

Chapter One

“Hybrid Degenerates” to “Multiracial Families”

Discourses of Race Mixing in America

The Filipino tends to interbreed with near-moron white girls. The resulting hybrid is almost invariably undesirable.

—C. M. Goethe, “Filipino Immigration Viewed As a Peril”

Ordinarily, the marginal man is a mixed blood, like the mulatto in the United States or the Eurasian in Asia, but that is apparently because the man of mixed blood is one who lives between two worlds, in both of which he is more or less a stranger.

—Robert E. Park, “Human Migration and the Marginal Man”

Particularly since the nineteenth century, mixed-race people have been included in discussions of how to define who is an American. As the nation grew spatially west and southwest, slavery, immigration, Native American and Mexican sovereignty over lands were tied to questions of race and citizenship. In the battles over territory and status, race was a crucial element of Manifest Destiny discourse that proclaimed Anglo-Americans to be the rightful occupants and rulers of lands west of the Mississippi as well as superior to former slaves, new immigrants from Asia, and already-present populations of Mexican and Native Americans.

In the last two hundred years, two main theories dominated hegemonic discourses of miscegenation and mixed race people: the theory of “hybrid degeneracy” and the “marginal man” thesis. The former emerged out of slavery, colonialism, and emerging biological sciences in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and conceptualized “half-breeds” as the inferior offspring of separate races (sometimes referred to as separate

species).¹ The marginal man idea was conceived in the rise of the social sciences in the first decades of the twentieth century, rescripting the inferiority of mixed-race people as a product of social tensions and psychological trauma rather than the biological incompatibility of the parents.

Much of the recent boom in scholarly literature on passing, multi-racial people, and miscegenation focuses on Black/White race mixing, but dominant discourses were not limited to that particular interaction.² Although some argue that the opposition of Black and White is the bedrock of and affects the dynamics of all race relations in the United States,³ dominant discourses included specific antimiscegenation references to any group deemed Other or threatening to White hegemony through purity. Thus, although I do not have the space to provide a full census of the literature available, in this introduction I have endeavored to include an array of sources to introduce the reader to examples of antimiscegenation narratives involving people of Asian-, African-, Hispanic-, and Native American ancestry.⁴ Whether or not the Black/White divide serves as the basis for all other iterations of antimiscegenation discourses, the hegemonic response to race mixing included and adversely affected all people of color. Additionally, I include examples from various media and genres to show how prevalent and popular narratives of mixed race were, and how, whichever the group, racially mixed individuals or interracial couples were almost always rendered with suspicion, condescension, disgust, exoticism, or some mixture of these. In a later section, I also provide readers with a section illustrating how Black journalists and authors have approached race mixing, to provide contrast and to foreshadow the conflicts and controversies encountered later in the case studies. This section emphasizes the importance of the counterhegemonic narratives produced in the Black press, and demonstrates further how widespread and contentious issues of miscegenation were within the Black public sphere.

Hybrid Degenerates

The hegemonic view of mixed-race people in the nineteenth century was that persons from different racial groups were nearly (or for some, actually) different species. Thus, a sexual “amalgamation” of two races would produce defective hybrid offspring, similar to hybrid pairings in the animal world. Theorists of “hybrid degeneracy” were part of the mainstream scientific community, and published work well into the twentieth century.⁵ These scholars believed that mulattos, mestizos, and Eurasians lacked physical, mental, and moral strength. Merging superstition, theology, and Darwin’s theory of evolution, scientists of amalgamation and eugenicists measured heads, sex organs, and other body parts to prove the superiority

of Whites over people of color.⁶ In addition to reinforcing their theories that “full-blood” Africans, Asians, and Native Americans were mentally and/or physically inferior to “Nordics” and “Aryans,” these scholars aimed to demonstrate scientifically “the disharmonic phenomena in half-breeds.”⁷ Beyond academia, this (pseudo)science reinforced antimiscegenation laws and racist social sentiments, and was used to justify everything from the enslavement of Blacks, to annexation of Mexican territory, to legislation barring Chinese and Japanese immigration. As such, discourses of multiracial people have been used to protect not only White identity, but White property and political privileges. In delimiting who could be included under the label “White,” both law and custom reinforced White hegemony.⁸

Demonstrating racial difference and White superiority became key strategies in the debates over slavery, westward expansion, and other imperial projects. Historians and cultural critics have documented how Whites deployed theories of uncontrollable Black sexuality to conceal and excuse their sexual exploitation of enslaved women, brutalization of enslaved men and lynching of free Blacks.⁹ In order to justify the one-drop rule, which made any child of one White and one Black enslaved parent a slave, theologians, scientists, and politicians drew upon various bodies of “evidence” to prove these offspring did not have the capacity for full citizenship as their “pure” White siblings did.¹⁰

Cynthia Nakashima describes how hybrid degeneracy theory was used to argue that “mestizo” Mexicans were unfit to govern themselves, justifying White confiscation of Mexican-held territories and denial of full citizenship to certain people of Mexican descent.¹¹ Nakashima notes that “[t]he connection between the scientific and theological aspects of hybrid degeneracy comes from the idea that what is ‘unnatural’ is also against God’s wishes,” thus the hegemonic wisdom concerning mixed-race people supported the evangelical nature of Manifest Destiny: Whites were not only destined to rule the West, but also were naturally more fit and morally bound to rule over those people of color who existed there. In the wake of the Mexican American War, this logic played out in the newly annexed territories of the United States, operating to exclude people of partial Mexican and/or African descent from citizenship.¹² The new southwestern U.S. states rejected Mexico’s inclusion of *mestizos* and *afromestizos* in its citizenry, and denied non-White Mexicans living in U.S. territory citizenship, while granting U.S. citizenship to many White Mexicans who remained in newly annexed lands.¹³

In a similar vein, the allegedly inferior moral and physical faculties of Eurasians were integrated into discussions and policies for curtailing Asian immigration. Americans borrowed theories from English and French colonists who wrote treatises on the inferiority of children born of White

and Asian parents. White politicians warned that male Asian immigrant laborers would marry White women or bring in a “horde” of brides that would have higher birthrates than Whites, increasing competition for jobs and land. Hysteria over population growth rates and racial interbreeding informed much of the “Yellow Peril” rhetoric. Madison Grant’s popular book, *The Passing of the Great Race*,¹⁴ advocated extending the one-drop rule beyond Blacks to all other “inferior races,” including “Hindus, Asians in general, Jews, Italians, and other Southern and Eastern European peoples.”¹⁵ Congressmen used Grant’s arguments to argue for laws barring “inferior” immigrants, such as Asians.¹⁶ In a 1921 essay for *Good Housekeeping*, Vice-President Calvin Coolidge declared that the laws were necessary because “[t]he hybrid is clearly both a diseased entity that could only perpetuate that illness and a sign of a monstrous union” of different races.¹⁷ Mixing with the wrong kind of immigrants, he and many others believed, would “dilute” superior White American blood beyond reckoning.

The “half-breed” status of certain Native Americans was another topic of discussion for the federal government. Depending on the government’s goal, mixed-blood Native Americans were defined differently. If “mixed-bloods” had ties to White communities and were sympathetic to government policies, they were often portrayed as superior to their “full-blood” counterparts. If they were allied with their tribe, they were usually excoriated as degenerates. “At best,” Terry Wilson relates, “these children were ‘marginal people of minor significance’; individuals who excelled as leaders were ‘renegades’ or ‘designing half-breeds.’”¹⁸ By stereotyping mixed-race Native Americans as “degenerates” less worthy of land or status than “full-bloods,” Karren Baird-Olson describes how the government used the blood-quota system to undermine indigenous definitions of family and tribal status. In contrast to the blood quantum used by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and other government agencies, many Native American tribes understood tribal status as determined “by family lineage, marriage, adoption, or . . . long-term membership and commitment to the various communities.” Thus, enforcing blood-quantum rules had the dual effect of decreasing population counts and assimilating Native Americans into the hegemonic racial structure of hypodescent.¹⁹

The Marginal Man

In the decades between the world wars, the Anglo-American foreign policy establishment, along with select few domestic politicians, predicted that racial problems could destabilize their international hegemony.²⁰ In European-held colonies as well as in America’s Deep South and northern industrialized cities, tensions around color, caste, and class were deemed

a liability. This concern supported the development of a new line of inquiry in the social sciences: race relations research. Frank Furedi stresses that the impetus of this research was to minimize damage to the national and world systems shaped by Whites; therefore, the main “problems” analyzed in much race relations research were people of color’s “adjustments” to White rule. Although many in the new field of race relations supported the expansion of legal rights for people of color, the overwhelming majority believed that “social equality” was out of the question.²¹ Through this research, “mixed-bloods” were offered (again) as scientific justification for continued social segregation and other restrictive policies and practices. In the new social science, however, the mulatto was not described in terms of biological deficiency, but in terms of psychological and social maladjustment.

According to sociologists, biracial people were “marginal” because they were incapable of settling into a role in society. Indeed, it was impossible for them to find an acceptable role, because their dual racial heritage warred both within their psyches and also between their parents’ racial groups. In the quest to manage race relations without upsetting Whites, social scientists and elites found the marginal man thesis a more than adequate (and palatable) substitute for the racist theories of moral and physical degeneracy based in biology championed by the prior generation of scientists. Although as late as 1944, some scientists still published work on the degeneracy of “mixed bloods,” theories of the maladjusted or “marginal” man had largely displaced the older research.²²

Despite the substitution of psychological and social, rather than biological, reasons for the tragic condition of mixed-bloods, the marginal man hypothesis was no less racist in its implications for people of color. “This perspective readily lent itself to an apologetic interpretation, where the maladjusted mind rather than the problems of colonial domination or racial oppression, became the problem.”²³ Thus, emerging nationalisms and racial consciousness of people of color around the globe were explained as the products of dissatisfied “native intellectuals” and “half-breeds.” Some Whites hypothesized (and feared) that this group of marginal men would be more likely to lead insurgencies as a result of their inability to accept their subordinate place in the Anglo-American social matrix; others didn’t predict organized resistance, but rather violent, isolated outbursts of frustration emanating from the mixed-blood’s tragic placement in a race/class limbo. No matter the social result, the mixed-blood person was theorized in social science as a problem, and one to be avoided by retaining existing social and legal restrictions on race mixing.²⁴

Tragic Romance, Shifty Immigrants, and Passers: Race Mixing in Popular Media

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the mulatto, mestizo, half-breed, and miscegenation were important topics in multiple discursive domains. The burgeoning popular media drew upon scholarly theories of race mixing to create narratives and stereotypes that continue to resonate into the twenty-first century. Scientific theories were dramatized and disseminated widely in popular culture. Dramas centered around the horrors of race mixing were commonplace in works by authors, filmmakers, playwrights, and journalists. Although these texts emphasized different issues, four common themes are clear in media concerning race mixing: (1) miscegenation and mixed-race people are a source of pollution of “pure” Whiteness and/or a pure nation; (2) miscegenation and mixed-race people are tragic, unnatural phenomena; (3) mixed-race people are psychologically damaged outcasts, angry at both parents’ racial groups; and, (4) miscegenation and mixed-race people are exotic and desirable, yet ultimately forbidden to Whites.²⁵

The Passer

The fear that an unmarked person of African descent—someone passing—would infiltrate White society was a regular feature in popular books, films, and the news. The ability to “read” blackness in a person whose physical attributes were not clearly “African” was a popular theme and plot device in American novels.²⁶ One of the most prolific writers who used miscegenation as a key theme was Thomas Dixon, author of *The Clansman*,²⁷ the story that was transformed in 1915 by D. W. Griffith into the first blockbuster film, *Birth of a Nation*.²⁸ In Dixon’s work, White-looking mulatto characters revealed their inferiority through violence, wanton sexual desire for White women, and deficient character. Cathy Boeckmann explains that even though Dixon and other authors conceded that “black blood” is not always physically visible, they believed that the “degeneracy” of mixed-race people would be expressed in their faulty character. Thus, “looking white” would never translate to truly “acting white” or having the essence of whiteness in one’s soul.²⁹

Beyond Dixon’s tales, the plots of many sentimental novels turned on whether the White hero or heroine would realize that his/her beloved was passing for white before it was too late.³⁰ Passing characters expressed fears that their children would be born with dark skin or some other telltale mark of Blackness, ruining their charade; the families of their

duped fiancés investigated their backgrounds tirelessly to test their suspicions. Many plots turned on a White hero or heroine’s ability to “see” the mark of Blackness somewhere on the mulatta fiancée’s body, often in the “bluish tinge” underneath the suspect’s fingernails.³¹ In other dramatic scenarios, tragedy ensues for mixed-blood women, who had been reared as Whites. Inevitably they discover on the eve of marriage or motherhood that they have the “taint” of Black blood. This discovery often leads to public shame, exile, or death, either from a tragic illness, suicide, or murder.³²

Accounts of passing and miscegenation appeared frequently in the news as well, providing lurid scandals of betrayal and shame for readers. One of the most infamous was the *Rhineland v. Rhineland* case of 1925. Attorneys for White heir Leonard Rhineland claimed that his wife, Alice, had failed to disclose her Black ancestry before their marriage, thus “passing” and fraudulently marrying into his blueblood family.³³ Attorneys for Alice Rhineland countered that her physiology obviously revealed her Black identity. As argued by her lawyers, proof of Alice’s innocence resided, ironically, in the preternatural ability of Whites to “see” through her white-looking skin.³⁴ Newspapers from New York to Des Moines had a field day with the case, publishing excerpts from love letters read in the courtroom as evidence.³⁵ Sensational cases such as the Rhinelanders’ kept the issues of miscegenation and passing in the public eye across the nation.³⁶

Tragic and/or duplicitous characteristics were not uniquely assigned to those of Black/White descent in popular media. Nakashima asserts that “by the time of the Civil War and the Mexican American War, the American public had already become familiar with the tormented, pathetic, and often dangerous multi-racial Black-White and Indian-White, and to some extent the Mexican-White, all of whom were favorite character types in mainstream fictional literature.”³⁷ Unlike depictions of African-descended mixed bloods, artists typically did not imagine Eurasians who could pass for White. “Yellow Peril” narratives depicted biracial characters with clear “oriental” or “Mongoloid” physical features. Concerns about Asian immigration and how it threatened the United States’ purity as a nation of White Americans dominated these tales; contamination—of individual bodies and the soul of the country—was the main fear. As with mulatto/a-White pairings, White-Eurasian love affairs almost always ended tragically for both the White and Asian partner, in death or disease. “But before his or her untimely demise, the Eurasian . . . is an especially persuasive witness to the racial and cultural superiority of Whites over Asians, and of the ‘unassimilability’ of Asians into mainstream America.”³⁸

The 1904 opera *Madame Butterfly* is, perhaps, the best-known template for doomed Asian-White lovers and the danger of possible offspring.³⁹ Cio-cio San (*Madame Butterfly*) falls in love with a philandering White U.S. naval officer. She bears his child after he abandons her and remains loyal to him against her father's wishes and cultural expectations. When her husband returns three years later with a new White wife, Cio-cio San kills herself, hoping that her son (nicknamed "Trouble") will be able to live a respectable life without the shame of his abandoned mother. Butterfly's wish for her Asian-White son, however, was not realized in later tales of mixed-race Asians. The central Japanese-European character in the 1921 novel *Kimono* was, notably, described in terms consonant with the marginal man thesis: "A butterfly body with this cosmic war shaking it incessantly. Poor child! No wonder she seems always tired!"⁴⁰ This "butterfly" daughter of a Chinese criminal, who murdered her White mother, is literally killed by her Asian heritage: her evil Chinese father dispatches her before she can expose him to the police. The same novel also contains a "psychotic Eurasian character, Yae Smith, who is described as a 'bundle of nerves' . . . doomed to a life astray between light and darkness."⁴¹ A similar character appeared in the 1936 film serial "Shadow of Chinatown." Portrayed by horror-film actor Bela Lugosi, this insane Eurasian chemist blamed and hated both Whites and Chinese for his pariah status.⁴²

In contrast to narratives of Black/White and Asian/White miscegenation, Native American/White pairings were sometimes portrayed "positively." To be sure, many pulp novels and Westerns contained plots with lustful Indians kidnapping White women; however, the status of Native Americans as original inhabitants of the land elicited specific anxieties about citizenship and belonging. In her analysis of silent Westerns, Joanna Hearne illustrates how the bodies of Native American characters in movies such as *Squaw Man* and *Maya, Just an Indian*, become vehicles for Whites to legitimately take hold of natural resources and land previously owned by tribes.⁴³ Cross-racial romances still fail in these narratives, but White characters do not uniformly reject the children born of these unions as in much of the tragic mulatto and passing literature. Hearne explains that "these early Westerns . . . provide a composite narrative that depicts the white 'family' on the land emerging from the 'broken home' of a previous mixed-race marriage, and that equates children, land, and gold as the spoils of failed romance, not of war."⁴⁴ The painful results of White conquest were reimagined as failed romance, papering over the violence and injustices Native Americans experienced in this relationship. These fantasies, then, substituted individual relationships for institutional poli-

cies. Unlike many narratives of Black/White children, in Westerns half-breeds could gain the acceptance through proper cultural behavior, dress, and other intimate knowledge of how to act in White society.⁴⁵ These plots echoed government policies for assimilating Native Americans, such as taking children from their families to be fostered at White-run schools or in White homes, and other acts of coercion. Through cultural changes, intermarriage, and “gentle” displacement by White settlers, these films suggested, Native Americans would vanish from the landscape, making way for White Americans to prosper.⁴⁶

These popular media narratives reveal different degrees of refusal to integrate or accept people of color in the American sociopolitical body. With the exception of Native Americans, complete rejection of interracial intimacy was the advice conveyed to readers in most tales. Even though a handful of silent westerns often portrayed Native heroines and half-breed heroes with sympathy, like the Eurasian and the mulatto, there was no space for these people to coexist with Whites as equals; they must return to “their people,” perish, or shed the remaining cultural markers and behaviors of people of color in order to achieve compatibility with the dominant group. Racial separation and hierarchy were depicted as necessary elements of the nation in these media texts. This pattern did not change significantly until the mid-twentieth century, when a handful of “progressive” race narratives emerged in dominant mass media.

Black Media on Passing and Miscegenation

The first part of this chapter summarized dominant narratives of passing and miscegenation in mass media of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Black media makers also produced narratives of race mixing, albeit they were often quite different than those created by their White counterparts. Rather than viewing mixed-race people and interracial sex from the hegemonic stance of White supremacy, Black authors of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were engaged in protest against slavery, racist stereotypes, and anti-Black violence. In their fight against racist discourse and practices, they attacked those elements of the dominant ideology that assigned deviance to all Black sexuality, outlawed miscegenation, and demonized mixed-race people. However, rejection of racist stereotypes and laws did not necessarily lead to acceptance of miscegenation, passing, or mixed-race people. Indeed, ambivalence and discomfort could be offered as the best descriptors for attitudes toward people of African descent who crossed—temporarily or permanently—the color line.

Interracial Sexual Exploitation

The Lynching record for a quarter of a century merits the thoughtful study of the American people. It presents three salient facts:

First: Lynching is a color-line murder

Second: Crimes against women is the excuse, not the cause

Third: It is a national crime and requires a national remedy.

—Ida B. Wells, “Lynching, Our National Crime”

Before the end of slavery, abolitionist and Black-owned newspapers criticized White slaveholders’ sexual exploitation of Black women, calling out the hypocrisy and barbarity of rape and the enslavement of their own flesh and blood.⁴⁷ After slavery, sexual exploitation and brutality continued under slightly different circumstances. Black journalists covered these issues, most famously with Ida B. Wells’s antilynching investigations. Publishing first in her own paper, the *Memphis Free Speech*, and later the *New York Age*, Wells was determined to refute the prevailing White discourse of violent black sexuality. She deconstructed the sacred myth of lynching: that it was done to protect the honor of white women. She described this excuse famously in a May 1892 editorial as “a threadbare lie.” Soon after, a White mob descended on the offices of *Free Speech* and destroyed the building, promising to kill her if she returned. The destruction of her paper and threats on her life only strengthened her resolve. T. Thomas Fortune, owner of the *New York Age*, offered her a job as soon as word of the mob violence hit New York City. After the first issue of the *Age* including Wells’s investigations came out, Fortune had to print an extra edition of ten thousand to meet the demand of Black readers.⁴⁸ It is clear from her success as a writer that her portrayals of lynching and interracial sex resonated with a large number of African Americans. In her pamphlet, “Southern Horrors,” Wells attacked the double standard in rape prosecutions: White women were granted protection of their virtue, while Black women’s virtue was not even recognized. She also reported multiple instances where White women admitted to and continued consensual relationships with Black men, and how some of these women helped their lovers escape mob violence.⁴⁹ Wells’s publications served as templates for future black journalists’ accounts of lynching, miscegenation, and other aspects of race mixing. Confronted with a new wave of racist violence at the end of World War I, the Black press continued to speak out against sexual stereotypes.

The golden age of the Black press began in the years leading to World War I, as circulation reached into the hundreds of thousands.⁵⁰ The *Chicago Defender*, cited by many historians as one of the most influential Black papers, contained many articles about miscegenation and racial violence.⁵¹ A fast-growing Black audience rewarded papers such as the *Defender* for calling Whites on their sexual hypocrisies, and for encouraging Blacks to practice self-defense. In 1915, a *Defender* editorial described the “Negro of Conquest,” a figure juxtaposed with Negroes who were “happy” living in the South. This man of conquest did “not believe in raising his family in a section of the country where the law allows the white man to live in open adultery with a black woman and is looked upon with favor by the Negroes, and lynch a colored man if he is seen talking to a white woman.”⁵² The paper was full of stories of race men and women combating White sexual violence. Headlines such as, “Must not insult women of the race: Lawyer Carter gives uppercot to white brute,” proclaimed Blacks’ right to fight back against sexual exploitation of Black women.⁵³ Similarly, in this excerpt from a 1916 edition, women were encouraged to use physical force if necessary:

In numerous instances over the country reports are different now. Women have become tired of white men treating them like inhumans [*sic*] and instead of the women being beaten up, the white men are taken to hospitals.⁵⁴

During the months of race riots and lynchings in 1919, dubbed “Red Summer,” the topics of lynching and rape myths were prominent in Black newspaper headlines nationwide. An article in the October 18, 1919, edition of the *Louisville News* condemned the lynching of a Black soldier rumored to have a White girlfriend and made the claim, “If white men were to be lynched for insulting and seeking to thrust their attentions on colored women here there would be lynchings daily.”⁵⁵ A week later, a dispatch from the Associated Negro Press declared that Southern White men possessed a “dual character” when it came to Blacks with the headline: “Is Both Negro Hater and Keeper of Colored Mistresses.”⁵⁶ In the view of Black journalists and editors, the stereotype of Black predatory sexuality was clearly a cover for White sexual urges to cross the color line. The *Chicago Defender* summed up this view in an article titled “Attacks on White Women” in the September 20, 1920, issue:

It is the same old excuse—“attacks on white women.” What the nature of these attacks have been is left to inference. . . . If the press of this country were honest in their statements concerning

such matters race rioting would be robbed of its chief inspiration. If the men of our group were to make reprisals upon the white people for the wrongs done the women of our race, America would see a red day. During the period of slavery the lecherous white master consorted with the slave women of his plantation and filled the South with his tawny offspring. The white sons of this master class are today passing laws to segregate their yellow kinsmen, but, if all reports are true, the separatist measures are only intended for daylight.⁵⁷

Romance across the Color Line in the Black Press

Although the most common stories of interracial sex in Black papers involved violence, consensual relationships were also covered, particularly when members of high society were involved.⁵⁸ Usually, the newspapers portrayed these unions as destined for trouble, due to an imminent violent response from White men or the duplicity of a White woman. In an article titled "Actress Wanted Color, Not Husband's Love," the *Defender* reported how a White actress filed for divorce after discovering that her husband was "not a full-blooded white man." Another report focused on White entertainer Ruby Clark, the lover of a Black actor, Bob Anderson. Anderson was married to an African American woman, and also allegedly dating another Black woman, referred to as Cleo. When Clark accompanied him to see his Black mistress, a fight ensued over his two-timing, and Cleo shot him. Anderson's wife, the paper noted, blamed his White lover, Miss Clark, for instigating the attack.⁵⁹ Other articles depicted White women tricking their husbands into thinking that Black male employees or local businessmen had become their paramours.⁶⁰ Although papers didn't explicitly discourage interracial romance, it was clear from the stories that it was foolhardy for a Black man to attempt a consensual relationship with a White woman.

Black newspapers spoke out against antimiscegenation law, but this did not translate into wholehearted support for interracial marriage or intimacy. Rather, editors qualified these protests by proclaiming that most Blacks didn't want to "socialize" with Whites or marry them.⁶¹ They declared that it was unjust and racist to legislate against miscegenation because the laws rested upon foul stereotypes of Black inferiority and White hypocrisy. Indeed, writers often suggested that it was White male desire that generated the most interracial sex, and the laws were merely vehicles for racist ideology.

Most people outside the penitentiary have the privilege of selecting their friends and associates. This fact should tend to allay the

fears of those who are imbued with the idea that it is our aim to break into their “exclusive” social circles. . . . American history records the fact that from the very beginning the white man sought us. How intimately he has been associated with us can best be judged by a casual survey of the millions of mulattoes in this country.⁶²

In the same vein, articles concerning Black women and White men almost always depicted Black men protecting Black women from White sexual aggressors. One of the largest front page headlines for the October 9, 1920, *Defender* read, “Life of White Man Threatened for Insulting a Woman.” The story related how “the trouble started when Harry Roeger (white) . . . knocked down a women of our Race” Afterward, a group of Black men proceeded to beat Mr. Roeger and his friends. Another *Defender* article applauded the fighting spirit of two race men who refused to allow a White man to accost a Black woman. The *Wisconsin Weekly Blade* relayed the story of a Black man who killed a White man in order to protect two young girls from him.⁶³ These articles charged race men with the duty of protecting race women at all costs, even one’s life.

But some Black women were portrayed as deserving neither the chivalry nor the vengeance of race men. Black women who chose consensual cross-racial liaisons were treated with disdain and suspicion. The papers accused them of lacking morals and race pride. This set up a double standard in regard to interracial sex. Unlike the sympathetic men who escaped violence with the help of White female lovers chronicled in the work of Ida B. Wells, Black women who consented to relations with White men were targets for ridicule and shaming, as indicated by the following story, headlined “Southern Afro-American Girl Parades Her White Paramour at Fiske University Reception.”

A merry waltz was in progress when in paraded a southern white brute and lyncher and his *mulatto* lover. Right here in Chicago and in the very midst of those who denounce the way the white men treat our women in the South. . . . [T]hey came in and sat UNMOLESTED. All day Friday the Chicago *Defender* received calls over the phone asking us to please make mention that this wench had dared to flaunt her low southern brute before the faces of decent mothers and sisters.⁶⁴

This excerpt reflects many common stereotypes about mulattas. Notice that in the headline, the offending woman is referred to as “Afro-American,” but by the middle of the first paragraph she is referred to as

“mulatto.” This shift in language suggests that mulattas are attracted to Whites and/or draw the attention of White men because of their blood mixture and desire to be like Whites.⁶⁵ The article continues with more negative descriptions of mulattas:

There are lots more here in Chicago . . . mulatto girls who care only for certain jobs because they have white blood, and are forced to sell their bodies to hold a job. . . . Recently at a popular dance a certain young girl was ignored by a set of young, manly fellows who are well-known in this city. Her reputation for loving white men came and was known before she arrived. She was made to feel uncomfortable and she left.

The *Defender* suggested that, even if they try to socialize with Blacks again, mulattas who cross the color line are to be socially ostracized. “Real” race men are encouraged to criticize and embarrass Black women who choose White partners.⁶⁶ In the same vein, completely crossing over to the White side of the color line was cause for alarm, shame, and dismay. Interracial romance was one thing; passing quite another.

Passing in the Black Press: Ridicule and Redemption

How can you tell who is a Negro?

—*Chicago Whip*, September 13, 1919.

Periodically, stories of lighter-skinned Blacks passing for White appeared in the pages of Black newspapers. Multiracial Blacks who chose to pass were represented in a variety of ways. Some who passed were called race traitors in some accounts, as tricksters who “get over” on the White man, or as stealth “race spies,” bringing back secrets from White society, in others.⁶⁷ Some writers justified passing as a means of subversion, as in this article from the *Chicago Whip*’s September 13, 1919, edition:

In the United States to-day [*sic*] there are over 1,000,000 mulattoes, octroons, and quadroons, that are so Caucasian in appearance that science is baffled. . . . Ninety-five percent of these hybrid people have gone over to the other side. They look like White people, they talk like White people . . . *but they always think as Negroes . . . the memory of old insults, and the knowledge that his fellows are still suffering, keep his mind forever colored and the spark of loyalty for his colored progenitors from ever dying.*⁶⁸

In the New Negro era, this imagination of race solidarity made sense. Papers such as the *Whip* and the *New York Age* strove to present a united front of Negroes, striving toward excellence and resistance to White supremacy. Attributing race loyalty to an unknown (but large) number of passing Blacks functioned both to refute the White supremacist assumption that White blood and society were better and to project a solid coalition of Americans of African descent.

Not all stories of passing Blacks characterized them in such a positive light. Passers were often chastised for abandoning the race. Kathleen Hauke’s essay on Elsie Roxborough provides an example of this trend.⁶⁹ Roxborough was the daughter of the first Black state senator in Michigan and the first African American woman to live in student housing at the University of Michigan, where she attended theater classes with future star playwright Arthur Miller.⁷⁰ Unlike her White male classmate, race and gender barriers squelched Roxborough’s dreams of success as a writer. Reborn as New York fashion maven Mona Manet, however, she wrote for magazines and produced fashion events, successfully passing as White among her closest co-workers.⁷¹

However, the Black press knew about her new life, and writers commented with humor and derision on the disappearance of the young woman who had once regularly graced their society pages. A 1937 column by William Smallwood in the *Baltimore Afro-American* spread the following word to the wise:

Though none of the metropolitan lads who pound typewriters for a living know it, Elsie Roxborough . . . has been living in Gotham for the past few months as Nordic—much to her family’s undisguised disgust. You can imagine poor La Roxborough shuddering each time she slips into an uptown subway train.⁷²

The writer’s displeasure with Roxborough is clear. Not only is her family’s disapproval (both her immediate and the implied family of the Black public) clear, but also the writer takes time to imagine her fear of being outed by Blacks living uptown (i.e., Harlem), because he assumes they would be able to see through her pass. Roxborough’s pass was not total; she sporadically made contact with her friend, the venerated writer Langston Hughes, in her life as Mona Manet. Although the poet’s feelings on passing were negative, Hughes did not expose her secret. Similarly, after her death when her uncle came to claim her body in New York, he made no mention of her past and told her New York acquaintances that the funeral would be private. He himself was light enough to pass, and thus, he did not expose her secret at death through his presence.⁷³ Her

uncle's silence is indicative of the ambivalent relationship many Blacks had and continue to have with passing; it is hard not to sympathize on some level with the passer's desire to masquerade and enjoy the privileges of whiteness, or to snicker at the duped Whites who could not "see" the Blacks among them. But the sympathy or pleasure felt when confronted with passing is always haunted by the realities of racism and continued oppression suffered by those without the privileges of light skin pigmentation.

While stories of "getting over" on Whites through passing probably provided some pleasures for readers of Black newspapers, newswriters did not sanction passing as a normative behavior or response to racism. The urge to pass, as in the *Whip's* fantasy of legions of ex-colored men, is a function of a racist system; light-skinned Blacks should remember their roots rather than attempt a complete transformation like Elsie Roxborough. In this way, the newspapers echoed the sentiments of many Black novelists and filmmakers that featured passing in their work. Giulia Fabi asserts that African American authors of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries used passing to depict the evils of slavery, racism, and prejudice.⁷⁴ Similarly, Boeckmann's chapter on James Weldon Johnson's work notes that his passing character recognizes and describes the presence and effects of White racism as part of his journey.⁷⁵ Like the *Whip*, Johnson's *Ex-Colored Man* is, in some ways, always "thinking like a Negro" even as he enjoys the benefits of his light skin. Indeed, at the novel's conclusion the main character expresses his frustration at his inability to use his musical talents to demonstrate the genius of the Black race.

Jennifer DeVere Brody's analysis of Nella Larsen's *Passing* highlights the passing Clare Kendry's refusal to frame her Black working-class roots as deviant/Other; she desires the company and memories of Black people and jokes with her semi-passing friend, Irene Redfield, about Whites.⁷⁶ Lauren Berlant's reading of the same novel emphasizes Irene's yearning to inhabit a body that is not stigmatized by color and gender conventions.⁷⁷ In contrast to White narratives, where White supremacy was reasserted and justified, Black authors used passing to expose and wrestle with the double standards of racial identities and expose injustices and traumas experienced by Blacks of all hues. Likewise, Oscar Micheaux's filmed depictions of mulattoes and mulattas often contained an inversion of the White-authored passing novel; discovering one's Black identity led to a happy ending and closure, not exposure and death.

The idea that people who passed would (and should) ultimately "embrace the race" returned at the advent of the civil rights movement of the 1950s. *Ebony*, *Color*, and *Jet* magazines all produced articles featuring former passers who had recently decided to refuse the opportunity to

pass. Gayle Wald analyzed this set of features and found that they followed the themes of middle-class advancement of Blacks popular in the press of the postwar period.⁷⁸ Structured this way, stories of individuals rejecting passing and embracing Blackness called into question “the exclusion or selective inclusion of Blacks in the public sphere” by manipulating the usual framing of passing “to imagine a world in which ‘White’ skin would no longer be a prerequisite to equality.”⁷⁹ The “reformed” passers were used to illustrate not only race pride, but the idea that individual social mobility was more accessible to Blacks due to reforms of the war years that opened new opportunities in certain industries and government service.⁸⁰

Given this history of Black authors’ approaches to passing, it is not surprising that the Black press, when confronted with Susie Phipps’s story⁸¹ in the 1980s, emphasized race pride and the hypocrisies of white supremacy. As with Elsie Roxborough and the passers of the past, her case was met with a mixture of bitter humor, memories, and political agendas that highlighted the continued effects of racism in Black lives and national culture.

Mainstream Media Portrayals of Race Mixing after World War II

In the years before and during World War II, filmmakers and radio producers were encouraged to produce programs to defuse racial and ethnic tensions, which the federal government feared might damage the war effort. The target groups for many of these media messages were Blacks and working-class European ethnic groups.⁸² Hollywood’s “message films,” many of which lauded the contributions of Black soldiers, created a popular space for a new liberal race relations discourse. After World War II, Hollywood continued to experiment with liberal “message films,” meant to encourage the masses to aspire to particular cultural traits and goals and to reject prejudice. Gayle Wald examines two such films that revolved around passing, Alfred Welker’s *Lost Boundaries* and Elia Kazan’s *Pinky*, which contained different, less tragic, outcomes for their miscegenated protagonists than the passing tales of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁸³

While these biracial characters—all portrayed by Anglo actors—are exposed as fraudulent “passers,” they have already achieved and performed bourgeois respectability that distinguishes them from other stereotypical Blacks. Additionally, Wald argues, “both films represent racial discrimination and exclusion as inducements to pass” but “the real heroes of the films are sympathetic whites” who allow passers to participate in a limited engagement with white middle-class society.⁸⁴ For example, the mulatta

Pinky decides to end her engagement to a White fiancé. She is later rewarded by a windfall inheritance that allows her to open a hospital—for black children—that solidifies her position as a lady and member of the middle class. Thus, Pinky is placed above other Blacks, but still distanced from White public and private spheres. In *Lost Boundaries*, after the passing parents reveal to their son that they are part Black, he runs away from their White middle-class enclave to see “real Blacks.” His harrowing trip through a stereotypical Harlem highlights the deviant behavior of other Blacks who display none of the middle-class behaviors of the protagonists and their White neighbors.⁸⁵ Thus, Wald concludes, race and class are intertwined in passing narratives; distancing oneself from the lower class (and race) is crucial for the passer/multiracial character who wishes to remain in or near the White public sphere, however tenuous his or her position may be.

Interracial romance films of the 1950s and '60s often emphasized the roles of heroic, forward-thinking Whites. In *Sayonara*, for example, Marlon Brando's main character and his White buddy both protest the U.S. armed forces' attempts to keep GIs from marrying local Asian women. In contrast, Brando's Japanese love interest is the one who pessimistically insists to her lover that their marriage would never survive. In that climactic scene, she is the one to cry the question, “What about the children?” He answers, “They'll be half-American and half-Japanese; half yellow and half white.” In this and other romances between White male soldiers and Asian women, the presence of the American military is played down as a mere plot device to join star-crossed lovers. Relatedly, male Asian characters who pursued White women were usually sinister or slapstick caricatures, never serious rivals to White men.⁸⁶

Similar to *Pinky* and *Lost Boundaries*, interracial romance films reinforced the importance of class and geographic distance from other people of color to make limited interracial intimacy work. The most famous American interracial romance film, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, features a solidly middle-class Black man, played by Sidney Poitier. A doctor, an eloquent speaker and sharp dresser, Poitier's character was the perfect prospective son-in-law—except for the color of his skin. Susan Courtney's analysis of the film and other 1960s films that featured mixed-race couplings reveals that, save for small moments of tension, these movies reinforced racial divisions and did not challenge White patriarchal authority.⁸⁷ Likewise, in many other films and TV shows that featured Black actors in the 1960s (e.g., *I Spy*, *Julia*), the Blacks allowed into the circle of White society are “exceptional” in every way. As Robin Means Coleman explains in her history of Black sitcoms, in the 1960s and '70s Black actors were either isolated from all other Blacks or particular expressions of culture

or behavior identified as Black, or segregated in all-Black casts with little or no contact with Whites.⁸⁸

Despite these small steps toward “positive” portrayals of interracial contact, in other arenas of mid-century popular culture, race mixing was still viewed as a looming threat to White status and control. The incredible popularity of Black performers of rhythm and blues music with White youth sparked consternation, censorship, harsh rhetoric, and physical violence across the country. As the civil rights movement built momentum and crossover Black artists and their White adherents and imitators increased, uglier descriptions of miscegenation resurfaced as part of the massive resistance campaign and in more genteel circles. Politicians, parents, and music industry officials worried (and periodically continue to worry) about the effects of Black music on White teens. Musicians who played “race music” were harassed, attacked, and in some cases, chased out of the business by Whites who feared amalgamation.

Brian Ward recounts the trial of the “wholesome” Black doo wop group, the Platters, who were arrested for entertaining three White women and one Black woman in a Cincinnati hotel. Although the group was acquitted of the charges of aiding and abetting prostitution, the judge in the case took the opportunity “to deliver a lengthy rebuke, encapsulating white fears of rampant black sexuality: ‘You have taken that which can be the core of reproductive life and turned it into a socially abhorrent, tawdry indulgence in lust.’”⁸⁹ Some segregationists were so sure that Black music had the power to turn White girls and women into sexual partners of Black men, they bullied and intimidated radio programmers and record store owners in addition to Black musicians. Members of the Ku Klux Klan vandalized the transmitter of WEDR-Birmingham, one of the most popular stations playing Black music.⁹⁰ Louisiana and other states passed laws against interracial dancing, musical performances, and the like, all of which were assumed to incite miscegenation.

Patterson relates how, in the wake of *Brown v. Board of Education*, segregationists used fears of miscegenation in public campaigns against school integration.⁹¹ Responding to the *Brown* ruling, many Whites felt free to publicly insist that “black men lusted after white women and that mixing would pollute the purity of the white race.”⁹² From state legislatures to the pages of leading newspapers and magazines, segregationists insisted that mixed schools would result in mixed blood. In the *Atlantic Monthly*, one South Carolinian wrote that school integration would mean “mixed matings would become commonplace and a greatly enlarged mixed-blood population would result.”⁹³ The specter of mixed-bloods was used to justify the intense violence and legal intransigence that Black students and their parents faced as they courageously tried to desegregate schools.

Despite the scholarly turn to more liberal consideration of race relations and a rejection of biological conceptions of race by many scientists, segregationists were comfortable with using the language of amalgamation and blood pollution to support their violent opposition to Black freedom movements and cultural influence.

By the time the Supreme Court overturned the last antimiscegenation laws in *Loving v. Virginia* in 1967,⁹⁴ no clearly new profile of mixed-race people had emerged from scholarship, law, or popular culture, although some stabs had been made at portraying interracial romance in a positive light.⁹⁵ Whether based on biological assumptions or social psychology, people of mixed race were still seen as misfits by the dominant society. The marginal man theory still reigned, and interracial parents were encouraged to teach their children to associate themselves with a single race. Even with the emergence of “children of the movement”—born to interracial couples who met through civil rights activism—the overriding ideology concerning race mixing was that it would harm families and/or society by creating a set of people with no natural or definable racial home. Not until the emergence of a new group of multiracial scholars and activists was this conventional wisdom vigorously challenged.

Reimagining Race Mixing: New Multiracial Scholarship and the Mixed Race Movement

In the 1970s, groups of mixed-race families and their children began to form to support formal networks. Founded in 1978, I-Pride (Interracial Pride) is recognized as the first large-scale organization dedicated solely to advocacy for multiracial people. According to most accounts, these groups functioned as safe havens for multiracial people and their families, providing social contacts and fora for people to share experiences and dispel stereotypes about interracial marriage and mixed-race identities. In 1988, the Association of MultiEthnic Americans (AMEA) was created to serve as a national umbrella organization for the growing number of state and local organizations for multiracial families, to give those groups a national presence. Thus, by the 1990s, many of them had grown beyond consciousness-raising and family picnics; they had become social movement organizations with offices and boards of directors. Through organizations such as AMEA, they were able to plan strategies locally and nationally as a new social movement.

Simultaneously, a body of scholarship emerged. A new generation of social scientists proclaimed the presence of a new multiracial identity that directly challenged the hegemonic stereotypes of tragic mulattos and hybrids. Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* and

Maria P. P. Root's edited collection *Racially Mixed People in America* are considered landmark texts in this scholarship.⁹⁶ Anzaldúa asserted that the borderlands are spaces where mestizas can access a rich, complex vision of society and power relations in order to deconstruct hierarchy and foment struggle. Root and colleagues argued against dominant psychological and historical approaches that depict people of multiracial identity as inherently damaged and doomed to ostracism. Rather, these authors emphasized the role of racism in subjecting multiracial people to shaming, violence, and isolation. These books and their descendants present a multiracial identity that privileges intersectionality, and proclaims that a both/and identity and perspective on race can be achieved, and that racial dichotomies are rooted in White supremacy, imperialism, and sexism.

In the last thirty years, this growing group of activists and scholars has made efforts to reclaim multiracial identity as a positive quality, to be celebrated and deployed in order to expose and undermine the fictions of racial hierarchy and racism. Similar to other new social movements, constructing a positive, generative identity is central to this movement, if not its defining aspect. Through conferences, marches, scholarly and popular writing, multiracial people and their allies have rejected the stereotypes of the “tragic mulatto” and the idea of distinct racial groups, advocating instead for psychological and sociological approaches to race that recognize that bi- and multiracial people can indeed adopt a both/and sense of racial identity rather than being torn apart (or rejected) by two social groups, or choosing one over the other. One main goal articulated by many multiracial organizations has been to change how the state classifies multiracial people. Parents, particularly, have articulated their children's need to have the choice to identify the races of both parents on school and health care data forms. Breaking from the school of thought that one had to bond with a single racial group to have a healthy self-concept, parents of multiracial children and psychologists argue that multiracial children would be healthier if they were not forced to choose between their parents, a choice that could imply a hierarchy of races in the household and the wider society.⁹⁷ Indeed, the original mission of I-Pride was to lobby the Berkeley, California, school system to include a multiracial option on school forms.⁹⁸ By 1995, multiracial activists were successful in changing school forms in Ohio, Michigan, Florida, Illinois, and Indiana.⁹⁹

As these individuals and organizations endeavored to reframe multiracial identity in the public sphere, the most visible aspect of their project became the campaign to add a multiracial category to the U.S. Census. In 1989, AMEA contacted members of Congress about changing the Census Bureau's racial categories to include a multiracial option, and were later invited to testify to the House Subcommittee on the Census in

1993.¹⁰⁰ Thus, the first multiracial issue to gain national publicity was the fight for a new census category. This nationally visible campaign, spearheaded mainly by AMEA and Project RACE (Reclassify All Children Equally) has drawn the most attention among the news media, following sparse interest in multiracial identity since the mid-century. Indeed, despite sporadic attempts in entertainment media in the 1980s and 1990s to portray interracial love stories or biracial characters, the notion that tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of individuals and families in the United States were in the process of forging new multiracial identities was lost on mainstream media.¹⁰¹ However, bolstered by the census campaign and the popularity of young multiracial celebrities, such as Tiger Woods, who publicly described and celebrated their multiracial heritage in the 1990s, news media latched onto the story of multiracial people. Certainly in contrast to earlier depictions, contemporary mainstream media have put multiracial identity in a better light.¹⁰² However, just as the burgeoning mixed-race literature and multiracial-identified populace flew under the radar for years before gaining media attention, specific aspects of the movement and its varied philosophies and goals concerning race have been lost in the glare of subsequent publicity. Namely, mainstream media have avoided the challenges to Whiteness and racial hierarchy that many multiracial scholars and activists emphasize in their work.

The successful campaigns to include a multiracial category on school forms followed by the push to make similar changes to the Census put multiracial organizations directly in conflict with many well-established civil rights organizations, including the NAACP, MALDEF, and National Council of La Raza. When the OMB solicited public comment on changing Directive 15, the rules that created the five racial designations used and officially recognized by the federal government, AMEA, Project RACE, and other groups took the opportunity in hand. In the eyes of other civil rights groups, however, multiracial activists were heading in the wrong direction. The liberation movements for people of color in the 1960s and '70s ushered in an era of racial and ethnic pride and an investment in one's right to choose and claim a particular, nonpejorative identity label. Thus, as Kim Williams argues, the multiracial movement is connected to other movements for people of color in the quest to determine for themselves how they are named in society. However, because Directive 15 and many pieces of civil rights legislation were implicitly referring to inequalities between Blacks and Whites, the categories created in 1977 were problematic from the start. Williams writes, "[T]he policy outcomes associated with the civil rights movement focused exclusively on racism, discrimination, and equality, leaving aside (a) the question of race itself and (b) the possibility of ongoing and considerable changes in racial demographics."¹⁰³

This part of the bureaucratic apparatus that made many aspects of civil rights oversight and prosecution possible—the collection of racial data—has become the target of the multiracial movement. Kimberly McClain DaCosta notes, however, that the multiracial movement differs from earlier movements’ assertions of racial identity and self-determination of racial labels in that multiracial activists have “used the codes of liberal individualism” to claim racial and ethnic identification as an individual right.¹⁰⁴ This individualist ideology and rhetoric can be contrasted to the nationalistic claims made by Blacks, Chicanos, and Native Americans in earlier fights for representation. Hence, the approach and aims of some multiracial activists toward racial categorization are greeted with suspicion by established civil rights organizations that view the government’s racial categories primarily as a tool for racial justice, not a vehicle for an individual right to self-realization or validation.¹⁰⁵

Nancy Brown and Ramona Douglas emphasize that many participants in the movement, particularly members of AMEA, have been simultaneously concerned with questions of social justice and equality for people of all races in addition to the more visible issue of government racial categories. The work of Maria Root, Teresa DeLeon and Cynthia Nakashima, and G. Reginald Daniel, among others, reflects the concern that antiracism and resistance to White supremacy should be integral to the movement and conceptions of multiracial identity. Other chroniclers of the movement, such as Dalmage, emphasize that many White members of interracial families were initially drawn to these groups because they had felt “for the first time, the hurtfulness of racism” through their experiences with spouses and children; however, many then adopted the idea that multiracial identity and involvement in cross-racial intimacy are the means to transcending race, rather than arguing that society needs “to transcend the biased meanings associated with race.”¹⁰⁶ As I demonstrate in chapters 5 and 6, however, the groups and scholars that endorse this latter view are not the ones normally consulted by the mainstream press.¹⁰⁷

Some observers of the multiracial movement are suspicious about the role of White parents, many of whom have been quite visible at congressional hearings and other media events concerning the 2000 Census. These adults who claim to speak for the rights of their bi- and multiracial children are often viewed as disconnected from the communities and concerns of people of color. The large numbers and visible presence of White mothers in multiracial organizations have generated the suspicion that multiracial activists want to distance their children and themselves from other minority groups. One person who has inspired this interpretation in particular is Susan Graham, head of Project RACE, who testified during congressional hearings on the Census racial categories. Graham publicly embraced Newt Gingrich for his endorsement of the

stand-alone multiracial identifier, and expressed outrage when a stand-alone multiracial identifier was rejected in favor of the multiple check-off system supported by established civil rights organizations such as the NAACP and MALDEF.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, her reaction and the desires of others to have stand-alone multiracial identifiers frustrated civil rights groups, who argued that the most important issue with the Census was avoiding minority undercounts that would effect many important policies crafted to monitor racial progress and sanction those who discriminate against minorities. In her study of the movement, McClain DaCosta notes that members of AMEA were self-conscious about the fact that the majority of their representatives were from Black/White couples and families, and made efforts to diversify their public image as they negotiated with the OMB and Congress. “In particular, the support of Asian multiracials eased the suspicion of some that those in favor of multiracial classification were actually interested in being a little less Black.”¹⁰⁹ Despite the outreach to multiracial people who are not Black/White, many traditional civil rights groups and laypeople still harbor concerns that the multiracial movement aims to achieve a higher “whiter” racial status for its constituents than for monoracially identified Blacks, Asians, and Hispanics.

White members of multiracial organizations and families are not the only ones viewed critically for pursuing a separate identifier for multiracial people. A vocal group of multiracial-identified political activists have wholeheartedly adopted the “color-blind” rhetoric and political positions espoused by neoconservatives. For example, Charles Byrd, editor of the e-zine *Interracial Voice*, has thrown his support behind conservative University of California Regent Ward Connerly, sponsor of the anti-affirmative action Proposition 209. Like Graham, Byrd was angered by the OMB decision to use a multiple check system without a stand-alone multiracial category and blames civil rights groups for “denying” multiracial people their own unique category. Because of his position as an editor and his connections to major multiracial organizations, Byrd has been a favorite contact for journalists. Connerly—who has recently become eager to explain his White, Native American, and Black ancestry to the media—has launched another racial ballot proposal named the “Racial Privacy Initiative” (RPI). The RPI calls for an end to government collection and use of racial categories; Byrd and others have come out in support of the measure.

As I discuss in both chapter 6 and the Conclusion, Connerly and other neoconservatives use the growing multiracial population and a number of interracial marriages as “proof” that race no longer matters in our society. Byrd and others have supported Connerly’s latest “solution” to racial issues, arguing that racial labels themselves must be eliminated

to achieve a “color-blind” society. This link between the emergence and increase of the multiracial population and the elimination of all racial categories does not necessarily hold sway with the majority of mixed-race individuals; however, many newsmakers have been quick to predict that the demographic phenomena that have engendered multiracial identity will, in the not-too-distant future, usher in racial harmony for the nation. In addition, many commentators have lambasted civil rights groups that have been critical of a separate multiracial identity for adhering to an outdated way of thinking about race to further their political agendas. Thus, the multiracial movement’s drive to rehabilitate and formally acknowledge multiracial identities has been meshed with the imperatives and ideology of neoconservative racial politics.

The next three chapters consist of case studies that predate the contemporary multiracial movement and the changes to Census 2000. Each in its own way illustrates the difficulties of the state and society in coming to terms with people of multiracial descent even decades after the Supreme Court struck down the last antimiscegenation laws. These cases provide an important contrast to and serve as prehistory for the new multiracial identities circulating in media today. These chapters help us remember that, not so long ago, the dominant understanding of race mixing was that it meant confusion. They also help us see that the bureaucratic decisions surrounding racial labels certainly matter, not only to people of color but also to Whites, the state, and other institutions that hold the power to name and change the names of racial groups. These cases also remind us that, more often than not, news coverage about race mixing and multiracial people reflects current thinking about race and race relations broadly, not just the specific identities of the actors in a particular story. Finally, the opening three cases took place in the last two decades, prompting us to recall how recently society has been introduced to Cablinasians, Hapas, and the other new names for racially mixed people in the United States.