us consider one example of global cultural diffusion -- namely, how mass communication has facilitated the diffusion and creation of global popular musical culture. I choose to focus on popular music because it is in this area of the globalization process that the strongest claims of homogenization have been made. Its classic statement was given by the musicologist Alan Lomax who, in 1968, lamented the presumed passing of the great local cultures of the world under the impact of American popular culture, which, he feared, would lead to global rootlessness and alienation as the peoples of the earth all sank into the desolate gloom of the great, global "cultural grey-out."¹

As someone who has studied this process in a Third World society that has perhaps been more exposed to the full glare of American culture than nearly any other -- namely, Jamaica -- I can say unequivocally that such charges are utter nonsense. It is simply not true that the diffusion of Western culture, especially at the popular level, leads to the homogenization of the culture of the world. Indeed, my research, and that of the best scholars working in this area, suggests that just the opposite is the case. Western-American cultural influence has generated enormous cultural production, in some cases amounting to near hypercreativity in the popular cultures of the world.

If what I say is correct, it must be wondered where the popular misconception of the homogenizing effect of the Western impact came from. One source is the propagandistic reaction of traditional cultural gatekeepers in Third World societies whose monopoly and influence has been threatened by the Western cultural impact. That impact, in generating new cultural forms, invariably stimulates the emergence of new and competing cultural agents and managers. To monopolize the cultural resources of a country is to exercise enormous power, not to mention to control economic resources. What usually upsets traditional cultural gatekeepers about the Western impact on their mass cultures is less the content of Western culture -- because this is invariably transformed -- and more the choice it immediately offers to the consumers of culture.

The second source of misconceptions about the impact of Westernism comes from important segments of the cultural gatekeepers in the West itself, on both the right and the left, who think and talk about this issue. The more abstract of these complaints about the influence of American global popular culture stem from elitist, postmodernist pessimism, of the sort that stimulates similar complaints about the stultifying effects of popular culture on the working class of the West. Cultural critic Paul Willis has recently taken issue with these pretentious criticisms. He notes that people never simply passively absorb cultural messages. There is always what Willis calls symbolic work at play: "The incandescence is not simply a surface market quality. It produces, is driven by, and reproduces further forms and varieties for everyday symbolic work and creativity, some of which remain in the everyday and in common culture far longer than they do on the market."²

There is a great deal of sloppy and ill-informed criticism of Americanization in what passes for serious, empirically based research. It is simply assumed that illiterate and semi-literate Third World peoples are powerless in their responses to Western popular culture. Experts on the subject have in mind a world of passive consumers, homogenized and manipulated into Marx's notorious sack of (Westernized) potatoes.³ It is nothing of the sort. The semi- and non-literate masses of the Third World invariably react to Western cultural influence in a nonpassive manner, reinterpreting what they receive in the light of their own cultures and experience. One of my favorite examples of this is the story about the British officer in a remote part of northern Greece following the general elections in Britain at the end of the Second World War. The officer asked a Greek peasant if he knew the results of the elections. "Oh yes," replied the peasant excitedly, "the Labour party has won the elections, the king has been assassinated, and Mr. Churchill and his party have fled to the mountains!"

Either the Western cultural form is reinterpreted in light of traditional meanings, or Western meanings are adapted to traditional patterns. In any case, something new, although still local, emerges. As the musicologist Peter Manuel points out, not only do local cultures "adapt foreign elements in distinctly idiosyncratic ways that substantially alter their function, context and meaning," but even what appears to Western ears and perception to be a major intrusion, may, in fact, be so shallow functionally to the native listener as to not even be perceived. This is true, for example, of the influence of American music on the thriving Indian pop culture.⁴

In their comparative analysis of eight cultures, musicologists Deanna Robinson, Elizabeth Buck, and others have demonstrated, in my opinion conclusively, that "world musical homogenization is not occurring." As they put it, "even though information-age economic forces are building and international consumership for centrally produced and distributed popular music, other factors are pulling in the opposite direction. They are encouraging not only what we call indigenization' of popular music forms and production but also new, eclectic combinations of world musical elements, combinations that contradict the continuing constraints of national boundaries and global capitalism."⁵

Furthermore, the common notion that the globalization of culture, especially on the popular level, is a one-way process, from the Western metropolis to the passive and vulnerable periphery, is simply not the case, although it is certainly true that the major diffusionary source of this culture is a single Western country: the United States.

Not homogenization, then, but the revitalization and generation of new musical forms has been the effect of the global exchange process. Some of these forms remain local, providing greater choice and stimulus to the local culture. Examples of such revitalization include the modernization of the traditional Camerounian *makassi* style with the introduction of the acoustic rhythm guitar; the development of the *highlife* music of Ghana, which fused traditional forms with jazz, rock, and Trinidadian calypso rhythms; the vibrant local modernization of traditional Afro-Arab music in Kenya. Elsewhere, musical forms under Western impact have broken out of their provincial boundaries to become regional currency, as, for example, the Trinidadian and American pop influenced *kru-krio* music of Sierra Leone, which swept West Africa and beyond during the sixties and seventies; the Brazilian *sambo*, the pan-American *salsa*; *merengue* (the latter of Dominican Republic origin); the originally Cuban *nueva trova*, which became a radical pan-Latin form, stimulating the even more radical and pan-Latin *nueva cancion*; and the Colombian *cumbia*, which has become an important part of the music of the Tex-Mex regional cosmos. And there are those musical forms that experience their fifteen minutes of fame as the latest fad in the "world music" scene: the Argentinean *tango*; the Algerian *rai*; the Zairian *soukous*; the Brazilian *bossa nova*.

Out of Jamaica

One of the most globally successful cultural creations of a Third World people is the musical form known as *reggae*. Indeed, the development of reggae perhaps more than any other musical form illustrates the complexity of global cultural interaction. The creation of the Jamaican working classes and lumpen proletariat, reggae emerged in the late fifties from a variety of influences, especially American. Jamaica had always had a rich musical tradition, originating mainly in the music of West Africa brought over by the slaves, but also influenced in its lyrical and melodic lines by British, especially Celtic, popular music of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. At the turn of the century, a popular secular form, *mento*, ideal for dancing, emerged. Similar to the Trinidad calypso in its topical and satirical lyrics and in its reliance on the guitar for a Latinized ostinato, *mento* soon established itself as *the* traditional popular music of the island.

By the late fifties, however, young working-class Jamaicans had grown weary of *mento*. What they did like were the rhythm-and-blues recordings being brought back by farm laborers returning from cutting cane in Florida and the "cowboy music" or bluegrass they picked up on short-wave early in the mornings. Aspiring young Jamaican singers -- including the teenage Bob Marley, Peter Tosh, Bob Andy, and numerous others -- began singing imitations of American soul songs at the many talent parades that preceded the weekend triple

bills at the working-class cinemas. These imitations were, at first, ghastly renditions of the original. (I can still recall hearing a pimply, short-haired Bob Marley singing an American soul song hopelessly out of tune.) At this point, Jamaica would seem to have had the worst of all possible worlds. A delightful native musical tradition had been abandoned, and in its place the island found its middle class swooning over syrupy white American ballads while its lower class sang imitations of African American music.

What happened next, however, demonstrates just how complex the dialectics between local and foreign influences that generate the global culture are. First of all, the imitations were so bad that they were unwittingly original. Furthermore, the Jamaicans instinctively brought their own local musical cadences and rhythms to bear on the tunes being imitated. This coincided with an infusion of the very African music of the Afro-Jamaican cults, which was lifted straight from the "laboring" movements made by cult celebrants as they worked themselves up to the point of spirit possession. Both the movement and the accompanying rhythm were secularized (in a manner similar to the crossover from gospel to soul music among African Americans), and a wholly new musical form and accompanying dance, known as *ska* was created.

At the time -- the late fifties and early sixties -- the vast majority of working-class Jamaicans were still too poor to buy record players or expensive imported records. This led to the formation of the *sound system*, a hi-fidelity system outfitted with enormous bass speakers, which the owners rented out, along with their record collections and themselves in the role of disc jockey. The disc jockeys, partly out of boredom, partly out of increasing dissatisfaction with the rhythmic patterns of the imported African American records, but above all, out of a desire to give a "live" quality to the performance of their systems, started to deliberately play around with the records as they were being played. They voiced over the imported records with their own rhythmic commentary, improving their "riddim" as they understood it, either through grunts and screams, or through an accompanying screed that sometimes made sense, sometimes was mere nonsense lyrics, which mattered little since the voice was actually being used as an additional bass instrument. This was rapidly to become a distinctive feature of reggae. The disc jockey would also "play" the turntable, stopping and pushing the record as it turned on the platter in order to induce strange new sounds. This, too, was later to become an essential part of the music, except that the strange noises were to be made through the manipulation of sophisticated studio electronics.

What emerged from these activities was another distinctive musical form, *dub*. When the disc jockeys were unable to match the love lyrics of the imported black American rhythm-and-blues songs, they resorted to what they knew best, local politics. Thus was born reggae dub, with its strong emphasis on the political, a clear departure from popular American music, black or white.

At about the same time that these developments were taking place, the Ras Tafari cult, a millenarian back-to-Africa movement that was the religious component of the reaction to Western influence, was taking hold among the Jamaican proletariat of the Kingston shanties. The spiritualism and radical racial ideology of the cult -- a religious form of negritude, exemplifying Sartre's "anti-racist racism" -- greatly appealed to the very people developing the music, and it was not long before the two merged, Rastafarian theology giving substance and ideological content to what were previously sappy imported lyrics or garbled political chatter.

The music swiftly went through several formal changes, first from *ska* to *rock-steady*, a more complex slow-tempo music, and finally, in response to the demands of the entrepreneurs who ran the weekend dance halls and who wanted music with a faster beat so their patrons would drink more of the Red Stripe beer on which they largely depended for their profits, to reggae.

Reggae swiftly caught on, not only among locals, but with the American tourists who were now visiting Jamaica in increasing numbers. Several major singers emerged in the late sixties and early seventies, the most successful of whom was Bob Marley, whose enormous showmanship and song-writing ability were important in internationalizing the music. However, one other factor was equally important in explaining the rapid spread of reggae and its eventual emergence as a global musical form. This was the mass movements of Jamaican

working-class migrants. The first such movement was to Britain, where Jamaicans effectively transformed what was a previously all-white country into a multiracial society. By 1964, a thinly Anglicized version of ska known as *blue beat* was already in vogue.⁶ Today, reggae has been completely embraced by white British youth, who now view it as an integral part of their culture.⁷ From its British base, it was to spread rapidly throughout continental Europe and north and sub-Saharan Africa.

Similarly, reggae spread to the United States as a result of a second mass migration of the Jamaican working class, which began with the liberalization of American immigration laws in the early 1960s. A new kind of West Indian migrant now entered America, not the relatively well-educated, highly motivated petty-bourgeois migrants of previous generations, but the working-class and lumpen-proletarian people from the Kingston slums. Eventually, the reggae music these new migrants brought over with them, along with their disk jockeys and dance halls (as well as their gangs, the notorious posses), were to influence black American youth, but what is interesting is how long it took to do so. Black Americans, in fact, strongly resisted most versions of reggae. Reggae, however, rapidly caught on among the white college students of America, especially after the enormous success of the reggae movie, *The Harder They Come*, and soon broke out of the campus circuit with the success of Bob Marley and other international stars, such as Jimmy Cliff and Peter Tosh.⁸

Eventually, by the late 1970s and early 1980s, even the underclass African American young began to respond to reggae. They were simply unable to prevent themselves from listening to the version of reggae brought over to the ghettos by the latest weave of underclass Kingston migrants: the dance-hall music. The fact that they also soon developed a healthy respect for the violent Jamaican posses also explains their changed attitude.

The music had gone full circle, from its beginnings in the crude imitations of 1950s' African American lower-class music, to the late 1970s' and early 1980s' imitations of dance-hall dub by the New York underclass. The American music that emerged from this extraordinary proletarian cross-fertilization was *rap*, the first popular American music to have an explicitly political lyrical content. The Jamaicans had repaid their debt.

The West Atlantic Regional Cosmos

The transmission of reggae to the American center from the Jamaican periphery not only illustrates the complexity of global cultural interaction, but was a forerunner of a much more complex process that has now integrated parts of the United States with other countries as deeply or more deeply than those parts are integrated with other regions of America. This aspect of the globalization of culture, which has resulted in the development of regional cosmoes, is entirely new. Indeed, it has emerged only over the past two decades or so, largely because it was dependent upon the revolution in cheap mass transportation.

The regional cosmos is best conceived of as a system of flows between a metropolitan center and a set of politically independent satellite countries within what the urban sociologist Saskia Sassen calls a "transnational space."⁹ People, wealth, ideas, and cultural patterns move in both directions, influencing both the metropolitan center as well as the peripheral areas, although asymmetrically. Although they are similar in many respects to other migratory systems, such as those of the Mediterranean, there are several unique features of the regional cosmoes that are of special importance to the problem of the globalization of culture.

In the West Atlantic regional cosmos, made up of eastern America and the circum-Caribbean societies, the peripheral areas are either contiguous with or within easy reach of the dominant metropolitan society.¹⁰ The separate unites are legally autonomous, but sovereignty becomes merely a resource to be used in the interaction between the main collective actors. In spite of legal restrictions on the movement of peoples, there is a vast flow in both directions -- legal and illegal migrants from the periphery, tourists and investors from the center. There is no simple flow of cheap labor to capital in this system, as in the classic colonial regimes. Skilled and cheap labor flow in both directions. Legal and illegal capital also moves in both directions.

The Third World countries of the periphery are only too eager to attract such capital, but with capitalization of their economies become dualized, as is true of the center, between an urban-modern sector and a traditional-rural sector. This disrupts traditional labor patterns at a much faster rate than it provides new job opportunities. The result is massive unemployment, the rise of the urban slums -- marking the first stage in the migration process -- and from there the mass movement to the center. These migrants rarely compete directly with native workers in the center; instead, a wholly new sector -- what sociologist Alejandro Portes calls the immigrant enclave -- is created for them.¹¹ Thus, dualization at the center reinforces, and is reinforced by, dualization in the periphery.

An important aspect of the regional cosmos is the rise of the cosmopolis -- a major urban center that shifts from being a major metropolis of the center to being the metropolis of the entire regional cosmos. This is precisely the role that Miami has come to play in the West Atlantic regional cosmos.¹² Miami is no longer an American city: it is a West Atlantic city, more vital to, and more dependent on, the needs of the circum-Caribbean societies and cultures than it is on the other sectors of the U.S. economy. It is the political, cultural, social and economic hub and heart of the Caribbean.

Culturally, the periphery is greatly influenced by the society of the center, but the reverse is also the case, as the example of reggae demonstrates. Another example of periphery-to-center cultural flows is the transmission of Spanish and Haitian creole, which has resulted not simply in the creation of a multilingual center where English once prevailed but, more broadly, in the Latinization of English and the Anglicization of Spanish. This process of creolization, in turn, has resulted in the creation of wholly new cultural forms in the transnational space, such as "New Yorican" and Miami Spanish. The same process of cosmopolitan creolization can be found in other areas of culture: in the rapid spread of Spanish-American food, Franco-Haitian-American dishes, and the recent diffusion of the Jamaican "jerk" method of cooking in both Jamaican (Jamaican-American) and mainstream American cooking; in the Latin and West Indian carnivals that are now a standard part of the festivals of the cosmopolis; in the infusion and transformation of Afro-West Indian and Afro-Latin cults, whose animal sacrifices were recently offered constitutional protection by the Supreme Court after a major nativist challenge; in the ironic revival of the game of cricket, once an elite sport among the dominant Anglo-Americans, under the impact of the Afro-West Indian working-class immigrants; in the spread of the dreadlocks style of hair grooming among African Americans and, increasingly, among white Americans from the Jamaican Rastafarian immigrants. These are only some of the more visible expressions of this extraordinary process of periphery-induced creolization in the cosmopolis.

Afro-Caribbean Intellectualism

One of the most fascinating, and neglected, areas of cultural exchange between the cosmopolis and the West Atlantic periphery is in intellectual and professional life. The British, Spanish, and French academic and professional cultures have traditionally dominated the countries of the periphery, the result of their respective colonial experiences. The ruthlessly selective nature of these European traditions created intellectual cultures that were at once highly sophisticated and elitist. What emerged in the black Caribbean -- a vibrant engagement with European intellectualism in which the culture of Europe was critically embraced, dissected, and reintegrated through the filter of a creolized neo-African sensibility and aesthetic -- had no parallel on the American mainland. It was possible only because of the overwhelming demographic presence of blacks in the West Indies, in contrast with the minority status of blacks in the mainland cosmopolis. In the periphery, the neo-European culture of the elite was mediated through agents of the hegemonic powers, who were themselves black or light-skinned. Hence race, per se, was muted as a factor in the cultural conflict that accompanied the decolonization process.

The ironic effect was that the European experience could be adjudicated, and dialectically explored, in purely cultural terms, devoid of the confounding effects of racial segregation and rejection. In contrast with the black American condition, where any engagement with the dominant culture always ran the risk of the loss of racial identity and the fear of racial betrayal, resulting in an understandable rejection of all intellectualism, the West Indian intellectual developed a love-hate relationship with the culture of the "mother country" that was

mediated through fellow blacks. The paradigmatic challenge in this situation became, not the rejection and suspicion of all intellectualism, but a desperate need to outdo the imperial culture at its own game. Intellectualism, however, went far beyond mere anti-imperial one-up-manship. For the ambitious black West Indian, it was, until recently, the only path to mobility, given the paucity of resources and the monopolization of the limited commercial positions by whites and Asians.

The net result has been a virtual hotbed of intellectualism among Afro-Caribbean peoples. These small, poor islands have, arguably, the highest per capita concentration of scholars, professionals, and real, as well as would-be, intellectuals as any place in the world. It is not Germany, Switzerland, or the United States that has produced the greatest proportion of Nobel laureates per thousand, but the tiny, dirt-poor island of St. Lucia. With an at-home population of under 100,000, it has produced two Nobel laureates, the economist Sir A. W. Lewis and the poet Derek Walcott. And they are merely the tip of the iceberg: Trinidad's V. S. Naipaul is generally considered one of the two or three best novelists writing in English; its late scholar-statesman, Eric Williams, was a major historian; its late radical intellectual C. L. R. James one of the foremost Marxist theoreticians. The poet-novelists Edward Brathwaite and George Lamming are only the most recent in a long line of internationally acclaimed writers from Barbados; indeed, Barbados was used by the colonial British as the seedbed for black professionals and missionaries in its cultural penetration of Africa and Asia and still lives to a considerable degree on the remittances of its large number of professional emigrants. What is true of the English-speaking Caribbean holds equally for the French-speaking islands where, to take the most noteworthy example, the poet-statesman Aime Cesaire has long been recognized by French critics as one of the best poets in their language.

This extraordinary intellectual and professional tradition is now being rapidly incorporated into the West Atlantic cosmopolis. American educational aid has been accompanied by American models of education, transforming the elitist nature of these systems. At the same time, there has been a massive redirection of the flow of talent from the region. All roads no longer lead to the old colonial metropolises of London and Paris but increasingly to the great East Coast cosmopolitan centers. Budding West Indian intellectuals now experience their required period of creative exile, not in Europe, but in America, where many take up permanent residence. What is more, a disproportionate number of American academic and other professionals are of West Indian ancestry. Paralleling the cross-fertilization of African American lower-class popular culture by West Indian immigrants is the interaction of Afro-Caribbean and African American traditions within the cosmopolitan academe, which has significant implications not only for the cultures of both traditions, but for the wider culture of the cosmopolis.

The special contribution of West Indian intellectualism in the cosmopolitan context will be a transference of its distinctive strategy of aggressive engagement with the dominant tradition of neo-European civilization -- a strategy that, at its worst, generates enormous identity crises and self-destructive emotional and physical violence, but at the same time, and at its best, is the crucible for the explosively competitive syncretism that finds expression in Rastafarianism and *voudon*, reggae and merengue, and negritude, magical realism, *omeros*, and the self-loathing genius of V. S. Naipaul. Such engagement African Americans have independently achieved so far only in the universalizing vitalism of rock music and the jazz aesthetic. My prediction is that the West Indian presence in the cosmopolis will act as a catalyst for the promotion of this transcendent Afro-European contribution to the emerging global culture.

In structural terms, the mass migration of peoples from the periphery in this new context of cheap transportation and communication has produced a wholly different kind of social system. The migrant communities in the center are not ethnic groups in the traditional American sense. In the interaction between center and periphery, the societies of the periphery are radically changed, but so is the traditional immigrant community of the center. What has emerged is, from the viewpoint of the peripheral states, distinctive transnational societies in which there is no longer any meaningful identification of political and social boundaries. Thus, more than a half of the adult working populations of many of the smaller eastern Caribbean states now live outside of these societies, mainly in the immigrant enclaves of the United States. About 40

percent of all Jamaicans, and perhaps half of all Puerto Ricans, live outside of the political boundaries of these societies, mainly in America. The interesting thing about these communities is that their members feel at home in the mainland segment as in the original politically bounded areas.

These communities are more like self-contained colonies -- in this respect, they remind one of the *politeumata* of the Hellenistic cities -- within the body politic of the United States, and it is a serious error to confuse them with the traditional ethnic communities, including native African Americans. They are what the Jamaican folk poet, Louise Bennett, calls "colonization in reverse." The former colonies now become the mother country; the imperial metropolis becomes the frontier of infinite resources, only now the resources consist not simply of unexploited land but of underutilized deindustrializing capital and the postindustrial service and professional sectors. There is no traumatic transfer of national loyalty from the home country to the host polity, since home is readily accessible and national loyalty is a waning sentiment in what is increasingly a postnational world. Jamaican, Puerto Rican, Dominican, and Barbadian societies are no longer principally defined by the political-geographical units of Jamaica, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic and Barbados, but by *both* the populations and cultures of these units and their postnational colonies in the cosmopolis.

Other Regional Cosmoses

In addition to the West Atlantic system, there are at least three other emerging multinational spaces within the body politic of contemporary America: the Tex-Mex cosmos of the Southwest, incorporating northern Mexican and Southwestern Euro-Indian cultures, peoples, and economies; the Southern California cosmos, with its volatile, unblended mosaic of Latin, Asian, and Afro-European cultures; and the newly emerged Pacific Rim cosmos of the Northwest, which integrates the economies and bourgeois cultures of industrial Asia and traditional Euro-America.

While the processes of incorporation and creolization are broadly similar in all four regional cosmoses, they differ sharply in their degrees of integration, in the volume and velocity of cultural, economic, and demographic flows, in the levels of asymmetry in the transfer of ideas, cultural products, and skills, in the patterns and stages of creolization, and in the nature and extent of the social and cultural conflicts that inevitably accompany the process of cosmopolitanization.

On all these indices, the West Atlantic cosmos is, in my view, the most advanced, especially in the degree of integration and the extent to which the nation-state has been transcended as a major basis of collective commitment and constraint on livelihood. The major outliers in this system are Haiti and Cuba, but in light of the already large contingent of Cubans and Haitians on the mainland, it is best to see their integration as a temporarily halted process, the one on ideological, the other on racist grounds. It is only a matter of time before both these restraints are eroded.

Next in level of integration is the Tex-Mex cosmos. Although it is the oldest of the four, the Tex-Mex cosmos is confined to a limited range of interactions and, in many respects, is the most asymmetric in its flows. The economic interaction consists largely of cheap, unskilled labor serving labor-intensive agricultural and light-industrial capital. Cultural flows are limited to popular music and the culinary arts. The hegemonic Anglo-American culture has remained strikingly oblivious to any significant Latinization. The architecture of the great cities of the region is aggressively Anglo-American, as is its professional and academic life, which takes account of the Latin presence in well-funded programs of Latin American and Latino studies.

The Southern California cosmos is the most heterogeneous and least integrated of the four and undoubtedly the most volatile. South and East Asian peoples of highly varied provenance meet Latin, Anglo-, and African Americans at all socioeconomic levels. Economic flows are complex, involving highly skilled, professional and entrepreneurial Asians, professional and working-class Latinos, as well as blacks of all classes and hegemonic Anglo-Americans. There has, as yet, been surprisingly little cross-fertilization of cultures in the cosmos; the process of creolization remains mainly at the pidgin stage, in language as in other areas of culture. The cultural mix has been correctly described as a salad, and a thoroughly unappetizing one at that. That the

nation's worst ethnic riot has recently taken place in this cosmos comes as no surprise. That the riot was not a traditional black-white conflict, as erroneously reported by the press, but a multiethnic conflagration engaging more Latinos than blacks, in spite of its origins in the police beating of a black man, Rodney King, is understandable in light of the extreme differences between the interacting cultures and classes.

The Pacific Rim cosmos is the newest, least complex, and potentially most integrated of the four systems. It is, in effect, the transnational space of the most advanced economic sectors of East Asia and the American mainland. Its boundaries in North America extend beyond the U.S. polity, incorporating the Canadian state of British Columbia. Unlike the other regional cosmoses, it is largely bourgeois in its demographic component, involving a large net flow of entrepreneurial capital and talent from industrial Asia. This asymmetric economic and occupational inflow is counterbalanced by a highly asymmetric cultural and social incorporation of the immigrant population. Nothing better demonstrates the globalization of bourgeois capitalist culture than the ease with which these immigrants have been integrated into the mainland cosmos; the cultural capital they bring with them was already highly Americanized.

The American Cosmos

What are the implications of all this for our understanding of contemporary America? I believe that it is best to conceive of not one, but three Americas, traditional America, multicultural America, and ecumenical America -- a vast sociological cosmos bounded by a single, powerful polity. The three are obviously related, but it is important not to confuse them, especially in discussions of multiculturalism.

Multicultural America is made up of the mainland or metropolitan populations of the four "transnational spaces" or regional cosmoses discussed above. It has been called immigrant America by Portes and others, and while this term obviously captures an important dimension of this sector, it is likely to be misleading to the degree that it invites too close a comparison with the immigrant America of earlier years. As I have pointed out, there is something fundamentally different in the relationship between these immigrant communities with both their home societies (to which they remain strongly linked socially and culturally) and the broader American society, with which they are permanently intertwined. Multicultural America is a great socio-cultural concourse, a space where all the cultures from the center's several regional cosmoses meet, resist, embrace, display their cultural wares at annual parades, gawk at, fight, riot, and learn to live with each other, sometimes even learn a little something from each other.

By traditional America, I mean the Euro-African world that emerged from the Puritan North, the industrial smokestacks, the prairie farms, and the slave South. It is the America of the Midwestern main street, of the old and new South, and of the ethnic working classes. It is the America of Richard Nixon, J. Edgar Hoover, and Louis Farrakhan. But it is also the America of Jimmy Carter and the Congressional Black Caucus, of the land grant colleges and the United Negro Colleges. Socially, it is committed to enhanced opportunities and intergenerational mobility, but it is also historically racist, though changing in this regard, and profoundly separatist in its basic orientation. It embraces all races and classes, and today a great many African Americans are as committed to the separatist ideal as their Southern white counterparts. There has been some progress: instead of "separate and unequal," the ethic of this America, as a result of African American pressure, is now "separate but *truly* equal." There is profound disagreement about how such an America is to be achieved -- witness the war over affirmative action -- but all parties, except for the fringe extremists, are in agreement in their desire to live peacefully and separately.

Ironically, traditional America does have a common culture. At the elite level, it is largely the Anglo-American tradition modified by interactions with the older, more traditional ethnic groups, including mainstreaming African Americans, and by continental European influences. At the popular level, traditional America has been deeply influenced by the African American working class: in its language, music, art, and religion, and in many of its attitudes. For a long time, it simply refused to acknowledge this influence, but in recent decades it has come to do so. It does so even while remaining committed to a separatist society, though

one less and less rationalized in racist terms. The persisting racial segregation among black and white traditional Americans is today as much a product of class as of race and is in many ways more voluntary than imposed.

Perhaps the strongest unifying cultural feature of traditional America is its Christian heritage. Originally and still largely Protestant, traditional America is rapidly losing its hostility toward Catholicism, as an overriding convergence of conservative religious values becomes more important: the belief in a Christian God and regular church-going; the commitment to patriarchy; the demonization of abortion rights; the preference for punitive law-and-order forms of childrearing and justice; the neo-Puritan fear of sex; uncritical patriotism; reverence for, and for many, dependence on, the military; and the parochial suspicion of the foreign. Even while firmly settled in their separate communities, the many different white ethnic groups and the large core of working- and middle-class blacks who make up traditional America are fully committed to this still thriving system of values.

The Meaning of Race

In one important area, traditional America is under strong pressure from the multicultural sector to change one of its central values, namely, the meaning and conception, though not the significance, of race. Traditionally, race has been defined among both black and white Americans in binary terms: the so-called one-drop rule sociologically excluded any intermediary racial groups on a continuum between blacks and whites. While the binary rule was originally constructed and rigidly imposed by whites out of their commitment to notions of racial purity and exclusion, it is one that traditional African Americans have come to embrace for political and cultural reasons. The rule operated with extraordinary tenacity not only because both the traditional "races" came to accept it, but because later immigrant groups quickly conformed. Jews, dark-skinned southern Europeans, and Caucasoid Hispanics, once rejected as "true whites," eagerly struggled for, and eventually won, acceptance within the Caucasian chalk circle of white people -- in contrast with the excluded blacks, whose presence is required for the extraordinary valorization of whiteness. (The point is best made by noting that for the average Irishman in non-black Ireland, whiteness has no social meaning; Ireland is, in fact, one of the least racist of European societies, as any well-traveled African American or West Indian tourist will attest; however, whiteness is instantly embraced as a valued social, cultural, and economic asset by the marginal socially insecure Irish immigrant in America, as the well-documented historical negrophobia of working-class Irish Americans, their liberal politics notwithstanding, will also readily attest.)

The rise of the multicultural sector strongly undermines the binary rule in two important respects, one demographic, the other cultural. One reason why the binary rule worked so well was that African Americans were, by and large, the only significant "other" in the American population for most of the nation's history. Until recently, Asians and dark-skinned Latin and South Asian immigrants were an insignificant demographic presence; and Native Americans -- who up to the end of the eighteenth century constituted the second significant racial "other" -- were removed from consideration through decimation and confinement on reservations.

All this changed dramatically with the rise of the regional cosmos and the multicultural sector. Visibly nonwhite Asians and Latin Americans, who by no stretch of the imagination can be socially redefined and incorporated within the social category of "white people," now exist in significant numbers in society; indeed, they will outnumber blacks by the turn of the century. Since these groups are clearly neither whites nor blacks, a serious crisis of racial definition now confronts those clinging to the binary conception of race.

Quite apart from the purely demographic factor, however, is the cultural refusal of most of the new immigrants to play by the binary rule, as early streams of immigrants have done. On the one hand, most of the new Asian immigrants have a strong sense of their own racial identity, are proud of the way they look, and do not wish to be redefined racially as anything else. And this sense of racial pride is further reinforced by the multicultural celebration of ethno-racial differences. On the other hand, most immigrants from Latin America bring with them, in addition to their racial heterogeneity, their own highly developed nonbinary or "interval-type" notions of race. That is, socially significant distinctions are made among persons on a continuum between

obviously black and obviously white persons. A visibly nonwhite, but light- or brown-skinned Puerto Rican, Dominican, Jamaican, or Brazilian does not consider himself "black." One only has to observe the elaborate shade gradations and mating and marriage patterns of Cuban, Puerto Rican, and other Latin immigrants to recognize that a wholly different principle of racial classification is at play. A similar nonbinary pattern prevails among South Asians between black-skinned "Dravidian" types and fair-skinned "Aryan" types. And the same holds for East Asians. Indeed, nonbinary racial classification is the norm among the vast majority of non-European peoples.

Added to these two factors is a third challenge to the binary rule: the pre-eminence of Japan as a major economic power. The coincidence of the advanced industrial world with the white world strongly reinforced notions of racial purity and superiority. The challenge to American and European economic hegemony from a clearly nonwhite power, one that until as late as the sixties was castigated as the "yellow peril," its immigrants unashamedly herded into concentration camps during the Second World War, has created confusion for traditional Americans holding fast to their binary notion of race. When one adds to this the out-performance of whites in the educational system by the former "yellow devils" -- especially on IQ tests, which have functioned so prominently as a "scientific" justification for the binary, purist dogma -- it is easy to understand why the binary rule is now in crisis.

Ecumenical America

Ecumenical America is not merely cosmopolitan, for it goes beyond the simple embrace of many cultures maintaining their separate identities. It is, rather, the universal culture that emerged and continues to develop in the great cities and university towns of the nation. This culture is a genuinely ecumenical one: it draws from everywhere, not just from the local cultures of the traditional ethnic and immigrant sectors and the traditional Euro-American culture at its doorstep. The image of the melting pot fails to describe the process by which it emerges, for it does not indiscriminately absorb all and everything into some common stew. There is a complex process of selection and universalization of particular cultural forms and styles generating its great cultural innovations for itself and for the world: in science, technology, literature, dance, painting, music, and cuisine.

Like traditional America, it has both a formal or elite and a popular or vernacular level. English, both of the streets and the academy, is its common language. Its shared art thrives in the works of a Jasper Johns or an Andy Warhol (with their ironic ecumenization of traditional America's most beloved icons) but, perhaps most quintessentially, in the musical form of jazz. On the popular level, the shared art of ecumenical America is also strongly influenced by African Americans. Increasingly, the products of the regional cosmoses are selected out for universalization, as in the ecumenization of Chinese and Mexican cuisine, the poetry of Derek Walcott, the fiction of Saul Bellow and Maxine Hong Kingston, and the drama of Eugene O'Neill. Ecumenical America also draws directly from the wider world in meeting the needs of its art and its technology. The culture it produces, in turn, has become the koine, or common currency, of the world, the first genuinely global culture on the face of the earth.

Ecumenical America is based primarily in the postindustrial economy, with its advanced technological plants, complex services, and multinational corporations. It is no utopia, as the legion of previously secure unemployed workers and managers of the smokestack industrial regions and rapidly obsolescent high-tech sectors can attest. It is almost as class-ridden as traditional America. It is politically mainly liberal, but it includes the politically very conservative elites and middle managers of the multinational corporations and silicon suburbs. It also includes the elite managers, scientists, and intellectuals from all over the world -- Indian engineers, Japanese and Hong Kong businessmen, Argentinean doctors, European managers and artists, and Caribbean intellectuals -- who enter this sector at the top and are not to be confused with the working-class or sweatshop entrepreneurs of the immigrant enclave economy.

A New Cultural Policy

Let me conclude with a few reflections on the kind of cultural policy that this interpretation of the American cosmos implies. In the first place, it seems to me that any attempt at a single policy for all of America is a

nonstarter. Any cultural policymaker must begin by recognizing the fundamentally tripartite nature of America. It is a waste of time trying to persuade a traditional American to embrace a Robert Mapplethorpe; it might even be unreasonable. The most we can reasonably expect is that he or she respect the right of ecumenical Americans to publicly view Mapplethorpe's photographs.

Second, it should now be clear that the multicultural social philosophy and approach to the arts and culture is wholly inadequate for the American cosmos. It very adequately addresses the needs of immigrant or multicultural America but is inappropriate as a strategy for the other two cultural systems that embrace the vast majority of Americans.

Indeed, it is questionable whether there can be a single policy even for the multicultural sector itself. In the first place, as we have seen, the American, cosmopolitan parts of the four regional cosmoses that together constitute the social bases of multicultural America are at different stages of development, especially in their degrees of integration. What holds true for the highly integrated West Atlantic cosmos, with its harmonizing processes of creolization, simply does not apply to the fissiparous Southern California cosmos.

But there is a more profound problem with regard to any attempt at a single multicultural policy. This is the inherent self-contradiction of all programs that adhere to the dogma of relativism. If all ideals, all values, and all art in all cultures and subcultures are of equal worth, there is no basis for the view that relativism -- the basic value of the multicultural theorists and policy advocates -- is of any greater worth than the basic values of any of the celebrated subcultures that deny the worth of others -- including that of the relativists -- in absolutist terms. Relativism requires the acceptance of its condemnation by the very antirelativists it embraces. This is no academic abstraction, as Americans have already learned in the course of their current bitter culture wars. A multicultural relativist is in no position to condemn the traditionalist fundamentalist's insistence that not only is the Christian God the only true God, but that no one has the right to prevent his children from attending public schools where the day begins and ends with Christian prayers. Similarly, a black nationalist has no moral basis for condemning a white supremacist. Indeed, partly out of recognition of this contradiction, there has been an astonishing recent convergence of interests between several white and black racist nationalists. The present volatile debate over speech codes, and more generally, over the First Amendment, is disturbing testimony to the potentially catastrophic social and cultural implications of an unthinking commitment to the self-contradictions of the relativistic dogma that is basic for multiculturalist theorists.

Traditional America is inherently hostile to such a strategy and rightly complains of its disregard for a common center. In its extreme commitment to relativism, multiculturalism well serves the needs of immigrant peoples and cultures thrown upon each other and who must learn basic principles -- often contrary to their own traditions -- of tolerance for others. But discrimination is the essence of cultural creation, and this same relativism, when applied to the other two areas of the American cosmos, could be deadening in its impact.

The multicultural ideology, then, is certainly needed, but its limits must be understood. Making it the American creed would be a serious mistake. In general, art within the immigrant sector should be encouraged, preferably by private foundations rather than the government, but only where it looks toward, and strives to become, a part of the shared art of the ecumene. However, where the immigrant artist is atavistic, looking only back at his or her original culture, he or she should be tolerated, respected, and accepted in good faith, but not actively supported. It is not the business of the ecumenical to promote the atavistic.

Ecumenical America is no utopia. Nonetheless, it seems clear to me that this is the future of America, for better or for worse. There is no basis for the commonly heard criticism that associates the ecumenical with a grey, homogenized world. Nor is there any justification for the view that the ecumenical is dominated by a global financial elite having no responsibility to any local community. The ultimate thrust of the ecumenical is indeed transnational and, in many respects, postnational. But this is the way of the world in the twenty-first century, and such postnational orientation is by no means confined to the financial elite. Indeed, as I have shown, it is the migrant peasants, working classes, and intellectuals from the periphery of the world's

transnational spaces who are most postnational in their attitudes and behavior. The typical Jamaican resident of Brooklyn or Mexican resident of Texas has already gone far beyond any transnational capitalist of New York in his or her attitudes, migratory movements, and life-style.

We have no choice but to accept the inevitable; but we do have choices in what we make of it. Ecumenical America and its advocates, among whom I count myself, should recognize its special place, not only as the most advanced part of the American cosmos, but as the vital source of the world's first truly global culture. It should support artists, scientists, and other cultural creators in and out of America whose work resonates and who are dialectically engaged with the emerging shared art and shared ways of the global ecumene, at both the advanced and vernacular levels of social and cultural life.

¹ Alan Lomax, *Folk Song Style and Culture* (Washington DC: American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1968).

² Paul E. Willis, *Common Culture* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1990), p. 26.

³ For the standard Frankfurt School criticisms, see Theodor W. Adorno, *Introduction to the Sociology of Music* (New York: Continuum, 1998); and Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon, 1964.)

⁴ Peter Manuel, *Popular Musics of the Non-Western World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 20.

⁵ Deanna Robinson, Elizabeth Buck et al., *Music at the Margins: Popular Music and Global Cultural Diversity* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1991), pg. 4.

⁶ Orlando Patterson, "The Dance Invasion of Britain: On the Cultural Diffusion of Jamaican Popular Arts," *New Society*, no. 207 (September 1966).

⁷ See Simon Jones, *Black Culture, White Youth* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1988).

⁸ See Stephen Davis and Peter Simon, *Reggae Bloodlines* (New York: De Capo, 1979).

⁹ See Saskia Sassen, *The Mobility of Labor and Capital* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

¹⁰ For a detailed analysis of this cosmos, see my essay, "The Emerging West Atlantic System: Migration, Culture and Underdevelopment in the U.S. and Caribbean," in *Population in an Interacting World*, ed. William Alonso (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987).

¹¹ Alejandro Portes and Ruben G. Rumbout, *Immigrant America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

¹² For a spirited journalistic tour of this regional cosmos and Miami's central role in it, see Joel Garreau, *The Nine Nations of North America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981), pp. 167-206.)