2004

The political conspiracies of Ishmael Reed's Mumbo Jumbo: historical relativism and the contemporary battle for power

Benjamin Clark Bishop

Iowa State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/rtd

Part of the English Language and Literature Commons

Recommended Citation

Bishop, Benjamin Clark, "The political conspiracies of Ishmael Reed's Mumbo Jumbo: historical relativism and the contemporary battle for power" (2004). Retrospective Theses and Dissertations. 7110.
https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/rtd/7110

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Iowa State University Capstones, Theses and Dissertations at Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Retrospective Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact digirep@iastate.edu.
The political conspiracies of Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo:*

Historical relativism and the contemporary battle for power

by

Benjamin Clark Bishop, Jr.

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Major: English (Literature)

Program of Study Committee:
Sidner Larson, Major Professor
Kathleen Hickok
Ray Dearin

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
2004
This is to certify that the master's thesis of

Benjamin Clark Bishop, Jr.

has met the thesis requirements of Iowa State University

Signatures have been redacted for privacy
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE OF CONTENTS</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE POLITICAL CONSPIRACY</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE MASONIC CONSPIRACY</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE LITERARY AND ART CONSPIRACY</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WORKS CITED</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

While one of Ishmael Reed’s objectives in writing *Mumbo Jumbo* “was to humble Judeo-Christian culture” (Dick, 63), an ironic outcome of this novel is the overlooked fact that Reed and the American Evangelical and Fundamentalist Christian have plenty in common: a growing distrust in the American Establishment since President Woodrow Wilson, a disdain for Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud, a condemnation of Freemasonry, and a disappointment that their prospective groups are victims of “revisionist” history.

I was introduced to Ishmael Reed’s *Mumbo Jumbo* in Barbara Haas’ creative writing class “The 5 Ms: Magic Realism”. One student in the class told me, “I’m an artist, I don’t worry myself with politics.” That student did not see that *Mumbo Jumbo*, besides critiquing the American political scene, was also satirizing the “secret societies” which includes contemporary publishing houses that put “Black writers [...] under literary colonialism” (Hubbard 27).

Because of Reed’s seemingly loose interpretation of historical facts, or because of his own subjective reasoning about historical and fictional persons and events, many critics and students fail to understand, or work to find, Reed’s underlying meaning. As Reginald Martin explains, as readers, sometimes our preconceived notions and beliefs do not allow us the desire for further inquiry:

Reed’s point is that ‘facts’ from history are often fabricated or too biased or incredible to be believed. Fact overlaps with fiction, and only when the two are juxtaposed can one see the similarities. Further, as in the case with religion, one believes what one wants to believe, regardless of the facts. One man’s fiction is another man’s fact, and
who is to say which is which and whose fact or fiction is more valid? (90).

Theodore O. Mason, Jr.’s study, “Performance, History, and Myth: The Problem of Ishmael Reed’s Mumbo Jumbo” asserts that “Reed’s sense of history devolves from an understanding that the historical ‘facts’ as we understand them are wholly fictions propagated by the masters of high Western culture” (98). Whereas Mason believes this is a downfall of the novel, I find it to be an obvious strength. I believe Reed’s purpose of intertwining historical angles as well as fictional motifs presents the reader with a greater understanding of the contemporary battle for power in light of the past (in which Reed terms necromancy). I doubt that Mason realizes that some Masonic scholars claim Moses as the first Mason, nor do I think that Mason realizes that Evangelical Christians believe that the Masons are poaching many groups’ myths just as Reed believes that Christianity has poached the African American myths. “High brow” literary scholars rarely delve into the unknown; Reed’s book revolves around the unknown and unproven elements of our world which he deems the “mysteries” that Western Civilization is keeping hostage.

Reed shows the political battle for power in 1920’s America as an ongoing warfare, melded within the political, spiritual, and publishing worlds. He offers up in Mumbo Jumbo the sentiment that “the nursery rhyme and the book of Science Fiction might be more revolutionary than any number of tracts, pamphlets, manifestoes of the political realm” (18). Even today, Reed asserts that political powers use the African-American for political gain:

Reed believes that these ‘talented tenters,’ led by Harvard University Professor Henry Louis Gates, have set up a black Vichy regime. (The French Vichy government collaborated with the Nazis during World War II.) ‘These blacks-Vichy-regime intellectuals don’t and won’t
support black writers with viewpoints that differ from their own, such as black nationalist, multiculturalist and anyone who makes white people feel uneasy. It’s time for African-American writers to end the slave-master relationship.’ (Hubbard 27)

Critic Theodore Mason also contends that the novel lacks merit because he believes that “the political life […] has no discernible connection with any concrete form of popular life that we may experience” (99). He truly misses the point of the novel. Works that, for political reasons, are not translated into the printed word cannot affect popular culture. Reed, however, misses the mark when he judges Christian doctrine through political means. Political establishments have frequently used the guise of Christian doctrine to accelerate and gain power, not to uphold Christian ideals.

*Mumbo Jumbo* is a book that enacts the search of a text, “for what good is a liturgy without a text?” While the “texts” of the Black Aesthetic are culminating, Reed shows in *Mumbo Jumbo* that these “texts” are always changing (like the pictures in subsequent printings of the novel) and also subject to misinterpretation. Hinckle Van Vampton, the former grand master of the Knights Templar, is collecting these works. Ironically, Van Vampton is amassing power by doing unto others what had been done to his group. As Peter Partner says in his study of the Templars:

> What is perhaps most striking in the Templar story, as it is also in the history of western witchcraft in general, is the power of literary texts to influence beliefs. From the twelfth-century Archbishop of Tyre to the sixteenth-century hermetic philosophers and so until our own day, the Templars were misrepresented through the spread of mistaken or forged texts. (xxi)
Although the focus of this discussion does not revolve around Reed's methodology, it is important to note that Reed asserts that an old photo book displayed "whites figured in the center of the photos and drawings while blacks were centrifugally distant" (210). In metafictional terms, Reed's novel demonstrates that blacks are viewed peripherally. If the reader of Mumbo Jumbo fails to solve the riddle of this detective fiction, the reader continues to marginalize the African American experience. In contemporary times, society is doing a one hundred and eighty degree turn where the Evangelical Christian is marginalized.

The novel's depiction of Masons and the Masonic order is also an important key to understanding the novel but an element that I have yet to find in any conclusive, academic discourse on the novel. While Freemasonry philosophy is derived from Egyptian, Assyrian, Indian, and Persian myths, the movement "no longer bears the stamp of these countries" aside from "decoration of the lodges" and "brief references" in the teaching (Webster 105). Most Masons, like President Harding in the novel, are "mere Masons" without the political, economic, and spiritual knowledge of their order. The power of the Masonic order, as one Masonic scholar has written, is grounded in Egyptian origin, but "Freemasons will never understand the meaning and origin of our sacred tenets till they have studied and unlocked the mysteries of the past" (Webster 104). This unlocking of the past is done in degrees, as in Reed's novel, where the true "mysteries" are exposed to the individual through stages.

Mumbo Jumbo is a novel that metafictionally unlocks both the meaning and origin of the Black Aesthetic and African American spirituality. "Jes Grew" is not only a dance trend or a jazz song, but one's own cultural awareness seeking approval. Reed believes that Christianity is an unnatural religion for the African American. He believes that the "traditional religion" is art (Dick, 42).
Most readers are not aware of the historical makeup of the book. In a 1973 interview with Ishmael Reed, Mark Johnson asked Reed if the historical and mythological references in his work were written on two levels, one “for the total perspective and the other for surface entertainment [because] this is beyond the common knowledge of most people.” Reed replied:

“Well, it may be habit or it may be the way I was brought up, but I do think that you should try to use the past to explain the future. When I say, for example, necromancy, I mean that you use the past to explain the present and to prophesize about the future and this is called a philosophically conservative position. I just don’t believe, maybe I did at one time, but I just don’t believe that the past is irrelevant and that it’s only the present that we should be concerned with. I think that is a very narrow viewpoint and it’s the kind of thing that leads people to repeat errors that they could have learned or could have avoided by looking at history. So I would say that is the reason I would use the historical and mythological references....I know that it is beyond the common knowledge of most people, but a writer doesn’t write for most people.” (Dick 51-52)

While Papa LaBas is in search of the “text” of the African American “liturgy,” several obstacles are in play. The Establishment, or political governing body, represented by the Wallflower Order, works to stifle the development of the text. This includes the white literary establishment, represented by Hinckle Van Vampton who becomes a member of the Wallflower Order (a caricature of author, photographer, and critic Carl Van Vechten who pilfered the work of the Harlem Renaissance) and historical figures such as the historical
white dance artist Irene Castle, who stole the Black Aesthetic and absorbed it, incorporating it to make it their own. This poaching leads to a weaker “pure” cultural aesthetic. The novel attests, “If it could not find its text then it would be mistaken for entertainment” (211). Irene Castle is mentioned as an agent of the Order. Historically, it was her stated purpose to “purify” the dance trends for the cultured masses. The white establishment, using the guise of Christianity, is working to stifle the “text.” What transpires in the novel, though, is the discovery that the Wallflower Order does not want African Americans to find their “text” because this “Establishment” is now the present owner of these “mysteries.”

The book _Mumbo Jumbo_ is a satire of race relations, historical contexts, and history that reflects and explains modern day life. Since the character Hinckle Van Vampton satirizes Carl Van Vechten, who was born and reared in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, I was a little nervous to embark on my study of _Mumbo Jumbo_ for fear of delving into a realm that Reed had mocked in the novel. Carl Van Vechten became “violently interested” in Negro studies in 1924 (Coleman, 95). While the black “folk-life” substance of Negro art was being rejected in the early 20’s, Montgomery Gregory, a professor at Howard University, was simultaneously initiating the foundation that culminated in the Harlem Renaissance. Gregory stated, “if the Negro does not express this life in music, fiction, and drama, white artists will and their distorted picture will be the accepted one” (Coleman 53).

Many contemporary critics still support Van Vechten’s role in the Harlem Renaissance. Few will agree that Van Vechten “bought” his prestige in Harlem, and secondly, that Van Vechten used these artists for monetary and professional gain as in his dubious relationship with Langston Hughes. While Van Vechten elevated the artists of the Harlem Renaissance, he also poached their works and their culture, culminating his study
with the novel *Nigger Heaven*. To some extent, Montgomery Gregory's prophecy was fulfilled. Many considered *Nigger Heaven* blasphemous to the cause. Even within the members of the Harlem Renaissance, the view of this novel was very mixed.

While I study the Harlem Renaissance and come to understand the players, I realize that Reed, as most novelists, bases his characters on many and thus cultivates a prototype. The text they are searching follows the same binary political discourse of the Harlem Renaissance. W.E.B. DuBois, the founder of the NAACP, historically wanted the African American, or “New Negro” as Alain Locke termed the talented-tenth, to rise above the fray and by a trickle-down effect, bring up the rest of the race. DuBois believed that “propaganda” was the sole reason for the movement. On the other side of the argument, white patrons and some African American artists believed that writers should write what they saw in the community. Carl Van Vechten wanted this “exotic” race to write about the speakeasies and underworld if they wished. Langston Hughes, influenced by Van Vechten, believed that:

> We younger Negroes who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, it doesn’t matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly, too. If colored people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure doesn’t matter either. We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on top of the mountain, free within ourselves. (Cobb, 57)

While W.E.B. DuBois, Langston Hughes, and Zora Neale Hurston are present in the novel and historically quoted, they are also melded into the prototype characters.
Another reason I am fascinated with Mumbo Jumbo stems from my political experience. I spent eight years as a political field director, organizational director, and executive director for numerous Republican campaigns. Reed’s book resonates what many Republican caucus-goers and general election voters believe, that an elusive “Wallflower Order” permeates our society, and, in turn, this “establishment” ultimately decides who gets elected. These elections further the cause for a “one-world government.” Gary Kah, in his book *En Route to Global Occupation*, eloquently states what many Evangelical Christians believe:

> I became aware of preparations being made for the New World Order here in the United States. I soon realized that this movement was not only economic in nature, but also contained a political dimension, and indeed, a spiritual motivation. I found the interconnections between the three to be extensive—we are being pushed toward a one-world government by powerful Luciferic forces rooted in age-old societies. (6)

Reed, however, does not look at the individual when judging Christianity. His reference point restricts himself to that of power, where he states Christianity works “hand in hand with exploitation and imperialism” (Dick 46). But, ironically, the fact that both Reed and a large number of Evangelical Christian voters agree, remains, with the only difference being that Reed sees the Christian faith as one that exploited the Egyptian myths and Reed believes the purpose of the Establishment is the stifling of the anti-virus, Jes Grew. The anti-virus enables the true soul of the African American. Evangelical Christians believe the Egyptian myths, or “mysteries,” to be grounded in satanic forces. Therefore, they are not used by that community, but resisted.
Although *Mumbo Jumbo* focuses on the Wallflower Order's repression of Jes Grew and the black aesthetic, Reed's notion that this establishment is alive resonates throughout our society and our world. In our contemporary world, in order to make the one-world government a reality (the culmination of what Evangelical Christian believers believe is the true motive of the Wallflower Order), to set the stage for the anti-Christ and final days, Christianity has been used to make the world palatable to the idea. (I believe Reed bases the Wallflower Order on the Council on Foreign Relations, the Illuminati, the Skull and Bones Society, and many smaller groups that have melded into the "Establishment." ) While the Iowa political structure relies on the Evangelical Christian vote, many individuals within that establishment mock their views, calling them the "black helicopter crowd." Many agree, though, that there is truth in this sentiment, thus resonating the same concerns an interviewer stated before meeting his subject: "Ishmael Reed sounds very paranoid, but he makes sense" (Dick 314).

My first inclination that the Evangelical Christian core had a point was a 1995 Mason City, Iowa town hall meeting with presidential candidate Bob Dole's wife, Elizabeth. A town resident asked her if it was true that Bob was a 33\textsuperscript{rd} degree Mason. She became fidgety and asked what a Mason was. Any Masonic web page that offers a membership roster includes Bob Dole. Surely, Elizabeth knew what the Masonic order was and if her husband was a member. She concluded that if the meetings were held at night, surely Bob was not a member; Bob was far too busy in the evenings.

At the time, I was working as the North-Central Iowa Field Representative for Senator Phil Gramm's presidential campaign. Bob Dole was seen as our chief competition. Pat Buchanan saw Phil Gramm as his chief competitor. Dole and Buchanan united forces to
knock Gramm out of the race. Southern Iowa was flooded with anti-Gramm sentiment called racism, clearly one of the major themes of Mumbo Jumbo: “[…] 1 of America’s deadlier and more ravaging germs: racism” (83). Gramm’s wife, Wendy, is an Asian American. As one top Dole aide told me many years after that election, “We had the Buchananites running all over Southern Iowa, whispering to all the women sitting underneath those hair dryers that we could not have an Asian First Lady in the White House.” The sentiment worked.

Sometimes, as the novel shows, the printed word is not as forceful as the whispering campaign. Jes Grew lives and mutates because it is so elusive and frequently this elusiveness, like Christianity, is disguised to empower evil means.

Ishmael Reed’s book Mumbo Jumbo can be considered a political manifesto for those on either side of the political spectrum. Money is needed for a politician to win favor among the electorate, but publicity is far more powerful. After working the caucuses as Steve Forbes’ Iowa Organizational Director in 2000, I was sent off to North Carolina. Because Forbes, and therefore Bush, did not accept federal matching funds, they were required to obtain signatures to get on the ballot. In North Carolina most individuals did not know Forbes was running for President. Most thought Bush was unopposed in the primary. The printed word (and television publicity) does have a very strong impact. That is why Reed’s novel could be considered a manifesto. The printed word is, as the old adage goes, mightier than the sword; but the printed word has to be readily available in order to be useful. Many conspiracy-oriented books state that the Council on Foreign Relations controls the American media and the publishing houses; they, in turn, control what news we hear and what books are published.
Many are surprised at my enthusiastic support and study of Ishmael Reed’s *Mumbo Jumbo*. Blasphemous to Christianity it may be, but persistent and universal the book’s message has become to us all. As the United States is once again embattled in war, we must ask ourselves why. Even if we heartily believe that we must be at war, an idea should still linger that we are not understanding, or given the right materials, to see the big picture.

I believe that Reed hits upon the true motive of the Wallflower Order and the concurrent Presidential administrations that have continued “the plan.” However, I believe the purpose of the Establishment may not be as much economic, as spiritual. As *Mumbo Jumbo* states, “When an extraordinary antipathy challenges the Wallflower Order, their usual front men, politicians, scholars and businessmen step aside. Someone once said that beneath or behind all political and cultural warfare lies a struggle between secret societies” (18).

These secret societies and the subsequent conspiracy theories they propel are difficult to pinpoint, but there are many theories that the American public obsesses about—Hillary Clinton’s “vast right-wing conspiracy” that assailed her husband, the mysterious deaths of Clinton advisors Vince Foster and Ron Brown; the deaths of J.F.K and his brother Robert; the deaths of Princess Diana and Marilyn Monroe, the X-Files, aliens, UFO’s, Waco, and the tremendous popularity of the conspiratorial Dan Brown novels; they all permeate our popular culture. The frustration is the conspiracy angle. Most of the books that follow Reed’s ideology are printed at obscure publishing houses. Therefore I realize that the “high-brow literary scholar” will not respect them as much. That is precisely why I believe Reed, and Dan Brown, use the fictional form to convey their messages. As stated earlier, Reed believes that science fiction and the nursery rhyme may be a better outlet than the traditional political tract.
While a baker must have precise measurements in his creation, Reed dishes out *Mumbo Jumbo* as a Louisiana gumbo. The flavor is savored because of the seemingly haphazard ingredients thrown in. The ingredients, though, are integral to the outcome. The difficult part is figuring out which ingredients contribute to which flavor. As this discussion proceeds, I would like to focus on the commonality between Reed and the Evangelical Christian, where both agree that “time is a pendulum. Not a river. More akin to what goes around comes around” (Mumbo Jumbo, 211). Intellectual study journals have misrepresented *Mumbo Jumbo* by not looking into the historical facts that keep repeating. Robert Scholes, in his study *The Rise and Fall of English* states, “History […], both social and literary, has to be part of a discipline called English” (155). This discussion of *Mumbo Jumbo* will look at historicism as Reed describes it as well as how the Evangelical Christian sees it, culminating with the difference of each opinion as to the outcome. There are many surprising similarities.
THE POLITICAL CONSPIRACY

“It’s a satire,” Mr. Reed told me over dinner. He was responding to a question I had asked regarding the Beatles and Mumbo Jumbo. Some conspiracy theorists believe that the Beatles were the brainchild of a psychological marketing firm in England known as Tavistock who created the group to introduce drugs into American culture.

“No, Elvis did that. The Beatles are in the book? I guess I should read it again,” he continued. “But it’s a satire.”

Ishmael Reed used the same laughing tone when he told me that the photographs changed in subsequent editions of the novel because he had “misplaced the original ones.”

A satire, though, is the “literary art of diminishing or derogating a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking toward it attitudes of amusement, contempt, scorn, or indignation” (Abrams 275). Reed has acknowledged that Mumbo Jumbo is powerful:

One almost feels as though one is receiving a vision or revelation in this work. I think the books can be seen as amulets. An amulet, you know, is something you carry around and people say they carry my books around. With Mumbo Jumbo I advise if you don’t read it, put it over your door! That comes out of the idea of the holy book, the sacred book. There are powers that really influence people in strange ways in those books [...] people do respond to those books in strange ways and there may be powers that we unleash in the books, in the words and language rhythms, which affect people in ways we don’t know about. (Dick 185)
On February 15, 2004 I was awarded the honor of introducing Ishmael Reed as the Iowa State University Goldtrap speaker. Reed told the audience that evening that there was a need for *Mumbo Jumbo* at the time of its publication because the African American story needed to be told. "It even includes a bibliography," he said. Certainly this "satire" was written as societal criticism and while including a bibliography Reed intended for the book’s audience to take his message more seriously than just another novel approach at "satire."

Reed has said that the seed for *Mumbo Jumbo* was the Nixon administration but then he asked himself, "Do I want to write about the Nixon administration or do I want to transcend some particular political event and make a statement about American civilization as a whole?" (Dick 16). Reed concluded that the twenties were a similar time to that he was living in, the sixties, and chose to meld the two:

[...] I began *Mumbo Jumbo* long before the Watergate scandal, although it’s interesting that in the book I have a photograph that includes, from right to left, John Mitchell, Richard Kleindienst, and behind, if you look closely enough, John Dean. I had no idea that the Watergate thing was about to break when I used the picture. The book was submitted to Doubleday in April, 1971. But I have this picture of these people looking down on the Yippies doing a May dance in the street. I have the picture in the book because I try to use all the patterns of time. For example, the great conspiratorial thing of the sixties—there was always a conspiracy seen behind political events—well, I exaggerate that, so that I have the Knights Templar in rivalry with followers of Jes Grew, which dates back to Osiris. And I have the picture there. It’s necromancy. You try to prophesy: you get strange feelings or impulses. I do...
believe that I get psychic information from sources I’m not even aware of when I’m writing. That’s prophecy. But that’s only one element of the book. I took all these things, used the classic techniques of the detective novel, as well as Egyptology, Western history, black dance, American civilization, and the Harding administration—all my myths to explain the present. I think I was right on target [...] (Dick 17-18)

In subsequent interviews, questioners have repeatedly asked him about the novel’s impact on readers. Reed said it “has come to be regarded as a manifesto. I wrote it as a novel, but it’s taken seriously” (Dick 120).

Ishamel Reed’s book *Mumbo Jumbo* got a thorough investigation last year at Iowa State. It is Reed’s style and his cultural criticism that has challenged a huge readership. Coincidentally, Mr. Reed came to speak as the Goldtrap Speaker for Black History Month. Those with common sense would agree with Reed when he says “there would be no American history without blacks in it so Black History Month should be all year round. I can’t think of an American history without African Americans. I think it’s token, sort of like a way of avoiding treating African American culture as the mainstream culture that is” (Dick 359).

During the Grammy awards this year, they paid tribute to the art form known as “funk.” Ishmael Reed has been ahead of his time in praising different art forms. He once said that “if anybody’s going to compare me to anybody then compare me to someone like Mingus and Charlie Parker, musicians who have a fluidity with the chord structure as we have with the syntax or the sentence which is our basic unit” (Dick 44). It was very interesting to note that kinetically, I put “funk” and Reed together. Watching George Clinton
that evening at the Grammy’s, I knew I had to include him in Reed’s introduction. Reed told me that not only did George Clinton cite *Mumbo Jumbo* as the impetus for “funk,” Clinton also bought the movie rights for the book. The governing body of the Grammy awards, after thirty years, has finally acknowledged this art form.

I also stated in my introduction that anyone who is concerned with art, writing, music, history or politics, should be versed in Ishmael Reed. But the current national acclaim given to writer Dan Brown shows our national interest: American society wants to put history and also current events into a sealed box, with a nice bow on top. That is not Ishmael Reed. He has concurrently predicted national and international events clairvoyantly and continues to show us that our “history” books are as frequently as fictional as our novels.

Most literary critics don’t have a clue when it comes to Ishmael Reed. They don’t have the political nor the spiritual angle to understand either his style or ideology. As someone that keeps mutating and still, at the same time, holds true to our American cause, Ishmael Reed cannot be pigeon-holed. He borrows his themes and style from the newspapers, from pop mythology, ragtime, the oral tradition. The list is never ending, and it is this that epitomizes him as a champion of the American tradition.

At ISU, Reed took the podium and paid me the highest compliment. He said that if every Republican were like myself, the world would be a much a better place. He compared me to Abraham Lincoln, who, he said, believed that government existed to protect those who could not protect themselves. Reed said that I had not lost that philosophy that my party had abandoned. Reed is right.

It is imperative that a reader of Ishmael Reed’s work know history in order to get an acute understanding of his message. Abraham Lincoln’s memorial is dedicated in the book
by President Warren Harding. It was very fitting that Harding was president at that time, because Harding championed the rights of the Americans as Lincoln had done many decades earlier.

Lincoln understood that slavery was wrong; so strongly did he feel about the immoral abuse of slavery, in fact, that the South began to secede from the Union. American government is frequently called a “democracy,” but Lincoln understood that our form of government was founded as a republic. In a democracy, the majority rules; under a republic, the minority also gets a voice. The United States Pledge of Allegiance does not state “I pledge allegiance to our Democracy” but to our Republic. In a democracy, civil rights are granted by the majority; in a republic, the minority, as in a jury-system, gets as strong of a voice as anyone else.

Reed mentioned to the Iowa State University students on February 15, 2004, that there was a need for Mumbo Jumbo in the early 1970’s. He said the book included a bibliography to show the history of the African American experience. Clearly, though, the book continues to show that “time is a pendulum.” The patterns of the United States government are consistently repeated. President Clinton sent troops to Haiti to restore power for the Marxist president Aristide; just this year President Bush sent troops to Haiti to restore order upon Aristide’s removal. Obviously, the American public is not aware if any harm or conspiracy has taken place at present but the fact that Reed believed that America was in Haiti during the first thirty years of the twentieth century to tackle “barbarianism” may be on the mark. I was speaking to a Marine a few weeks ago and he said he had been sent to Haiti years ago. He said the Marines were sent because the Haitian people were not “tame, but unruly……like those in Africa.”
Consistently we hear the phrase from our political leaders that we are making the world "safe for democracy," a slogan that was first spoken by Woodrow Wilson's staffer Colonel House in House's novel Phillip Dru: Administrator. Reed mentions President Woodrow Wilson within two frames in Mumbo Jumbo and incorporates his personage into the character Woodrow Wilson Jefferson. First, Reed criticizes President Wilson's Haitian Foreign Policy that sent Marines to the Island in an attempt to stifle the work of VooDoo generals and Jes Grew (22).

Historically, President Wilson did indeed send troops to Haiti. American occupation of Haiti began in 1915 due to "exaggerated accounts of danger from Europe" (Suggs, 70). Marines landed in Haiti to:

- Restore order after the brutal murder of Haitian President Vibrun Guillaume Sam. Although the decision to intervene was part of the long-term development of U.S. hegemony in the Caribbean, especially Cuba, the threat of a German submarine base in Haiti was also a key factor that propelled the U.S. invasion of Haiti. Shortly after the invasion the U.S. Marines supervised the election of Phillipe Sudre Dartiguenave in August 1915. Haiti now had a new president, a mulatto, a man, to use Wilson's words, "We can trust to handle and put an end to revolution." Dartiguenave signed a treaty with the United States on September 16, 1915 which made Haiti a protectorate of the United States. (Suggs 70)

This occupation gave little to no control of government to the Haitians. The African-American press, in conjunction with the NAACP, made the withdrawal of American troops a "cause celebre" (Suggs, 72). But these actions did not go very far due to internal
inadequacies of the movement, and their lack of political clout. President Wilson went so far as to pass the Sedition Act of 1918 to

[...] censor movies, the press, and Wilson’s critics. Although major newspapers, such as Oswald Villard’s New York Evening Post, who opposed Wilson, escaped severe punishment, the African-American press and dozens of small radical and reform white presses like the New York Call and Milwaukee Leader were restricted in America’s drive for wartime conformity.

(Suggs, 73)

President Wilson, an ardent racist, was a former Ku Klux Klan member, “who attempted to engineer the diminution of both justice and democracy for American Blacks—who were enjoying little of either to begin with. (In fact, Wilson reportedly struck a racial equality clause from the League of Nations Charter as well)” (Freund, 16). While President Wilson was telling the American people that American intervention in Haiti was needed to bring about political stability and a constitutional self-government, his domestic policy was less than appealing to many African Americans by reflecting his racism. Wilson “replace[d] an African-American scholar as ambassador to Haiti” with a white, and told a black delegation that “Segregation is not a humiliation but a benefit, and ought to be so regarded by you gentlemen” (Freund, 16). Reed has a point in believing that the purpose of the American role on Haiti was to change the spiritual life of the indigenous culture.

The second mention of Woodrow Wilson claims that “250,000 copies of a book which asserted Harding’s Negro ancestry had previously been ordered destroyed by Woodrow Wilson” (146). Reed, in Mumbo Jumbo, cites J.A. Rogers’ book The Five Negro Presidents as the source for this information. Although Rogers’ book does not document
sources, several historical books mention the straddling of the race issue that Wilson had so often been accused of. Several historical books mention the duality of Wilson’s speech and actions. 

[Wilson] had actually courted the Black vote in the 1912 campaign, and they felt betrayed. The president was unmoved. ‘If the colored people made a mistake in voting for me,’ he told the New York Times in 1914, ‘they ought to correct it.’ (Freund, 17)

Harding, however, was unapologetically in support of racial healing. He once told a friend that he was not sure if he had Negro blood and commented, “How do I know, Jim? One of my ancestors may have jumped the fence” (Murray, 65).

Reed is sensitive to President Harding in the novel, and it is not surprising why. Many regard Harding as having a “total lack of racial prejudice in a highly intolerant era” (Anthony, 54). Harding, according to a letter sent from Alfred Cohen, an Ohio friend, said the president was “devoid of racial or religious prejudices” (Anthony, 54). Harding not only rejected Wilson’s policy on Haiti, he worked with the NAACP in proposing “an anti-lynching bill and an interracial commission to recommend ways to improve race relations” (Anthony, 54). President Harding campaigned on these promises, while Wilson was being ridiculed for “championing the rights of small nations at the Versailles Peace Conference while simultaneously maintaining military control over Haiti” (Suggs, 73). It is easy to see that Wilson, in losing the confidence of the American people, and his mind (some say he had a stroke, others say he was going through a nervous breakdown, Reed asserts that he was paying for his sins by suffering under a Voodoo spell), may have had the books burned.
Douglas K. Daniel, in his article “Ohio Newspapers and the ‘Whispering Campaign’ of the 1920 Presidential Election,” says that

Amid racial tension, the question of Harding’s genealogy understandably caused emotions to run high. In Ohio during the campaign, Democrats charged the Republican Party with creating racial unrest by courting black voters. Historian Randolph C. Downes suggested the rumor about Harding’s ancestry was part of the white backlash in response to moderate concessions to blacks by Harding and other Republicans. (162)

The question whether Wilson had these books burned will never be proven, but the fact remains that Wilson was for “colonial” endeavors both domestically and on foreign soil.

Reed also uses the personage of Woodrow Wilson as a fictional character. The character Woodrow Wilson Jefferson is groomed in the novel by Hinckle Von Vampton who hires him because of his “color” and naiveté. A rural Mississippian from Remote, he travels to New York to become famous. Jefferson is not grounded in the knowledge of his own culture, but a student of Karl Marx writings that are well above his head. The choice to name this character after two presidents is noteworthy. As Gary Kah describes in his book En Route to Global Occupation, President Wilson was supposedly naïve in signing the Federal Reserve Act into law, a move that President Jefferson had called a European plot and had warned America about one hundred and forty years before:

The U.S. had barely declared its independence when these same European forces [the Illimunati, a branch of Freemasonry] began efforts to bring America’s young banking system under their control. Alexander Hamilton, believed by some to have been an Illuminist agent, was at the forefront of this
drive. President Thomas Jefferson, keenly aware of the plot, argued: "If the American people ever allow Private banks to control the issue of their currency, first by inflation and then by Deflation, the banks and the corporations that will grow up around them, will deprive the people of all property until their children wake up homeless on the Continent their fathers conquered"....Colonel House, as he was called, was an Illuminist Agent committed to the one-world interests of the Rothschild-Warburg-Rockefeller Cartel, serving as their point man in the White House. He first gained national prominence in 1912 while working to get Woodrow Wilson nominated as President. After Wilson’s election, he became the president’s most trusted personal advisor....His accomplishments as Wilson’s chief advisor were many. Among other things, he successfully persuaded Woodrow Wilson to support and sign the Federal Reserve Act into law. Later, realizing what he had done, President Wilson remorsefully replied, ‘I have unwittingly ruined my country.’ (28-29)

President Wilson would, however, continue the one-world unity movement. Wilson had been elected to his first term by the “establishment” flooding Teddy Roosevelt’s campaign with donations and votes in order to split the Republican vote. This scheme worked, enabling their puppet, President Wilson, to gain office. In 1913, after Wilson’ inauguration, his own book The New Freedom was published. In it, he wrote:

Some of the biggest men in the United States, in the field of commerce and manufacture, are afraid of something. They know that there is a power
somewhere so organized, so subtle, so watchful, so interlocked, so pervasive, that they had better not speak above their breath when they speak condemnation of it. (Perloff, 26)

The most interesting corollary, however, with Reed’s Mumbo Jumbo, is how President Wilson used a “text” in the Oval Office. The novel Philip Dru: Administrator, published anonymously in 1912, became “the directives which revolutionized our lives...The Wilson administration transferred the Colonel’s ideas from the pages of fiction to the pages of history” (Perloff, 28). In this novel, Philip Dru reigns over America with radical changes. Among these are a graduated income tax and a central bank [...]. What may seem surprising is that the character Philip Dru was attempting to install what he called ‘Socialism as dreamed of by Karl Marx.’ This becomes less incongruous when one realizes that income tax and central banking were both called for by Marx in his Communist Manifesto. (Perloff 28-29)

Colonel Edward M. House (Wilson’s most trusted advisor) later acknowledged himself as the author, and said that this novel was the best means to get his message across. His novel also called for a new United States Constitution. Again, Reed discusses that the political tract may not be as useful as works of fiction. Colonel House would later use this strategy of Philip Dru, Administrator to help Russia implement socialism; in 1921 House created the Council on Foreign Relations, which is considered to many to be the real power behind the United States Government:

The C.F.R. has come to be known as “The Establishment,” the “invisible government” and “the Rockefeller foreign office.” This semi-secret organization unquestionably has become the most influential group in
America [...] Although the formal membership in the C.F.R. is composed of close to 1500 of the most elite names in the worlds of government, labor, business, finance, communications, the foundations, and the academy—and despite the fact that it has staffed almost every key position of every administration since those of FDR—it is doubtful that one American in a thousand so much as recognizes the Council's name, or that one in ten thousand can relate anything at all about its structure or purpose [...] The policies promoted by the C.F.R. in the fields of defense and international relations become, with a regularity which defies the laws of chance, the official policies of the United States Government. As liberal columnist Joseph Kraft, himself a member of the C.F.R., noted of the Council in [a] Harper's article: "It has been the seat of some basic government decisions, has set the context for many more, and has repeatedly served as a recruiting ground for ranking officials." Kraft, incidentally, aptly titled his article on the C.F.R., "School for Statesmen"—an admission that the members of the Council are drilled with a "line" of strategy to be carried out in Washington. (Allen 84-5)

Another interesting corollary with Mumbo Jumbo is President Wilson's famous "Fourteen points" (not coincidentally, Van Vampton has fourteen disseminated chapters) delivered to a joint session of Congress on January 8, 1918. In this address that would affect the Versailles Treaty, Wilson laid out his foreign policy plans, plans that the American people ultimately rejected. Wilson's motives were grounded in global control, yet disguised as peaceful international relations (as well as being attributed to his Christian credentials). Wilson's fourteenth point proposed the "general association of nations." As noted, this
League of Nations eventually failed but it was out of this initiative that the Council on Foreign Relations, and subsequently, the United Nations, were born. Woodrow Wilson, historically, was trying to bring about an end to United States autonomy, while the character Woodrow Wilson Jefferson is attempting to bring about an end to the African Americans' autonomy by confusing and muddling their religious art.

In the novel, Von Vampton is grooming Woodrow Wilson Jefferson as the Talking Android. Jefferson says, "If I have to be contradictory using the real time and ideal the other then that's the way I would be" (80). He promises to "use any vehicle at all so that I won't have to return to that farm and spend the rest of my life milking cows and distributing feed" (80). In essence, that how is our modern government works. While Von Vampton believes that Jefferson's column "[...] did 1 thing...confuse the state of Black letters which was good because then they would be isolated and he could be like the wolf approaching the sheep who wanders away from the variegated herd" (78-9), the United States government is continually using the same Hegelian jargon that Jefferson uses in his column.

Sharon A. Jessee's article "Laughter and Identity in Ishmael Reed's Mumbo Jumbo" claims that the Wallflower Order is a satire of Yale's Skull and Bones Society. This society has many connections with Masonry and the Council on Foreign Relations. Antony C. Sutton, a former Research Fellow at the Hoover Institute, writes in his book America's Secret Establishment: An Introduction to the Order of Skull & Bones, that the Skull and Bones, with our media, makes sure that

---
1 Accessed off of ISU online library. No specific page numbers are available for specific quotes.
any discussion between left and right, while essential to promote change, is **never** allowed to develop into a discussion along the lines of Jeffersonian democracy, i.e., the best government is least government. The discussion and funding is **always** towards more state power, use of state power and away from individual rights. So it doesn’t matter from the viewpoint of The Order whether it is termed left, right, Democratic, Republican, secular or religious—so long as the discussion is kept within the framework of the State and the power of the State. (35)

Reed, in the novel, states that the Atonists are the State, controlling the public mind:

Politically they can be “Left,” “Right,” “Middle,” but they are all together on the sacredness of Western Civilization and its mission. They merely disagree on the ways of sustaining it. If a radio show began touting the achievements of Western Civilization over civilizations of others there would barely be a letter to the station from anyone, anarchists or Calvin Coolidge Republicans. (136)

Sutton expands this thought:

Probably the most difficult task in this work will be to get across to the reader what is really an elementary observation: that the objective of The Order is **neither** “left” **nor** “right.” “Left” and “right” are artificial devices to bring about change, and the extremes of political left and political right are vital elements in a process of controlled change. The answer to this seeming political puzzle lies in Hegelian logic. Remember that both Marx and Hitler, the extremes of “left” and “right” presented as textbook enemies, evolved out of the same philosophical system: Hegelianism. [...] In the dialectical process a clash of opposites brings about another political system, a

---

3 Bold text are the intention of Mr. Sutton.
synthesis of the two, neither left nor right. **This conflict of opposites is essential to bring about change.** Today this process can be identified in the literature of the Trilateral Commission where "change" is promoted and "conflict management" is termed to bring about this change. (34)

I asked Reed if the novel's last introduced character, who states, "Black Studies so much blackeyed peas" (216) was based on William F. Buckley. He told me no and identified the character, while telling me never to tell who he is. In keeping my word to Reed, I will not identify the liberal he is speaking of, but ironically, it sounds a lot like Buckley. In the novel, the character says "Black Studies so much blackeyed peas" (216); in an interview, Reed associates Buckley with the "Historical Establishment":

"I think the people we want to aim our questioning toward are those who supply the nation with its mind, tutor its mind, develop and cultivate its mind, and these are the people involved in culture. They are responsible for the national mind and they’ve done very bad things with their propaganda and racism. Think of all the vehemence and nasty remarks they aimed at the Black Studies programs, somebody like William Buckley, the Christian fanatic, saying that Bach is worth more than all the Black Studies programs in the world. He sees the conflict as being between the barbarians and the Christians. And, you know, I’m glad I’m on the side of the barbarians. So this is what we want: to sabotage history. They won’t know whether we’re

---

4 The Trilateral Commission was created by Zbigniew Brzezinski and former CFR chairman David Rockefeller. Their mission is to bring Europe, North America, and Asia together to limit national sovereignty. They believe that "the objective of shaping a community of developed nations is less ambitious than the goal of world government, [though] it is more attainable" (Marts 23). An offshoot of the CFR, the Trilateral Commission has fewer members, although the majority of Trilateral members are also CFR members.
serious or whether we are writing fiction. They made their own fiction, just like we make our own.” (Dick, 36-7)

William F. Buckley has consistently been awarded, as a book in his honor titled Patron Saint of the Conservatives, demonstrates, the voice of America’s “right wing.”

Author John F. McManus though, in his 2002 book William F. Buckley, Jr: Pied Piper for the Establishment, states that Buckley is actually the “darling of the liberal internationalist Establishment” (xxvi). Buckley has been used as an agent, much like those that Reed calls the Black Vichy regime. McManus states the purpose of his book is to debunk what Buckley has done to American society:

After arriving on the political scene in the early 1950’s, Buckley created a fork in the nation’s political road. Though few realized he had done so, the new path lured conservatives away from the Constitution and toward an undefined and shifting standard where attitudes, personalities, and organizations previously deemed to be anathema gained approval. (xxvi)

McManus shows how Buckley has used his books, magazines and television spots to promote an undermining of morality, a debunking of conspiratorial views, and to promote the Establishment causes. While Buckley has posed as a champion of the “moral majority,” or Christian cause, he in actuality is just posing, as President Wilson had done decades before.

President Wilson described Colonel House as his “second personality. He is my independent self. His thoughts and mine are one” (Perloff, 27). What is very interesting to note is Colonel House was well versed in the Egyptian mysteries. These mysteries, in the novel, are being held hostage by the Atonists.
These mysteries are those which the detective of the story is trying to find. Papa LaBas is the priest of the Mumbo Jumbo Kathedral and the evangelist of Jes Grew. In search of the "text," LaBas is the "detective" of the book. While Mumbo Jumbo mocks the "hardboiled" (white) detective (Biff Musclewhite), LaBas is his antithesis, a priest that seeks to unite the spiritual and physical. LaBas has always mutated: "in Haiti it was Papa Loa, in New Orleans it was Papa LaBas, in Chicago it was Papa Joe" (77). Reed asserts:

My reading leads me to believe that HooDoo—or, as they say in Haiti and other places, "VooDoo" or "Vodun"—was always open to the possibility of the real world and the psychic world intersecting. They have a principle for it: LegBa (in the U.S., "LaBas"). (Dick, 62)

LaBas understands that anthologies, or the "work" of Jes Grew begins with the historical knowledge. His search is similar to the search for the Holy Grail. LaBas' grail is the sacred book which is "buried beneath the center of the Cotton Club." This also plays on the fact that no one in Western Civilization knows history. Osiris, the Egyptian god, will rightfully take back his place as deity once his Book is made available:

By the end of the novel, the sacred book has still not been recovered. In fact, it may be lost forever. But that doesn't mean that the Jes Grew is done for.

The spirit of life suggested in the sacred Text will be preserved nevertheless.

And it's this spirit which endows the black man with a heritage that the white

---

5 The Holy Grail legend says that the cup Jesus drank from at the Last Supper was not lost, but acquired and kept in secrecy. This Grail, according to myth, enlightens those that drink from it. As one version is told, the Templars acquired it around 1118 A.D. The Templars "sought the help of Jewish rabbis in translations of the books of the Old Testament from Hebrew [because] they revealed that a hidden treasure lay buried beneath the Temple Mount" (Read, 305). In Dan Brown's novel The DaVinci Code, he describes the Holy Grail as "The quest [...] to kneel before the bones of Mary Magdalene. A journey to pray at the feet of the outcast one" (454). Brown, in this fictional novel, contends that the "mystery" is the fact that Mary Magdalene was the wife of Jesus and the Catholic Church has kept this hidden. The American Broadcasting Company did a special last contending that Brown may be right. Again, the fictional novel is frequently used as truth.
man is without. It’s this Neo-HooDooism⁶ which will save the black man, and save all of those who embrace it, from the spiritual wasteland which modern living is creating. (Boyer, 27)

Although LaBas is still continuing his work at the end of the novel, he will, like the Sacred Text, live on (as Papa Loa and Papa Joe had previously), for someone will take up the cause to ensure that the “work” is continued. Conversely, Reed states in a 1990 interview that “memory ends where writing begins” (Dick, 335). He cites the fact that “by not writing down their language the people of West Africa were able to preserve their values and their religion” (Dick, 334). In essence, values and religion are felt and cannot be understood through a written form. Ironically, LaBas “discover[s] that the aesthetic is always changing and that its evolving form is integral to it” (Jablon, 26). Evangelical Christianity, though, does not contend that mutation is necessary, or even positive, to the religion.

Five years before Mumbo Jumbo was published, John Barth wrote in his famous essay “The Literature of Exhaustion” that the “novel’s time as a major art form is up” (32). He states that the novel is a product of “used-upness of certain forms or exhaustion of certain possibilities” (29). In Mumbo Jumbo, the white aesthetic is dead. Writers such as Theodore Dreiser and dance artists Irene Castle are poaching the black aesthetic. By including their photo in the first printing of the novel, Reed points out that rock and roll, and the band Black Sabbath, have dipped into the black aesthetic. Reed says that Stephen Crane and Mark Twain are held up as the serious writers of the age. In Christian terms, however, both writers are spiritually void and lack the Christian perspective. Carol Johnson Simi’s article “The

⁶ Neo-Hoodism is Reed’s word for an amalgam of Jamaica’s Obeahism, Haiti’s voodooism, and American Indian religions melded and produced by African Americans.
Limbs of Osiris: Reed’s *Mumbo Jumbo* and Hollywood’s *The Mummy* contends that both works represent the small subversive faction of the arts that escaped the “white male hegemony [which] controls the production, distribution and evaluation of this ideological barrage […].” She asserts that the novel “takes the opportunity to poke fun at all the players in the academic and literary world, all rigidity of stance.” These players prohibit and hide the black aesthetic texts while the black aesthetic critics fail to understand the texts or meld into the white community. *The Mummy* is yet another “undiscovered genre.” Written by a woman, the movie is misunderstood in its true representation and thought of as entertainment while missing its true representation: “The female coming-of-age […which] is ultimately the little girl’s sexual fantasy from early childhood.” [Accessed on-line, therefore no specific page numbers cited.] Johnson hits upon some interesting analogies, but her post-colonial as well as feminist critique, misses a rather large part of the novel that would have aided her argument. She states that the mummy wreaks havoc on the colonial oppressors that have awoken him but misses the opportunity to compare the mummy with the missing text that is also dangerous in the wrong hands.

Although Reed claims that “the themes I deal with in the novels have been dealt with before by black novelists all the way back to 1854, not to mention the poetry that began earlier than that…” he states that his structure and “style [is what’s] unique and it took me a long time to develop that” (Dick, 29). The African American heritage also propels an artistic tradition that the American Caucasian is without. Reed sees the 1960’s as a time when the black aesthetic was mutating:

“because so many of the Black writers [who] have been influenced by

---

7 Accessed online, therefore no accurate pagination was offered.
Christianity and Communism [are no longer] making it an either or thing with the exceptions being very few. This is one of the things that happened in the 60's; many of the Afro-American writers broke away from these traditions and developed systems of their own. I can give you an example of Askia Muhammed Toure using the Islamic references and North African references in his work. This was revolutionary.” (Dick, 54)

Papa Labas can also be considered “revolutionary” by using Reed’s definition. Labas is continuing the Egyptian occult tradition while mixing in Haitian voodoo. This melding and borrowing is precisely what the Knights Templar and their spawned organization, Freemasonry, had done. Papa LaBas is finally told near the end of the novel that the Atonists “were worried that we would find out and wouldn’t learn that the reason they wanted us out of the mysteries was because they were our mysteries!” (194).

Ironically, these occult mysteries Reed speaks of are those that the Evangelical Christian population warns against. But, according to the novel, “even the Catholic Mass was based upon a Black Egyptian celebration” (194). Many Evangelicals believe that these “secret societies”, including the Catholic Church, are plotting to form a one-world government with the aid of the American government. The Wallflower order signifies this same group. Although Reed describes these Atonists as spiritually void, their ideals in current world affairs are seen by Evangelicals as Satanic in nature. I conclude from my research that Reed is loosely basing the Wallflower Order on many of the secret societies
mentioned earlier as well as the Illuminati\textsuperscript{8}, which melded into the constructs of the Council on Foreign Relations here in America in 1921.

The Wallflower Order is a secret society, headed by Hierophant 1, that aims to keep order by rationalism rather than the Jes Grew carrier's magical, spiritual, and intuitive forces. This group hires Von Vamptonto eliminate the plague of Jes Grew. Members are known as Antonists, in which Reed says, are modeled after Aton, the Sun-God (Dick, 202). While the Wallflower Order is said to be protecting the Church (and decency), historical facts point out that the Church of Rome can be considered a subset of the United Nations and its parent organization, The Council on Foreign Relations. While "out-lawing jazz masses, because the masses were 'eccentric and arbitrary' (Martin, 83), the Vatican holds differing groups in contempt and seeks to unite them under Catholicism. Pope John Paul II, as quoted in Gary Kah's book The New World Religion, says "it is necessary for humanity to achieve unity through plurality to come together in the one Church, even while presenting a plurality of ways of thinking and acting, of cultures and civilization" (237). Pope John Paul II has close ties to the U.N. and numerous political contacts. Kah believes that this is no accident, but a plot:

The growing involvement of the Vatican and its allies in politics and religion reminds one of Alice Bailey's\textsuperscript{9} prediction that the new world

\textsuperscript{8} Ironically, the Bavarian Illuminati awarded Reed "honorary pope" for Mumbo Jumbo. Reed said the organization thought the book was not "muddled" as some other critics had thought (Dick, 67).

\textsuperscript{9} Alice Bailey is credited to have "constructed the foundation of what is now known as New Age religion. Unabashedly acknowledging their demonic sympathies, they launched Lucifer Publishing Company, which published the theosophical periodical \textit{Lucifer}. Realizing later perhaps the Christian world was not yet ready for their open preference for Satanic religion, they changed the name to Lucis Publishing Company. The Lucis Trust, established by the Baileys in 1922, continues to serve as the umbrella organization for a profusion of globalist/New Age/occult organizations and programs that are key catalysts of the emerging new world religion. These include the Arcane School, World Goodwill, Triangles, Lucis Publishing, Lucis Productions, Lucis Trust Libraries, and the New Group of World Servers" (Jasper, 215).
order would be ushered in with the help of a universally-accepted church.

Bailey explained that the New Age would ‘rest upon the foundation of a newly interpreted and enlightened Christianity...being universal in nature.’

The occult prophetess also stated that there were no major distinctions ‘between the One Universal Church (Catholicism), the sacred inner Lodge of all true Masons, and the innermost circles of the esoteric societies.’ She indicated that they would all be working together through a global governing body to achieve their goal (Kah, 243).

Kah also states that the Pope is a close personal friend of the Dalai Lama of Tibet, whom new agers “consider [...] to be one of the leading occult masters in the world” (126).

In Mumbo Jumbo, the Wallflower Order, unable to rid the country of Jes Grew through Von Vamption, enacts the Great Depression. This allegation, although it may be seen as inflated, has historical validity:

In reality the Federal Reserve prompted the speculation by expanding the money supply a whopping sixty-two percent between 1923 and 1929. When the central bank became law in 1913, Congressman Charles Lindbergh had warned: ‘From now on, depressions will be scientifically created.’ Like two con men working a mark, the Fed made credit easy while Establishment newspapers hyped what riches could be made in the stock market....Louis McFaddon, chairman of the House Banking Committee, declared of the Depression: ‘It was not accidental. It was a carefully contrived occurrence....The international bankers sought to bring about a condition of despair here so that they might emerge as rulers of us all.’ (Perloff 55-56)
The Wallflower Order has to stifle anything that involves the spiritual, physical, or political institutions that are not aligned with them. According to Mumbo Jumbo, one does not know how far-reaching the order is, which can also be viewed as another parallel to American Society. The Council on Foreign Relations includes most presidents, publishers, and government officials and works alongside secret organizations such as the Bilderbergs and England’s Round Table.

The Freemasons, or Masonic Order, are also a sub branch to the Illuminati.
THE MASONIC CONSPIRACY

In order to show the historical, as well as contemporary battles for power, Ishmael Reed uses the three groups of American society that have been targeted since the nineteenth century. David Brion Davis’s article “Some Themes of Counter-Subversion: An Analysis of Anti-Masonic, Anti-Catholic, and Anti-Mormon Literature” describes the counter-subversive nativist literature of the nineteenth century. He contends that this nativist literature sought to unite the country’s political patriotism and way of life by exposing the subversive secret societies. Freemasons, the public was told, had “seized control” (205) of the government as well as the courts; Roman Catholic priests were plotting to “subject the nation to popish despotism” (205); Mormons were “undermining political and economic freedom in the West” (205). The nativist tracts usually pointed to a shared immoral, sexually charged promiscuity (priests seduced “virtuous wives” (217), Mormons practiced polygamy, and Masons indulged in all passions). The effect was general stereotyping of the groups and their collective, yet singularly autonomous, mission to control the world. This nativist, Protestant vision was representative of the Protestant need to “escape from guilt” (221). The individual had to escape Satan to “prepare his soul for the infusion of the regenerative spirit. [...] It is not surprising that conversion to nativism followed the same pattern, since nativists sought unity and moral certainty in the regenerative spirit of nationalism” (221).

Davis lays out credible primary and secondary sources in his discussion. While he gives exaggerated, sensationalized accounts of counter-subversion, he also offers substantial evidence that would give the nativist reasonable reasons to worry. He ends his discussion, however, with an abrupt conclusion that “In a rootless environment shaken by bewildering
Scott Sanders argues in his essay “Pynchon’s Paranoid History” that “God is the original conspiracy theory” (172) because monotheists, especially the Puritan sect, believe that all workings in the universe are intricately maneuvered by the single deity. Once this God is discredited in the Puritan mind, “Paranoia is the last retreat of the Puritan imagination” (178). The novels of Thomas Pynchon, according to Sanders, are the classic examples of this paranoid style. The demonic conspiracy of global control replaces the former monotheistic view that God controls the earth. Puritan beliefs, then, are binary. The individual is elect and believes God is in control and thus receives salvation, or the individual is preterite and lacks the salvation necessary to gain access into heaven. Pynchon’s works depicts preterite characters that also fear a metafictional conspiracy in which they will be “passed over, [dropped] out of all plots, [will] lose one’s identity, [will be] isolated from external schemes, [as the] character dissolves” (186).

Sanders does a credible job in arguing that Pynchon’s characters are the antithesis of the “elect” Puritan mind. However, he gives substantial historical credibility to the conspiratorial views but then discounts Pynchon’s political and philosophical world view; Sanders also fails to mention the fundamental Christians’ interpretation of Revelation and the anti-Christ’s “new world order.” He also does not point that out that after deconstruction, frequently the individual undergoes reconstruction. Sanders, though, does quote Pynchon’s view that “There is a theory going around that the U.S.A. was and still is a gigantic Masonic plot under the ultimate control of the group known as the Illuminati.” (If we want to learn more about this particular conspiracy, Pynchon tells us, ‘check out Ishmael Reed’” (183).
Whereas Pynchon may believe the same conspiratorial theories as Reed, Reed’s non-linear approach to prose is held up to harsh literary criticism. Sami Ludwig’s article “Ishmael Reed’s Inductive Narratology of Detection” argues that Reed’s narratology in *Mumbo Jumbo* is too confusing because the reader is forced to decipher between speakers; these speakers include Ishmael himself, the characters within the novel, the animistic voodoo gods (loas) that possess these characters, and transference to a narrator of unknown origin. These narrators are further confused because Reed does not present dialogue within quotation marks. Therefore, Ludwig asserts, “narratological closure is not possible.”¹⁰ Ludwig does contend, though, that the multi-narration serves a purpose because it “reflects and acknowledges traditional pagan origins.” Ludwig pinpoints the confusing narration and gives examples to the complexities in detecting the origin of the differing narrative voices.

Ludwig fails, though, to make the connection that this narrative anti-detection is also reminiscent, and a possible satire of Reed’s, on the Masonic and Illuminati tradition where initiates are given the secret mysteries in gradual steps. According to Masonic scholar Mustafa El-Amin, “Masonry should be felt everywhere, but nowhere should it be unveiled. The whole strength of Masonry lies in its own discretion. Our enemies fear us all the more because we never reveal our methods of action” (362). (Ludwig also fails to realize that Reed may be satirizing Carl Van Vechten at the same time. Van Vechten disdained the use of quotation marks.)

Many literary critics have also tried to marginalize the purpose of *Mumbo Jumbo*. Donald L. Hoffman’s “A Darker Shade of Grail: Questing at the Crossroads in Ishmael Reed’s *Mumbo Jumbo,*” asserts that Reed’s novel is a reworking of the European Grail

¹⁰ This article was accessed off of ISU’s electronic library. No page numbers are given.
Legend. He cites the novel’s Templars and Teutonics, who, along with its spawned group, the Atonists, work to continue stifling the god Osiris’ Book of Thoth. Whereas the Grail is a “relic of Christ’s bloody sacrifice which originated in the text of the word of God,”¹¹ the Book of Thoth “originates in the dancer’s body” and is therefore more elusive. Reed, according to Hoffman, complicates the Osirian and biblical legends by introducing Moses as the Heirophant who, as the world’s “first deceitful sorcerer, buries the book.” The Templars’ original librarian, Hinckle Von Vampton, seeks to rework their search for the grail, but backwards, in an attempt to stifle Osiris’s book that has been uncovered.

Hoffman does a credible job in analyzing the similarities between the Grail and Osiran legends as well as the novel’s revisionist heresy against the Judeo-Christian tradition. He points out the deity Set and his subjects the Atonists who are “associated with light in all its negative aspects.” Hoffman, however, fails to connect that the Atonists are of the Masonic tradition that believe Lucifer is of the light. If one looks to the Masonic scholars, they will find that Masonry claims Moses as their first scholar:

Moses, from his peculiar education, was well acquainted with the rites, the ceremonies, the hieroglyphs, and the symbols used by the Egyptian priesthood. Many of these he introduced into Masonry, and thus began that system which, coming originally from the Egyptians and subsequently augmented by derivations from the Druids, the Essenes, the Pythagoreans, and other mystical associations, at last was developed into that science of symbolism which now constitutes so important and essential a characteristic of modern Freemasonry. (Mackey 132)

¹¹ Also accessed from the ISU electronic library.
The Atonists in Reed’s novel are followers of Aton, the Sun God. Critics have also failed to mention that Akhnaton, Pharaoh of Egypt during the fourteenth century B.C., is seen as the world’s first monotheist because he rejected the religions of Egypt and changed them to Atonism. Masonic scholar Manly P. Hall, in his book The Secret Destiny of America, states that Akhnaton “was the first man in recorded history to exemplify social consciousness in the administration of a great nation. He saw every living thing as a divine right to live well, to hope and to aspire in a world governed by brotherly love” (28). This Atonism is harshly criticized by Reed; I believe he is criticizing Atonists because of the monotheism that was produced. Conservative Christians, however, criticize Atonists because they would not believe in Jesus; and also, because the Masons have usurped these religions and used them in their amalgam of beliefs.

The most quoted Masonic scholar, Albert Pike, stated that Christianity was a hoax but Masonry was a religion that worshiped “Lucifer, the Light-Bearer! Lucifer, the Son of the Morning! It is he who bears the Light…” (Epperson 224). Pike also claims that “the world will soon come to us for its sovereigns (political leaders) and pontiffs (religious leaders.) We shall constitute the equilibrium of the universe and be rulers over the masters of the world” (Epperson, 224).

Critic Theodore Mason, as mentioned earlier, clearly misses Reed’s point. In the Masonic tradition, only those intelligent enough to figure out the mysteries with little assistance are trusted or worthy to become Masons of the highest degrees. Pike did not write his books for the masses but a select few. Reed transfers this same tradition to the readers of Mumbo Jumbo.
Mason says that Reed’s work “presents both a puzzle to be solved and a problem to be engaged” (97). Within the three levels of the text—“the fictive present, the mythical background, and the historical reality outside of the text” (102), the reader’s job, as Mason understands it, is to understand the complexities that historical facts are in actuality “wholly fictions propagated by the masters of high Western culture” (98). Mason believes that Reed is guilty of the same act for Reed “clearly wishes to control the field of information in the novel […]” (103). This “fanciful” historical revisioning breaks down into a “patent artificiality of his vision of history” (104). Mason, therefore, concludes, “Reed takes up more than he is able to handle and invites a degree of scrutiny that the novel simply cannot withstand” (108).

While Mason contends that the novel is, as Georg Lukacs had argued regarding Flaubert, a “pictorial frame” of “exact costumes and decorations” that concerns itself with “the political life [that] has no discernible connection with any concrete form of popular life that we may experience” (99), Mason ignores the facts that one of the novel’s major themes is the elusiveness of truth; this truth is blurred between myth, political control, and historical textuality. Until Mason fully understands this entanglement, he marginalizes the book’s power.

It would be interesting to know Mason’s take on the New York Times best-selling author Dan Brown. Brown’s books, Angels and Demons as well as his latest book The Da Vinci Code, appear to be the literary establishment’s current preference. Brown delves into the very same mysteries as Reed, but uses a linear approach and leaves no mystery to be solved. Critic Richard Swope contends in his article “Crossing Western Space, or the HooDoo Detective on the Boundary in Ishmael Reed’s Mumbo Jumbo” that Reed’s novel,
while on one level is reminiscent of the standard mystery novel, is actually an anti-detective work because it defies the traditional detective fiction closure. Whereas the traditional mystery can be defined by scientific thinking (or the Western traditional view of rational thinking), the book’s detective PaPa LaBas, “offers an explanation of the crime that is actually the product of a supernatural, collaborative effort, a fact that is obviously disruptive to the illusion of the detective’s authority.”

This unidentifiable mystery is kept hostage by the Atonist capitalists, who figure they can stifle the anti-virus, Jes Grew, in coming in contact with its text if they shut down the temples (i.e., banks). The crossroads LaBas seeks is the litany of both assimilation and autonomy within the American community; this crossroads, though, is held captive by the single-minded Atonist.

Swope does a credible job in explaining his anti-detective theory. Unfortunately, the article fails to address the notion that scientific rationality is also frequently at odds with Christianity. Reed states in Mumbo Jumbo that the Atonists allowed many compromises including Jesus Christ, Karl Marx, and Sigmund Freud. The article, however, does not address the scientific model versus the Christian model but lumps all the elements into a single Western tradition; Reed, however, contends that the Atonist order is not one of rigid standards, but an order that offers allowances to hold power.

Dan Brown, however, discusses the disparate elements between Christianity and Scientific reasoning. His novel, Angels and Demons, also deals with the American government on a linear level. He accurately depicts the history of the Illuminati but ends his book with a closed summary that claims the Illuminati does not really exist but has been used as a disguise by one member of the Catholic Church.

\[12\] Also accessed from ISU's electronic library.
Ishmael Reed, in the novel, reflects the idea that those in power (the Catholic Church, the U.S. Government) work together to stifle the power of citizens and their natural God given rights. Many Evangelical Christians would agree. Mason Manly P. Hall attests that secret societies have used the guise of the Church to influence public thought:

The rise of the Christian Church broke up the intellectual pattern of the classical pagan world. By persecution of this pattern’s ideologies it drove the secret societies into greater society; the pagan intellectuals then reclothed their original ideas in a garment of Christian phraseology, but bestowed the keys of the symbolism only upon those duly initiated and bound to secrecy by their vows. (77)

In reality, the secret societies use the Christian Church and their beliefs, traditions, and rituals to influence the public. They use these to make their ideas acceptable and palatable to the public while hiding their true motives. The phrase “mumbo jumbo” has historically been attributed to black vernacular as well as to the secret dogmas of these societies. Only a select few get past the “mumbo jumbo” of the societies and fully understand the purpose the societies are aspiring.
Carl Van Vechten was a white music, drama, and literary critic. He was also a novelist and a professional photographer. Born in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, in 1880, his journey to Manhattan and subsequent life and career there culminated in an astonishing accomplishment—he became an integral part of a movement despite the fact he was an outsider. The notion that books such as When Harlem was in Vogue and articles from esteemed journals such as African American Review and Genders share the same conclusion, that Van Vechten was one of the hardest working white patrons on behalf of the African American artistic community of the Harlem Renaissance, lends one to believe that history has sided with Zora Neale Hurston’s hope that Van Vechten would be credited with greatly aiding the Harlem Renaissance. Van Vechten did morally encourage African American artists, diligently sought publishers for black authors, and offered substantial financial support to aspiring artists. In a July, 1947, letter from Hurston to Van Vechten, she stated:
You have had such a tremendous influence on the arts of the last twenty-five years, that I think it ought to be precipitated out of the mass of lies that are now growing up. People are now brazenly claiming credit for the many things that you were responsible for. (Coleman, 5)

In contemporary literary scholarship, however, only one harshly criticizes Van Vechten: Ishmael Reed. In his 1971 novel *Mumbo Jumbo*, Reed satirizes Van Vechten as Hinckle Von Vampton. This illusory name points to Van Vechten’s pilfering of the community’s artistic material and the admonition of his guilt:

> The squalor of Negro life, the vice of Negro life, offer a wealth of novel, exotic picturesque material to the artist....The question is: Are Negro writers going to write about this exotic material while it is still fresh or will they continue to make a free gift of it to white authors who will exploit it until not a drop of vitality remains? (McCoy)^13

Not only did this admonition of guilt precede his novel *Nigger Heaven* by six months, it was also meant as a defense to help derail what was already a hotbed of contention in Harlem.

W.E.B. DuBois was one of the novel’s major critics. DuBois, an NAACP founding member and editor of Harlem’s *Crisis* magazine, believed that “the higher education of [the] Talented Tenth [could] through their knowledge of modern culture guide the American Negro into a higher civilization” (Lewis, 7). He believed that Van Vechten’s book showed the underworld of Harlem’s civilization, and thus was not the right propaganda for the Black movement. He encouraged the readers of *Crisis* to drop *Nigger Heaven* “gently into the grate” (Worth, 464).

---

^13 I accessed this from the online journal, therefore no page numbers are specified.
Ishmael Reed, on the other hand, also satirizes DuBois' beliefs. A'Lelia Walker Robinson, the heiress to her mother’s hair-strengthening fortune, is satirized as saying to Von Vampton’s foes, “get out of here you men you gate-crashers I don’t want no conjure mens’ detectives in this house you ain’t money you ain’t no artist you don’t have no degree” (159). Walker hosted “the social forum for the elite” (Lewis, 170) in her Manhattan home and Irvington-on-Hudson mansion. Ironically, the educated persons in the novel speak in vernacular while the common man speaks prescribed English. This is also a current theme of Reed’s—that the Talented Tenth are influenced by money and societal appearance instead of truly furthering their purported cause. While they will speak to the individual in their own slang they will concurrently undercut the group they say they are representing (Hubbard, 27)

Sharon Jesse states “the practice of making language the butt of a joke is clearly widespread in American ethnic humor—making fun of ethnic accents, dialects, and like—but in Mumbo Jumbo, high and low speaking styles are reversed.” She believes the seriousness of the white Atonists is satirized by their use of black vernacular. The black artists, however, are frequently speaking in prescribed, formal English. This strategy works because being funny is seen as a lack of seriousness. The Jes Grew anti-virus, which is manifested in the anti-serious dances, is lauded by the “low style” of President Harding’s (who cannot dance) historical campaign slogan, “Let’s be done with wiggle and wobble.” While Reed shows the hilarious nature of the white man’s (un)reasoning and his failure to see that he poached the African American style through informal “low” style, the humor is escalated by the contrasting of the hosts and their command of prescribed communication.

Reed is using the same sentiments in Mumbo Jumbo as Van Vechten is using in Nigger Heaven. Lewis states, “From the point of view of racial uplift, Nigger Heaven was a
colossal fraud in which the depiction of the Talented Tenth in high baroque barely muffled the throb of the tom-tom” (188). While many of the black (and white) critics thought Van Vechten was solely focusing on the tom-tom way of life, he too was mocking the Talented Tenth and portraying the “‘archaic Negroes’ at ease in their skins and able to act decisively” (189).

Reed’s satiric referencing as Von Vampton also alludes to Van Vechten’s homosexuality. As McCoy states, the words “‘vampire’” and “‘vamp’” are:

Terms that connote not only the vampirization of black culture of which Van Vechten was accused, but also the decadent, threatening sexuality inherent in the concept of the vampire. In *Mumbo Jumbo*, Reed manipulates allegations of racial exploitation with an idea of homosexuality as perversion and further embellishes that intersection with intimations of pedophilia and necrophilia.

Historically, Reed’s thoughts may be right on target. According to Emily Bernard’s introduction to *Remember Me to Harlem: The Letters of Langston Hughes and Carl Van Vechten*, Van Vechten’s influence in this black movement was sometimes unwelcome. Almost every black artist had to negotiate white patronage in some form or another. But no white person has been disdained as intensely as Carl Van Vechten. Why? Because Van Vechten was a gay white man active in a black movement whose homosexual overtones are still controversial. By virtue of both race and sexual orientation, Van Vechten’s motives have always been doubly suspect. (xxiii)
Van Vechten was, and to some extent continues to be, blamed for bringing Harlem’s writers to a lowly, immoral level—especially the aspiring Langston Hughes. These writers considered themselves agents of free expression that were telling it like it really was. Shortly after Van Vechten met Hughes, he contacted him for help with his own novel. Van Vechten had used a popular song’s lyrics in the first printing of the novel. He was being threatened with a lawsuit for using the lyrics without permission. In haste, he called Hughes, who rushed from Lincoln University of Pennsylvania by train and in an all-night session at Van Vechten’s Manhattan apartment rewrote the novel’s lyrics. Although they were both accused of bringing the seedy side of Harlem life to light, an interesting corollary is the verses Hughes wrote for the novel and Reed’s satiric reworking of events in the previously cited scene at A’Lelia Walker Robinson’s Villa Lewaro. In Reed’s reworking, Von Vampton’s sidekick, Hubert “Safecracker” Gould, is used at the last minute as the Talking Android. Painted in black face, Gould is at Villa Lewaro to recite his poem “Harlem Tom Toms.” Reed stated in an interview that the Talking Android is a pawn—“You’ve always got these liberals grooming people. They always want a token spokesman whom they can use for talking ‘android,’ as I said in Mumbo Jumbo” (O’Brien, 22). But Von Vampton’s original Android, the black Woodrow Wilson Jefferson, is taken back to Mississippi by his father, the Reverend. In Reed’s reworking, as I see it, the truly heretical statements by an African American are thwarted by the Reverend rescuing his son. The poem given to the audience is given by a white man (Gould in painted face) trying to pass as black. His statements are homo-erotic and, of course, written by Von Vampton:

O Harlem, if you are a sea, why...why
Dat makes Lenox Ave. one of your many
Swift current, grappling me as I
Beckon to big Black Bucks—lifeguards
On de sho. Up on de sho O Harlem
Where jazz is a bather writhing in de
Sand and claw-snapping crabs do dey
duty. Where dippermouthed trumpets
Summon de tides
Root-t-toot! Root-t-toot! Root-t-toot!
And de tom toms play in sea shells
Da-bloom, Da-bloom, Da-bloom-a-loom (158)

Von Vampton’s words are almost beyond understanding. In Nigger Heaven, Hughes’ added verse is extremely coherent:

Born an’ bred in Harlem,
Harlem to duh bone,
Ah say, born an’ bred in Harlem,
Harlem to duh bone,
Early every mornin’
You can hear me moan:

Ah’m a hard-boiled mama
From Lenox Avenue.
‘Tain’t nobody’s business
What Ah do.
Sometimes Ah feels lonesome,
Sometimes Ah feels sad,
But Ah can’t keep no lover
Cause Ah’s evil an’ bad. (248)

Hughes is not pilfering the work, but living in, and part of, a community. Whereas Reed’s satiric use of the “Tom Toms” poem is written by a white man, and therefore not true to the African American community, Van Vechten’s use of Hughes’ work is credible.Ironically, Hughes served the purpose of Woodrow Wilson’s father, the Reverend, and saved Van Vechten from further humiliation like what the novel brought him from DuBois.

Literary critics and historians defend Carl Van Vechten but frequently their defenses are shallow. Hughes said, “No book could possibly be as bad as Nigger Heaven has been
painted” (Worth, 465). Interesting, is how Van Vechten admired Hughes so much and yet Hughes showed only moderate reverence to him in the public forum. In Langston Hughes’ *The Ways of White Folks*, the Carraways are jig-chasers, an act that Carl Van Vechten himself was certainly guilty of and defined in his novel *Nigger Heaven*. Footnoted on the first page of the novel, Van Vechten states, “The reader will find, at the end of this volume, a glossary of the unusual Negro words and phrases employed in this novel” (3). A jig-chaser, the glossary states, is “a white person who seeks the company of Negroes” (286). The Carraways in the story “Slave on the Block” are obsessed with African American culture, and “longed to meet Carl Van Vechten” (19). Curiously, Hughes mocks the obsession of these jig-chasers while upholding a statuesque persona of Van Vechten. Or is he? In the same collection, another jig-chaser, the patron Mrs. Ellsworth, has her servant order a copy of *Nigger Heaven* so she can understand the Negro race. Is Hughes satirizing Van Vechten? Van Vechten’s novel was written predominantly for the white public, and purposely sensationalized to sell. The naïve Ellsworth in Hughes’ story believes, though, that Van Vechten’s novel is conclusive, as if the one novel, written by a white man, could define a whole race. Although Van Vechten’s novel is not discussed again in the story, Mrs. Ellsworth clearly never understands that Oceola is a person with feelings and that her love for her boyfriend transcends her art. Hughes may possibly be satirizing his own friend Van Vechten.

Reed’s satirization of Van Vechten goes much deeper. He says that Von Vampton’s “disguise in Manhattan circles is that of Negrophile, patron-of-the-arts and of course controversial publisher of the Benign Monster magazine” (78). Bernard is much kinder when she says that Zora Neale Hurston
had crowned him an "honorary Negro." One of his favorite portraits was a Miguel Covarrubias cartoon of himself in blackface titled "A Prediction." Van Vechten took all of this literally. A combination of naivety and arrogance led him to believe that he was unique, a white man who had transcended his whiteness. (xix)

But, as Reed attests, Van Vechten did encourage illicit behavior in literary works. While Van Vechten wanted to be seen as black, he uplifted what DuBois commented was "vulgarity [...] forsaken for art" (Lewis, 194). The Scarlet Creeper of Nigger Heaven is a sensationalized view of a "dominant white image of black male hypersexuality" (McCoy). In Mumbo Jumbo, Von Vampton encourages Woodrow Wilson to spice up his column. While Wallace Thurman is criticized by W.W. for writing a play "called Harlem in which these bonzos be rubbing up against each other" (79), W.W. is encouraged by Vampton to accept all writers: "Why any month we might run a picture of a nice boyish young disrobed thing. We've been banned in Boston for pornography. Why would you want to include your material in our magazine but then abhor the same freedom when it occurs among your playwrights?" (79-80). Hughes is also quoted in Reed's novel as living a decadent Harlem lifestyle:

We liked people of any race who smoked incessantly, drank liberally, wore complexion and morality with loose garments, made fun of those who didn't do likewise....After fish we went to two or three in the morning and drank until five. (101)
This is hardly an equation that can be attributed to one race but an aspect that Du Bois wanted left out of all Harlem Renaissance work.

Interestingly, critic Richard Swope believes that Reed's character Major Young is "modeled on Langston Hughes." Young criticizes Von Vampton for expecting all blacks to act and write the same:

Is it necessary for us to write the same way? I am not Wallace Thurman, Thurman is not Fauset and Fauset is not Claude McKay, McKay isn’t Horne. We all have unique styles. (102)

Reed is employing the same literary techniques in *Mumbo Jumbo* as Van Vechten used in *Nigger Heaven*. Both novels mock the stereotypical Talented Tenth while also mocking the undereducated (Woodrow Wilson Jefferson). While Reed satirizes all, his characters and themes, as Swope contends, are reminiscent of the Jes Grew of *Mumbo Jumbo*. This Jes Grew "does not belong to the homogenized space that Atonism produces—the space inside which the detective can solve all crimes—but is, rather, like jazz, ‘a continuous variation of form,’ a perpetual becoming that, like Reed’s Neo-HooDoo mystery novel, remains open-ended." Interestingly, the role of Carl Van Vechten and his motives will also remain open-ended. Reed does not expect scholarly works to expose the truth behind any of these mysteries. Instead, all groups become sacrificial lambs. In *Mumbo Jumbo*, Reed even mocks this study: "Well can you prove this? I mean don’t you think we need evidence for this? Who’s your source?" (141)

---

14 Accessed off Iowa State's Infotrac online system, no page numbers are offered.
CONCLUSION

Ishmael Reed proved in Mumbo Jumbo that the African American has been stifled politically, spiritually, and artistically. At our Goldtrap event, he acknowledged that there was a reason, and a need, for the book in 1971; the book showed how the African American tradition and history had been pilfered, distorted, and blocked from the public. Concurrently, he showed how the past political governing bodies have prevented all Americans from understanding the truth.

The Atonists of the novel made many compromises. Marx, “who secularized” (97) Christ’s doctrine and Freud who believed America was a “big mistake” because religion was harmful. Marx, according to Reed

“[...] saw variety and America in demonic terms. [...] I think black intellectuals have been harmed by reliance on the Marxist perspective. It’s a comfortable system that allows them to sit back in their chairs without having to go out and investigate what is happening. Anything they disagree with is fascist. That’s too easy. I’m not a capitalist, but I think they have a good point when they say that Marxism has never really been tried. It’s still a debate. In Moscow they have a problem with crime as bad as in New York City. Only they don’t report it. So apparently, socialist societies haven’t solved the problem of human fallibility. (Dick 150)

Whereas Reed and the Evangelical Christian would agree on the fallacies of both Freud and the Marxist perspective as well as the duping of the public mind, I would be very curious to know if Reed would agree with Michael Novak’s article “The Ten Commandments Controversy.” Novak objects to the August 27, 2003, ruling by the
Alabama Supreme Court that stated any "recognition by the Court of a special role for the
God of Judaism and Christianity in this nation's understanding of civil and political rights
represents an establishment of religion, and thus violates the First Amendment" (1). Novak says

The main point in this case was the unique character of the Jewish and
Christian God. The God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Jesus is unlike any
other God known to the ancient religions of Greece, Rome or the Middle East,
or any other religion known to our Founders. Uniquely, this God wishes to be
worshiped in spirit and truth, in whatsoever manner conscience directs,
without coercion of any sort. This God reads hearts, and is satisfied only with
purity of conscience and conviction. Those who belong to any other religion
or tradition, or who count themselves among agnostics or atheists, are thereby
given by this God equal freedom. They, too, must follow their individual
consciences. This God wishes to be worshiped by men and women who are
free, not under duress. Arising from His sovereignty, the rights He endows
cannot be abrogated by a tyrannical majority among the people, or by the
actions of the state in any of its branches. (2-3)

In short, the American idea of religious liberty "demands that each person's decision
about how (if at all) to worship God is inalienable, for it belongs to each alone in his or her
own conscience" (Novak 3). In our Republic, we decide on our own. In the novel, the art
stolen by the Mu'tafikah and returned to the indigenous cultures are religious artifacts of
those countries. Certainly, Reed would not expect them to be hidden or removed as our
country has removed the relics, such as the Ten Commandments, of our past.
Novak asserts that sixty years ago, the Supreme Court
[...shifted] its focus from the constitutional term “religious liberty” to the much more recent and polemical slogan “separation of church and state,” [which makes the Court] seem radically anti-religious, and in particular, anti-Jewish and anti-Christian. (6)

I believe that Reed and the Evangelical Christian have plenty in common. In 1968, Phyllis Schlafly wrote the book The Betrayers to convince the American public that Nixon should be elected. She pointed to the fact that during the twentieth century, Democrats kept getting America into wars. She cites Franklin Roosevelt’s famous speech that promised “Mothers and fathers, I give you one more assurance. I shall say it again and again and again. Your boys are not going to be sent into any foreign wars” (118); she cites Harry Truman’s involving the U.S. in the Korean War; she cites Lyndon Johnson’s deceptive 1964 television commercial that showed “a little girl picking daisies being incinerated in an atomic mushroom cloud” (118)—Johnson, at the same time those commercial were airing (and deceiving voters that Goldwater was “trigger happy”) was committing the United States to the Indochina War. Reed, on page 163 of Mumbo Jumbo, includes a diagram which shows the “U.S. Bombing Tonnage” for those three wars.

Schafly states in her book that

America is never so close to war as when the Democrats are promising peace.

The American voters have been deceived again and again and again. By now the voters should know that the surest key to peace is to elect a Republican President. (119)
Her words were not prophetic. Both Reed and Schafly, although on two different ends of the ideological spectrum, seek the same peace. President Bush and his father have proved that electing a Republican is not the surest way to peace. But it is possible that these Presidents have been under the command of the C.F.R., the Trilateral Commission, or the supposedly debunked Illuminati. One thing is for sure: The American people, regardless of creed, color, or nationality, are not getting the full story. Sutton's Heglian theory readily applies.

Both Reed and the Evangelical Christian seek the same personal freedom to worship their faith. Frequently, though, the secret societies seek to usurp the political freedoms of all Americans by slowly demonizing groups. While the African American has been demonized for hundreds of years in America, it appears that Christianity is now blatantly under attack.
WORKS CITED


McCoy, Beth A. "Inspectin’ and Collecting: The Scene of Carl Van Vechten."


Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1931.

University of Missouri Press, 1996.

Sanders, Scott. “Pynchon’s Paranoid History.” *Twentieth Century Literature* 21.2
(May 1975): 177-192.


Scholes, Robert. *The Rise and Fall of English: Reconstructing English as a Discipline.*

Soitos, Stephen F. *The Blues Detective: A Study of African American Detective
Fiction.* Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1996.

States Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934.” *The Journal of African American

Sutton, Antony C. *America’s Secret Establishment: An Introduction to the Order of

Swope, Richard. “Crossing Western Space, or the HooDoo Detective on the Boundary in
611-629.


Webster, Nesta H. *Secret Societies and Subversive Movements.* Palmdale, California:
Omni Publications, 1924.